

See discussions, stats, and author profiles for this publication at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/257542222>

# The Relationship between Identity Crises and Crises of Control

Article in *Journal of Business Ethics* · April 2013

DOI: 10.1007/s10551-013-1670-x

---

CITATIONS

14

READS

623

1 author:



Mollie Painter

Nottingham Trent University

102 PUBLICATIONS 1,499 CITATIONS

SEE PROFILE

# The Relationship between Identity Crises and Crises of Control

Mollie Painter-Morland

Received: 12 March 2012 / Accepted: 14 November 2012 / Published online: 9 April 2013  
© Springer Science+Business Media Dordrecht 2013

**Abstract** Corporate governance is a theme that is important to Business Ethicists for various reasons. It relates to how and for whose benefit corporations are governed, to how important corporate decisions are taken, and to how organizational cultures are “managed.” In this article, it will be argued that in each of these respects, corporate governance relies on particular identity constructs that need to be questioned. In fact, it will be argued that the way in which corporate governance initiatives address the various crises of capitalism, allows us to gloss over some crucial ontological questions that could precipitate a more rigorous questioning of capitalist practices. The article will plot the limitations of the kind of thinking that we encounter within the corporate governance realm, and expose its problematic assumptions by exploring a selection of Deleuzoguattarian concepts. It will be argued that the challenges facing corporate governance relate to the relationship between identity crises and crises of control. We will argue that a better understanding of the nature of capitalism could open new avenues for ethical questioning of contemporary corporate practices, and put the various “crises” that capitalism faces in a new perspective.

**Keywords** Agency · Control · Corporate governance · Deleuze and Guattari · Identity · Rhizome

## Introduction

Corporate governance is discussed in various areas of business ethics and cuts across many of its most important

debates. By way of definition, one can say that corporate governance refers to the processes by which corporations are directed and controlled. It relates to how, and for whose benefit, corporations are governed, how important corporate decisions are taken by individuals, and to how organizational cultures are “managed.” In this article, it will be argued that corporate governance relies on particular identity constructs and assumptions of control, which need to be questioned. The main concern of the article is to challenge the contention that corporate governance mechanisms can and should exert control on individual and corporate identity. The preoccupation with control covers over the more insidious fluidity inherent to capitalism’s operations, and as such forecloses a broader ethical critique of its functioning within our societies. The way in which the corporate governance discourse integrates ethical concerns largely fails to address the ontological questions of how corporations come into existence and how they function. It focuses on the abstract principles that should guide governance practices, rather than on an understanding of the material conditions and dynamics that shape corporate reality. As such, an opportunity is missed for a more radical ethical challenge to how corporations function.

In what follows, I provide a brief overview of the main concerns of corporate governance and then highlight at least three problematic assumptions that remain operative in this environment. In response to each, I propose a Deleuzoguattarian concept that may help us to reframe the problem. Since Deleuze and Guattari coined a plethora of concepts, this article by no means claims to be comprehensive in its discussion of all relevant parts of Deleuze and Guattari’s oeuvre. I therefore make deliberate selections to address specific problematic assumptions. The first problem we confront within corporate governance centers

---

M. Painter-Morland (✉)  
Department of Philosophy, DePaul University, Chicago,  
IL, USA  
e-mail: mpainter@depaul.edu

on the nature of capitalist institutions and its effects. In response, we explore Deleuze and Guattari's notion of "desiring-production." The second problematic assumption relates to our conception of moral agency. We will draw on the notion of "agencement" (French for "assemblage") to rethink our capacities for agency. The third problematic assumption pertains to the organizational structure that governance initiatives often rely on. Deleuze and Guattari's discussion of the root-tree structure versus that of the rhizome sheds new light on the balance between hierarchical structure and other more unpredictable connections.

### An Overview of the Main Concerns of Corporate Governance

Corporate governance can be defined as the way in which the roles, responsibilities, and balance of power among executives, shareholders, and directors are arranged (Ryan et al. 2010, p. 673). The main issues that corporate governance addresses are: the role of shareholders; the fiduciary duty of executives and the kind of moral compass, which is required to fulfill their role; and the functioning of Board.

Typically, a Board of Directors is in charge of the governance of corporations. Some of their tasks include determining the direction of the company, the supervision of management, as well as the acceptance of corporate accountability and compliance with legal and statutory frameworks within which the corporation operates (Erokovic 2007, p. 472). In most cases, the Board of Directors is elected by the shareholders of the corporation to fulfill these tasks. Agency theory in Business Ethics discusses the fact that the Board has a fiduciary duty to act as agents of the principals, i.e., the shareholders, or the owners of the corporations. They are the people who represent the owners, and should therefore operate according to the desires and needs of those whom they represent. Though initially these principals were understood exclusively as the owners of the corporation, it has for some time now been widely acknowledged that other stakeholders have become important in corporate governance processes as well: employees, key suppliers, financial institutions, and certain government agencies all have legitimate claims to participate in the corporations' affairs (Freeman 1984; Freeman et al. 2010). Kolk and Pinkse (2010) describe the way in which the definition of corporate governance has shifted over the past 15 years. While initially the focus was on the control of executive self-interests in settings where organizational ownership and control was separated, there now seems to be a greater awareness of the complexity of relationships that corporate governance must address. In

fact, corporate governance can now be defined as "the determination of the broad uses to which organizational resources will be deployed and the resolution of conflicts among the myriad of participants in organizations" (Kolk and Pinkse 2010, p. 16).

This concern for attending to the interests of broader stakeholder groups is more prominent in certain countries than others. There are quite a number of governance models internationally, which we will not discuss in much depth. Though our focus in this article will be on the Anglo-American model, it is important to note that significant differences exist among the Anglo-American, European, and Japanese-East Asian governance systems. These differences pertain to how corporations are funded and owned, but also with how other historical, political, social, and economic factors shaped the expectations that societies have of corporations. It will suffice to say that in some systems, certain stakeholders have more power in terms of the governance of the corporation, than in others. In the Anglo-American system, which operates largely on the shareholder wealth maximization model, stakeholder groups have much less influence. Anglo-American Boards' primary fiduciary duties are toward private individual shareholders, or groups that represent these shareholders. The main interest of these shareholders is the growth of their investment in firms, and hence, ensuring sustained profit-maximization has been a prime governance priority (Erokovic 2007, p. 473).

Since 2000, a number of new corporate governance initiatives have been launched in the US to enhance oversight and control over corporations. This included attempts to get rid of CEO-duality, i.e., when the CEO also acts as the Chairman of the Board of a specific corporation. Shareholder activism has also been increased, with pluralist voting being replaced with majority voting, and "say-in-pay" measures enhancing shareholder input into decisions on executive compensation by means of "advisory" votes. Legal support for this has since been institutionalized through the Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act. New types of activist shareholders, such as representatives of the hedge funds and private equity industries, as well as federal government, have also emerged. Where in the past, CEOs had significantly leeway in terms of the "business judgment rule," post-Enron there have been many restrictions imposed on the decisions they can take (Ryan et al. 2010).

In some European countries, other stakeholders, like employees, have more influence on the direction that the company takes. This influence is afforded to them by a two-tier Board system, which includes a supervisory Board or Council on which employees have significant representation. This allows employees to put their interests and demands squarely on the agenda when it comes to the

governance of the corporation. In recent times, the influence of these councils has, however, been diminished and disputed. Banks, which are the key financial institutions and are closely involved with ownership of corporations in Continental Europe and Japan, also have a lot of influence on how corporations are governed.

Despite the differences in context, significant consensus has emerged regarding best practice corporate governance standards globally. Some of the most important safeguards that these standards aim to put in place relate to ensuring independence and objectivity in corporate decision-making processes. The importance of a balance between independent and executive directors on the board, the suggested split between the positions of the CEO and Chairman of the Boards, and the declaration and avoidance of all conflict of interests are all indications of the belief that all bias has to be removed in order for decision-makers to act in the best interest of the corporation (King 3 2010). As we saw above, shareholder activism in terms of ethical and social imperatives have also increased and as such, another level of accountability has emerged. Pirson and Turnbull (2011) have even gone as far as to argue that there has been a shift away from an economic conception of governance, toward a more humanistic conception. They also contend that a different conception of human nature is needed within corporate governance. Where most corporate governance initiatives operate on the assumption that the self-serving, rational, *homo economicus* is still alive and well, these authors argue that a more realistic perspective on human beings emerges from science. From their perspective, we should understand the individual as a *zoon politicon*, a relational (wo)man, who materializes freedom through human values. In the light of this contention, Pirson and Turnbull (2011, p. 103) argue we may do well to revisit our assumptions about “rational agency.” This article will attempt to do just that. We will, however, depart from these authors’ insistence on universally applicable principles and pursue a more materialist conception of valuation.

Though one could agree that a concern for long-term sustainable relationships have come to guide corporate governance, the concern for generating profits as a main priority remains intact. It is important to note that though stakeholder engagement has become more important, it tends to be motivated from the vantage point of enhancing the profitability and longevity of the firm. The argument that “good ethics is good business” underpins much of the stakeholder engagement approach: happy and healthy customers are loyal customers; happy workers are motivated and more likely to stay in their jobs, communities who believe the corporation acts in their interests are less likely to complain and taint the reputation of the corporations, etc.

Another important development is that Boards of Directors are held responsible for many of the important

decisions that corporations make as well as for the actions they take. Recent legislative developments (like the Federal Sentencing Guidelines and Sarbanes–Oxley in the US) have also increased the oversight duties of the Board to avoid the kind of unethical behavior that has led to the demise of many corporations worldwide, of which Enron and WorldCom are maybe the best examples. In the US, the most prominent initiative to entice Boards to proactively manage the ethics of their organizations is the *US Federal Sentencing Guidelines for Corporations*. Within the Federal Sentencing Guidelines for Corporations, seven steps are prescribed that should be taken in the establishment of an ethics and compliance program.<sup>1</sup> These provisions have been significantly strengthened in the 2004 revisions of the Guidelines. For instance, the Board of Directors and executive leadership of an organization were assigned significantly more responsibility in overseeing the ethics program. More specifically, an organization now has to show that it had promoted “an organizational culture that encourages ethical conduct and a commitment to compliance with the law.” Within Business Ethics, the management of corporate culture has now become all the rage, both in theory and in consulting practice (Petry 2005). The debate often centers on the question of whether ethical failures in corporations are the result of “bad apples” (unethical individuals) or “bad barrels” (corrupting organizational structures). The argument that it is “both-and” instead of “either-or” has led to compliance-driven initiatives to curb misconduct, plus values-driven initiatives to ensure “ethical,” or “values-driven” corporate cultures (Trevino et al. 2010). However, even the culture-focused perspective seems to rely on a belief that moral identity can be created, directed, and controlled. As Rossouw and Sison (2006, p. 6) describes it, what we witness in the development of governance regulations internationally, is not only an emphasis on the ethics of governance, i.e., the principles according to which Boards should function, but also on the governance of ethics, i.e., the Board’s role in managing the ethics of their organizations.

The question, however, remains whether these corporate governance developments actually have a positive influence on the decisions and actions of corporations. In a previous study, I have argued that the view of responsibility operative in Business Ethics assumes that individual human beings are still in charge of corporations and that

<sup>1</sup> The Federal Sentencing Guidelines’ seven steps include: (1) formulating compliance standards and procedures such as a code of conduct or ethics; (2) assigning high-level personnel to provide oversight (e.g., a compliance or ethics officer); (3) taking care when delegating authority; (4) effective communication of standards and procedures (e.g., training); (5) auditing/monitoring systems and reporting mechanisms, whistle-blowing; (6) enforcement of disciplinary mechanisms; and (7) appropriate response after detection.

these individuals represent their principals (most prominently, the owners of the corporation) as moral agents (Painter-Morland 2011, p. 89). Within the governance arena, this assumption seems to be alive and well. Ryan et al. (2010, p. 680) argue that executive values and motivation lie at the heart of business ethicists' research on corporate governance. The reason for this is that the fiduciary duties of executives constitute moral obligations, which require these individuals to have a personal ethic that entails consideration of and respect for others. The reigning assumption is that individual agents with sound moral characters are rational and "values-driven" in making decisions and actions that this furthers the interests of the principals they are representing. In addition, there is the belief that through the intentional efforts of individuals in Board structures, a certain "corporate identity" or "organizational culture" can be procured that would guide the individuals within the organization in terms of their decision-making. These efforts often rely on a very limited understanding of both "organizational culture," and "ethical decision-making" (Painter-Morland 2008).

The interaction between individual Board members, executives, or other representatives of the corporation, their principals, and the corporation as a legal "person" or as a "corporate culture" raises some taxing questions regarding corporate governance initiatives. To fully understand these implications, a few serious questions have to be posed: Is the kind of control that this "management of corporate identity" entails not in fact be the antithesis of responsive good corporate governance? And on an individual level, is the kind of ethical corporate straightjacket that "integrity strategies" envisage not the antithesis of individual moral responsiveness? In exploring these questions, I will argue that a preoccupation with control of individual and corporate identity lies at the heart of the way problems of corporate governance are discussed and undermines our ability to address these issues in a meaningful way.

### Critiquing Governance Initiatives from a Deleuzoguattarian Perspective

**Problem 1** The nature of capitalism and the crisis of control.

One of the problematic assumptions that emerge from within the corporate governance literature is the way in which it focuses on the fiduciary duty of directors and managers to ensure the growth of shareholder value. As such, it focuses on "money," rather than on the kind of society that is produced as a "side-product" of this pursuit of money. Weaver (2011, p. 178) in fact argues that the field of corporate governance and finance are closely related. He claims: "finance is about raising, structuring,

managing, and apportioning capital, and related matters of mergers, acquisitions, expansion, and so forth, while a large part of top management attention, board of director responsibility, and shareholder interest appears to focus on just those activities and their implications." Weaver (2011) then proceeds to draw our attention to the fact that both corporate governance and finance are social phenomena, and argues that problems in both these areas should bring us to study the practices that emerged over time and the tangible and intangible resources that sustain them. I could not agree more with this, but will contend that we need to go one step further, namely to understand how the pursuit of profit within capitalism creates the kind of flows of value that are difficult, if not impossible to contain, while at the same time producing a social order which in many respects is problematic.

It is their insight into our human capacities for producing certain social orders that make Deleuze and Guattari's perspectives so valuable for understanding the problems we face in corporate governance. In "Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia," the authors describe human beings as handymen, each with his/her little machines (Deleuze and Guattari 1983, p. 1). They argue that we are essentially in the business of producing, in whatever we do, and, however, we go about doing it. All our practices, and as such, our capitalist practices, are related to some of the most basic workings of the human unconscious, which they describe as "desiring-production." Desiring-production is their concept for desire infused with production, i.e., it involves an understanding of desire that has nothing to do with a "lack," or some inadequacy that must be resolved, but is instead a productive interplay of forces and flows, be they natural, social, or technical. This leads Deleuze and Guattari to dispute the distinction that is made among production, consumption, and recording processes as relatively independent spheres or circuits. Instead, Deleuze and Guattari (1983, p. 4) argue:

...everything is production: *production of productions*, of actions and passions; *productions of recording processes*, of distributions and co-ordinated that serve as points of reference; *productions of consumptions*, of sensual pleasures, of anxieties, and of pain. Everything is production, since the recording processes are immediately consumed, immediately consummated, and these consumptions directly reproduced. (their original emphasis)

They argue that industry must be seen from its fundamental identity with nature as production of man by man. They also make no distinction between man and nature. Instead man and nature are part of the same essential reality, that of the producer-product (Deleuze and Guattari 1983, p. 5).

Deleuze and Guattari (1983, p. 32) describe “desiring machines” as a fundamental category of the economy of desire. Desiring machines are both social and technical. This means that distinctions between the social order and technology, i.e., between human relations and relations of production, dissolve. We therefore do not stand outside of our creations, whether they are technical or organizational. We are instead fully coupled with and to them. The implication is that we create systems and structures that we no longer fully control, as we are changed and shaped in our interactions with them.

Within capitalism, we can see the social and technical structuring, de-structuring and restructuring that our desiring-production brought about and continues to bring about in all its force. Capitalism succeeds in coding the flow of desire into axiomatic patterns designed to perpetuate the production of surplus, which in turn is plowed back into even more surplus (Deleuze and Guattari 1983, p. 246). In the process, the essential unity among man, nature, and industry is directed toward very specific ends. As (1993: 84) so eloquently put it: “Desire, the plane of consistency is short-circuited by an infinite feedback loop of metaphysical redundancy. At the center of the feedback loop, a private sun that is and isn’t there. An ever-present absent object of overpowering attraction inspired an impossible ritual quest for fulfillment. Not incidentally, this is good for business. The Commodity is the capitalist incarnation of the phallus as Master Attractor. Love may be the light of one’s life, but a toaster is an acceptable substitute.”

These structuring “feedback loops” paradoxically undermine the unity among humans, nature, and technology and present to us an abstracted, segmented, and re-glemented world governed by capitalist axioms. The flow of desire is, however, not so easily contained, nor is it easily satisfied, and our failure to control the effects of our own desiring-production must to be understood within this context. As Deleuze and Guattari (1983, p. 251) point out, capitalism needs “social organs of decision, administration, reaction, inscription; a technocracy and a bureaucracy” which are social in nature and not merely technical.<sup>2</sup> Corporate governance could be described as one such social organ, and the state intervention in terms of corporate governance regulations, another. Together, these organs reinscribe the belief that capitalism’s capacity for producing surplus must be guaranteed at all costs, regardless of the inequalities that may be perpetuated as part of this process.

<sup>2</sup> Thanem (2004, p. 208) criticizes Linstead’s analysis of the body without organs as a metaphor by emphasizing organisations are populated by bodies, which are themselves BwO’s, and that the real disruptive effect of such bodies should not be ignored. He also points to Deleuze’s own disbelief in metaphor.

In Deleuze’s later study, he offers us a startlingly clear analysis of how this capacity of capitalism to change form creates new problems in its wake. In his “Postscript on control societies,” Deleuze (1990, p. 178) plots the demise of Foucault’s disciplinary societies, with their strategies of confinement, and show how they are being replaced with what he calls “control societies.” He argues that though there have been attempts at institutionalizing “appropriate reforms,” these disciplinary societies are “more or less in terminal decline.” In the context of corporate governance, we see these attempts at stemming the decline in the myriad legislative reforms, of which the Sarbanes–Oxley legislation in the US, the King 3 report in South Africa, and various other initiatives worldwide are examples. The fact is that even the most rigorous governance apparatus—like more carefully constituted Board committees, more stringent audit systems, or enhanced information security—seem to be unable to contain possible leaks and breakdowns. As a result of this, Deleuze argued, we need “new weapons.” These new weapons can no longer rely on the “molds” that were used within societies of confinement. Instead, Deleuze argues that controls are “a modulation, like self-transmuting molding continually changing from one moment to the next, or like a sieve whose mesh varies from one point to another.”

To illustrate this, Deleuze (1990, p. 179) points out that the factories of production have now been outsourced to the “third world,” and that “business” has replaced factories, becoming “a soul, a gas.” Deleuze continues to plot the effects of these changes in various spheres, i.e., business, education, and the media. What cuts across all these illustrations is the new preoccupation with assessment, reward for performance, and an endless preoccupation with self-improvement and competition. Deleuze (1990, p. 180) plots how the fluidity of floating currencies and access to information technologies have created a different kind of business activity—the kind directed at selling services and buying activities instead of products, an “essentially dispersive” capitalism, endlessly transmuting and reconfiguring itself. Control, in this environment, is “short-term and rapid, but at the same time continuous and unbounded” (Deleuze 1990, p. 181). In summarizing the result of this crisis of control, Deleuze states: “...control will have to deal not only with vanishing frontiers, but with mushrooming shantytowns and ghettos.” I believe that in this passage, Deleuze has brilliantly captured the challenges faced by corporate governance today. Not only does it have to deal with the dispersion and fluidity characterizing contemporary business but also with the inequalities created and perpetuated by capitalism. We can see some signs of this in the predominance of the concern for “sustainability” in contemporary governance models.

Understanding capitalism from the perspective of desiring-production may help us understand why so many initiatives directed at good governance fail to have results. In the first place, they fail to address the desiring processes that are always already at work within organizations, and secondly, partly as a result of a misdiagnoses of the problem, they use strategies of containment that are ill-fitted to what it is trying to contain. Finally, these initiatives could well make a more sustained criticism of capitalist practices impossible.

Deleuze and Guattari caution us to develop a critical eye for all of the bodies, institutions, and practices required to sustain a certain capitalist ordering over time. Within a global environment, a plethora of institutions conspire to keep capitalism as we know it intact. These institutions also make it impossible for us to question whether we want to perpetuate capitalism in its current form. In Deleuze and Guattari's time, they saw the capitalist State as the central player in this, but it is clear that the world was a different place at the time of their writing. This does not mean that they were not prophetic in much of what they offer us in their analysis of capitalism. Nor does it mean that we should not engage in an analysis of the role that the State still plays in supporting capitalism today, especially in countries such as the US.

However, it has to be acknowledged that in the context of globalization, the playing field has changed. The budgets of some multinational corporations exceed those of some nation states. Powerful institutions such as the World Bank and the IMF dictate the terms of engagement in trade and industry. Large financial institutions, and the mistakes they make, have an impact on small business owners and homeowners across the globe. In all of these respects, the importance of something like corporate governance has increased. But as I hope to demonstrate, this may require a very different conception of "corporate governance."

It is indeed encouraging that the preoccupation with "sustainability" has now become a central part of the corporate governance discourse. This is clearly an acknowledgement that businesses have to deal with the social inequalities and environmental costs that their activities may cause or perpetuate. But here again, we may have to be more careful in awarding praise to all such initiatives. A number of questions have to be raised: Has the sustainability rhetoric become yet another scaffolding by means of which "business and usual" is perpetuated? Have "sustainability reports" become yet another series of simulacra which allows capital to flow and real value to escape unabated? Is the appeal to "green business" and "ethical business" just another "coding," designed to access new markets, this time the market of consumers with an "ethical conscience"? If we uncritically accept these new names and brands that capitalism assume, are we not undermining a more rigorous questioning of the effects

of capitalism on those without some clear "stakeholder" power?

Much of the initiatives around corporate citizenship social responsibility and good governance are well-intentioned, but paradoxically, they may also make serious ethical questioning unlikely. The threat is that instead of allowing new creative possibilities to present themselves, these initiatives may easily be employed as feedback loops that serve to support some of the same axiomatic structures that capitalism have created. Such axioms include "pursue profit growth at all cost," "greed is good for everyone in the end," "morality is legality" etc. Instead, we may have to question these initiatives' ability to create an openness toward new couplings, relationships, with those people and entities that are potentially disruptive of the various iterations of "business and usual." We need to understand the inevitable limitations of terms like "corporate governance," be more skeptical with regard to the kind of safeguards it promises, and realize that there is always more going on than what meets the eye...

The challenge is to think about the unanticipated side-effects of whatever we are trying to institutionalize within corporate governance. In the first pages of *Logic of Sense*, Deleuze (1990, p. 1) helps us to understand that the processes of becoming means that Alice can be both taller and smaller. Something like this insight has to register within the corporate governance realm, where increased transparency and objectivity could paradoxically also imply decreased transparency and objectivity.

Deleuze's discussion of the secret could be the topic of a separate paper on the functioning of transparency within Business Ethics, and as such it goes beyond the scope of this article. But what is worth noting here is that transparency can equally well function as another form of secrecy. Deleuze and Guattari (1987, p. 289) make reference to the fact that what is often referred to as women's indiscrete gossip, may be the best method for hiding secrets. They argue that women do this precisely "by virtue of transparency, innocence, speed," by saying everything and yet revealing nothing by "celerity and limpidity." If we could bring ourselves to ignore the clear gender stereotype that is operating here, it may serve us well to take Deleuze and Guattari's cue and treat the emphasis on transparency, full disclosure, and full-cost accounting within corporate governance with much more circumspection. Could it be that it hides more than it reveals?

## **Problem 2** Moral agency and identity "crises."

When discussing the difference between research in corporate governance and finance, Weaver (2011, p. 175) argues that corporate governance more directly involves individual actors as subjects (e.g., executives, board members) and hence requires interdisciplinary research,

while finance is focus on more abstract financial and economic structures and processes. The importance that is placed on the moral agency of individuals within corporate governance emerges clearly here. Corporate governance remains focused on the fiduciary duties of Directors as agents of their principals, or on Board members as designers or engineers of corporate cultures. As such, it is assumed that a certain moral “identity” would allow these individual agents to act in a morally correct manner. Within Business Ethics, much attention is paid to the development of these individuals’ personal integrity through various kinds of ethics training sessions and moral awareness raising programs (Driscoll and Hoffman 1999).

In studying these initiatives aimed at shaping individuals’ moral identity, it becomes evident that many of them rely on the ultimate of neo-liberal tools of self-governance. A lot of emphasis is placed on the development of moral character, which would bring the individual to be trustworthy, disclose conflicts of interest, act in good faith, and maintain a sound work ethic. Though most Business Ethicists assume the positive value of such “ethics management” projects that are pursued in response to regulations such as the Federal Sentencing Guidelines for Corporations, others have pointed out its more pernicious effects. Some, like Alvesson and Willmott (2002, p. 621) have argued that what is at work here is a kind of “identity regulation” by which individuals’ self-image is aligned with managerial objectives. In fact, Roberts (2001) has argued that corporate governance is effected precisely by means of a kind of narcissistic alignment of the identity of individual with the corporate identity. As both the individual’s and the corporation’s “identities” are preoccupied with corporate self-interest, the interests of others are always defined in terms of the profit-interest of the firm. This becomes evident in the multiple attempts to indicate the relationship between social and financial performance. Hence the problem: this kind of corporate narcissism makes individual moral responsiveness to others impossible and paradoxically undermines the ethics it is trying to foster.

The individual is inevitably “produced” through the social orders that result from desiring-production. As we saw above, Deleuze and Guattari’s understanding of social, political, and economic activity is premised on the fact that all of life itself is a matter of flows and interacting forces, which are inevitably structured in order for us to subsist. This structuring takes place through societal “coding” (of which capitalist codes are prominent iterations) that brings about relatively stable ways of existing, or systems of habit, which Deleuze and Guattari describe as territories. It relates to the spatial, material, and psychological components that constitute a society, group, or individual. Understanding these structuring dynamics, helps us to see our “agency” as

a side-product of assemblages, which, I will argue, can either enable or foreclose moral responsiveness.

An *assemblage* has both territorial aspects, to stabilize it, and cutting edges of deterritorialization—therefore, it can be described as a mobile and shifting center. This notion of assemblage is the translation of the French concept of *agencement*. *Agencement* is the result of bodies in interaction, of both the amalgamations and the repulsions that come about, and the affects and sensations that are elicited. It allows us to put things into motion, to act, and to find direction. The fact that the concept of *agencement* is translated as assemblage, is quite significant. One can think here of how a room is appointed, how things are arranged. It is also easy to see how in corporate governance terms, it would entail the structures of the organization, the chain of command, its reporting lines, its delegations, which allow a sense of “agency” to emerge.

These structures are often designed precisely to control all flows, to prevent any leaks from, or breakages out of the axiomatic structures that it is designed to serve. The reality is that apart from these structures, there are also certain tacit “arrangements,” which we may refer to as “the way we do things around here,” which is the result of a more spontaneous connection of flows, and which are not so easily contained or “managed.” In the latter case, it could be that there is no central agent or body that arranges, but that it is rather a kind of emergent patterning that in turn produces things like “governing bodies” and “agents.”

The assemblages that allow for this *agencing* (the verb form of agency) capacity are not stagnant. Rather than being a sedentary place with fixed borders, the territory is itself a malleable site of passage (Message 2005, p. 275). This malleability has distinct implications for agency. According to Bonta and Protevi, Deleuze and Guattari thematize the subject as “an emergent functional structure embedded in a series of structures.” This would mean that both individual agency and the “corporate” agency of groups are emergent properties of the interactions, priorities, shifts, and challenges that are part of organizational life. *Agencing* therefore gives up the notion of the strong transcendental subject in favor of a patterning that allows decisions to emerge spontaneously within certain “couplings.” Instead of thinking about individual subjects when describing “moral agency,” we need to think about agency as a verb, something that is always already taking place. We see the same kind of insight in the work of critical management scholars who insist that we should understand organization as a verb, rather than as a noun (Parker 1998, p. 77).

Does this mean that as such, that anything that emerges in the *agencing* process should then be considered “moral”? Not quite. Deleuze and Guattari explain that there is a difference between the connection of flows and



the conjunction of flows. A connection of flows occurs when decoded or deterritorialized flows join each other spontaneously, boosting and strengthening each other in an autocatalytic, i.e., self-propelling movement that is creative and life-affirming. Conjunction, in contrast, is the over-coding of flows, which captures it and leads to stoppages that are decidedly life-denying. Deleuze and Guattari seem to challenge us to continually perform an evaluation of all of the various “assemblages” that we are involved in. The only criteria they offer us for this evaluation is whether assemblages are life-affirming or life-denying. And even these “criteria” are material in nature, not transcendental. What “life-affirming” means in practice depends entirely on the people, institutions, and the environments involved in the specific “couplings.” It requires an experimental immersion in relationships and responsiveness to what a specific relationship requires in very material terms. In his discussion of Spinoza’s *Ethics*, Deleuze (1970, p. 33) explains that “there are always relations that agree with one another.” There is no evil (in itself), but there is something that is bad for me in relation to someone or something. An object that decomposes my body is bad, and one whose relation agrees with me, is good. The example that Deleuze uses is the effect of poison on the body—it is quite clearly life-denying, and therefore bad. This may seem like quite relativistic criteria for good and evil, but in fact, it involves quite firm relational constraints. It suggests that we should consider the kind of couplings that individuals enter into at work. Could some of these relationships have a poisoning, or life-denying effect?

The way that this question is addressed within Business Ethics, largely centers on the discussion of “organizational culture.” Again, as we saw above, this has now become one of the assigned responsibilities of Board of Directors. It is, however, important to question exactly what is meant by this and how it plays out within organizations. This preoccupation with “ethical organizational cultures” assumes the possibility of developing homogenous organizational “identities.” Ibarra-Colado, Clegg, Rhodes and Kornberger note that the idea that organizational culture can be used to control decisions and actions has become quite popular within the Business Ethics environment. They point out that the problem with this perspective is that it discounts the complexity and contingency of interactions between individuals and their institutional environments (Ibarra-Colado et al. 2006, p. 51). This has led to the proliferation of ethics and governance codes that operate as axioms, covering over the multiplicity of power dynamics and differences between individuals and between various subcultures within organizations. It makes it impossible to acknowledge that which inevitably escapes the normative structuring of the organization. Individuals and corporations are assumed to be governed by means axiomatic truths, such as

the insistence on “transparency,” “objectivity,” “due process,” “fiduciary duties” etc. All the axioms seem to refer to a principled reality reflecting some kind of moral order that lies beyond dispute. These initiatives cannot fully account for what is happening within corporate environments.

The danger here is that a form of corporate self-presentation, which represents and markets them as “good citizens,” or “ethical corporations” will replace serious ethical questioning about how corporations function (Roberts 2003, p. 205). We should not stop questioning the kinds of products they make and the risks that they may pose to natural and social environments. It is interesting that many of the corporations that have embraced “triple bottom-line reporting” and “corporate citizenship” initiatives are precisely those who are involved in extractive industries with huge environmental and social risks, or those who make potentially dangerous products, such as tobacco and arms.

What is important within the context of corporate governance is that a concern for life-affirming couplings should raise questions regarding the sustainability of the organization’s operations, and the ways in which important stakeholder relationships can best be nurtured. These relationships, or couplings in Deleuzian terms, are not stagnant, and as such cannot be controlled from outside, or top-down—it requires ongoing engagement and experimentation to be sustained and in and through the process of sustaining them, moral responsiveness is required. The focus on control is therefore replaced by relational constraints, which emerges within the various couplings within which individuals and groups are engaged. In stating the need for “basic sociotechnological principles of control mechanisms,” Deleuze (1990, p. 182) himself alluded to the possibility that “older means of control, borrowed from the old sovereign societies, will come back into play, adapted as necessary.” Could relational constraints be such an “older form of control”? Perhaps, but what needs to be taken into account is the complexity of relationships in which we find ourselves immersed.

As our analysis above revealed, corporate governance aims to contain identities, instead of engaging with the flows through which these identities spontaneously emerge. Corporate governance seems to try and engineer, direct and program these “identities,” instead of fostering the couplings that in and of themselves involve relational constraint, albeit not complete control (Painter-Morland 2006). We therefore have to address the “identity crisis” that is inherent to capitalism. Governance initiatives relying in controls institutionalized and managed by singular individuals with integrity are bound to miss the ever shifting target of flows.

When we realize that what we conceive of as “individual agents” are social machines that emerge as result of their connection and amalgamation with other people and

institutions, we may need to rethink their role in governance. Governance may have to take account of the effect of experimental couplings, instead of attempting to control identities. Couplings are productive of a social order with significant force. It is not a case of “anything goes,” but rather a process of amalgamating, or connecting within a broader network that, although it entails neither unilateral external rules nor self-disciplined control, does involve significant constraints.

From this perspective, it becomes possible to rethink the process of “stakeholder engagement.” Some stakeholder theorists have been insisting that the corporation should not always occupy the center of the stakeholder map, but this idea seems difficult to materialize. If governance could be rethought in terms of a mobile and shifting center, it may finally shed new light on how this reframing may be accomplished. As couplings occur, individual agents such as Board members and managers enter into a relational space with stakeholders from within certain normative imperatives emerge. What is important here is that this should involve real material engagements with a broad group of stakeholders and environments. Boards literally have to get out of the Boardroom and have real experience within different material contexts. This may allow them a different form of “agencing,” which is as much a function of the couplings, relationships, and commitments as it is a part of the multiple machinic processes within the individual that makes “decisions.”

The important caveat, however, is that the engagement with new stakeholder groups should not be conceived of as a new “strategy,” with a clear “telos.” This would amount to yet another form of “organization.” Such engagements cannot be planned ahead of time and managed according to fixed schedules and outcomes. Instead, it should involve surprising, experimental interactions that are creative precisely because they go beyond a stated “purpose.”

We may also draw on Deleuze and Guattari’s ideas on “becoming other.” Instead of “incorporating” the other into the same (the fascist strategy), the “outside” must be allowed to slip in (Massumi 1993, p. 116). This implies a kind of anarchy, as it is a schizophrenic process that undermines identity. Does this undermine the very idea of “governance”? In my mind, it simply acknowledges the an-archic elements of governance that is always part and parcel of it and must be understood for governance to exist in the first place. Instead of indentifying business partners that conform to a certain “identity,” multiple interactions with the strange and the unknown will allow the corporation to experiment with new becomings. Other couplings, such as with previously neglected or ignored stakeholder groups, open new possibilities for “agencing.”

From this perspective, something like “conflicts of interests” should not be prohibited to protect agents from a loss of “objectivity,” but instead to avoid certain kinds of couplings. Certain relationships draw what should be an open-ended process of deliberation into foregone conclusions based on status and privilege. A conflict of interest creates a one-directional pattern of thought that makes it impossible for the persons involved to take others into consideration. If the relational network is broadened, the check-and-balances of other relational constraints may stimulate “agencing” that involves the ongoing exercise of discretion, rather than a mere checking of compliance boxes.

**Problem 3** Hierarchical governance and the crisis of structure.

Another misconception that we should challenge is the assumption that governance systems can be sufficiently described and managed by means of hierarchical structures with direct cause and effect relationships. Within organizational theory and leadership studies, we do find much criticism of top-down management styles, and an emphasis on participative management and bottom-up initiatives (Ul-Bien et al. 2007, p. 300).

From a philosophical perspective, the focus on hierarchical structure ignores the very real effects of the multiplicities occurring within and between bodies in organizational settings. If this is ignored, the notion of “governance” as such cannot be understood, nor can its failures be discussed. It may therefore be helpful to consider within Deleuze and Guattari’s discussion of root-tree structures and rhizomes to help us better understand the limitations of certain governance systems.

Deleuze and Guattari argue that much of our reality can be understood as the unspecifiable, unpredictable, and uncapturable activity that characterizes the rhizome. In biological terms, a “rhizome” refers to a form of plant that extends itself through horizontal tube-like root system and can in this way create endless new plants. Deleuze and Guattari employ the concept of the rhizome to create an alternative to what they depict as arboreal root-tree structures. With this distinction, they offer us two ways of looking at the world: from the perspective of the root-tree, linear cause and effect relationships and dialectical structures provide a neatly organized perspective on the world, whereas from the perspective of the rhizome, entities and events are more intricately related. In fact, Deleuze and Guattari’s description of the rhizome provides an account for the fact that there are strange connections among events, people, and objects.

Deleuze and Guattari (1987, p. 7–13) explain that the rhizome works according to the following principles: connection; heterogeneity; multiplicity; a-signifying rupture by

means of lines of flight (Painter-Morland 2011, p. 93)<sup>3</sup>; cartography, i.e., maps of emergence; and decalcomania, i.e., the rhizome is an immanent process, rather than a model that imitates the world (Bonta and Protevi 2004, p. 136). As Lawley (2005, p. 37) describes, it involves a site of potentiality, a constantly moving set of potential connections, as such “permanent inventiveness.” Embracing the rhizomatic implies allowing one’s body to be affected by other bodies’ habits, appearances, and actions without all of a sudden losing all of the habits that has already become embodied. It is an incremental, unpredictable, and in many cases unintentional experimentation with what one is exposed to.

Seen from this perspective, individual “agents” are themselves social machines that are the product of rhizomatic multiplicities. Individuals connect with each other and with multiple organizations and other animate and inanimate entities to produce yet more machines. As such machines are the product of multiplicities, it is difficult to describe it in terms of the clear-cut “identity” of decision-makers or agents with fiduciary duties. Add to this that these multiplicities interact with each other and with other entities in a rhizomatic fashion, and the governance challenge becomes clear. Both the values-driven and the rule-driven approaches that Business Ethicists employ are therefore limited in what they may achieve.

We saw above that Business Ethicists spend a great deal of time debating whether rule-driven compliance mechanisms, or aspirational values, have a more profound effect on ethical decisions and actions. To determine whether rule-driven initiatives or values-driven initiatives are more appropriate, scholars debate whether corporations operate as rule-driven mechanisms, or instead as organisms. Economic theory and management studies have largely been pursued from the perspective of the modernistic scientific method, characterized by logical positivism. Within this approach to science, both natural and human systems operate as orderly, rule-driven mechanisms. From this perspective, it is possible, and maybe even necessary, to have conception of fixed roles for individuals and corporations. From the mechanistic perspective, bureaucratic systems defined each person’s place. From the more organismic perspective, individuals could function as crucial “organs” that play mutually supportive roles and responsibilities with the corporate body (Frederick 2004). The problem is that neither a mechanistic nor an organismic model of the organization can account for the rhizomatic multiplicities that continue to escape the safeguards and systems that governance structures put in place. Trying to come up with an “integrity” strategy that holds individuals and corporations true to their “core values”

(foundational, root-like assumptions being evident in this term) will not have much effect in a rhizomatic environment, but neither will top-down application of rule-driven directives be able to deal with multidirectional dynamics within organizations.

Viewing corporations as either mechanisms or as organisms is, however, not our only option. To open another vista, we have to fully understand what Deleuze and Guattari (1983, pp. 285–286, 1987, pp. 395–409) have in mind with their notion of the machine. It is important to distinguish Deleuze and Guattari’s idea of the machinic from that of the mechanistic or organismic. For them, living bodies and technological apparatuses are machinic when they are in the process of becoming, they are organismic or mechanical when they are functioning in a state of stable equilibrium. For Deleuze, the machinic is necessary to celebrate and explore the multiplicities that are always present in mechanisms and organisms. The possibility of exploring and indulging in these multiplicities create our capacity for agency. If we take Deleuze and Guattari’s insistence on the unleashing of multiple machinic operations within both individuals and all other entities seriously, the “roles” assigned to both individual agents and corporate agents may have to be rethought. Change within organizations is only possible if the multiplicity of desiring-production is acknowledged. Only then do new forms of agency, and real responsiveness, become more likely. This occurs when individuals are no longer perceived as “functionaries” within the organization as organism, or as “tools” within the organization as mechanism. Individuals are in and of themselves multiplicities of force, and as such, they are capable of “agencing” that is unique, surprising, and as such creative. It is this kind of agency that is required for moral responsiveness.

Boards may be charged with the “governance of ethics”, but what presents itself as the “cultural identity” of the organization may in fact cover over the schizophrenic existence of multiple subcultures (smaller “machines” in Deleuze and Guattari’s terms). Assuming a strong sense of “corporate identity” also discounts the functioning of the multiplicities operating within individual agents. As all machines are the product of multiplicities, it is difficult to assign it a clear-cut individual or corporate “identity.” In terms of “organizational culture,” the multiplicities that persist despite attempts to depict an integrated, homogeneous culture via a “cultural audit” have to be acknowledged. In fact, in her work on culture, Martin (2002) has argued that acknowledging that cultures can simultaneously be fragmented, integrated, and differentiated is probably the most accurate depiction on what is going on in organizations.

The idea is by no means to discount the structural realities of organizations or to deny specific cultural

<sup>3</sup> Painter-Morland (2011).

manifestations. Instead it underscores the importance of noting that the management or organization of “culture” is always accompanied by the “non-organizational,” as described by Thanem (2004, p. 204). As he defines it, the non-organizational refers to the implicit problems that organizational activities are designed to control, and also to the energies that disrupt, subvert, and escape these activities. As such, the non-organizational seems to be precisely the stuff that business ethicists should be interested in, but seldom are.

What Deleuze and Guattari would help us understand is that the mechanistic rules that we often witness in corporate structures function as a “molar order,” which hides or covers over what is happening on a molecular level. Similarly, describing organizations as “organisms” does not get us beyond the molar order either. Organisms are as stuck in specific functions and processes that are required to maintain the body’s equilibrium. What Deleuze and Guattari are interested in is exploring the molecular flows of forces that we are typically unaware of. These molecular flows of belief and desire escape the molar categories that are regulated through codes (Bonta and Protevi 2004, p. 87). It is these molecular aspects of organizational life that are the blindspots of governance systems, yet have a direct impact on its functioning.

It has to be acknowledged that Deleuze and Guattari have no interest in trying to direct or control ethical decision-making in a corporate setting in any traditional sense. In fact, they may argue that “ethics management” obscures the processes of desiring-production that is always at work. In their study, we encounter a different perspective on “ethics.” They see ethics as a response to the world that is not based on any transcendental force, but rather involves a very practical engagement with empirical relationships. Following Nietzsche, Deleuze (2006, p. 185) encourages us to resist reactive forces and to experiment with the kind of relations that create life-affirming possibilities. This kind of ethics entails an immersion in life, where “good” and “bad” are assessed in relation to specific bodies in interaction with one another. From this perspective, there is in fact no longer any distinction between “ethics” and life (Deleuze 1970, p. 130).

As Buchanan explains, ethical thought projects certain permanent features of human experience and a kind of “wisdom” about how to conduct interpersonal relations (Buchanan 2008, p. 82). These are part of the historical and institutional specifics that allow us to operate within certain social settings, but as such, they are merely the “effects” that hide the actual processes of desiring-production. What Deleuze and Guattari’s work allows us is the kind of analysis of desiring-production that may make a more rigorous ethical reconsideration of corporate governance processes possible. The following statement may be the best description of the evaluative perspective that Deleuze

and Guattari (1987: 10) offer us: “Good and bad are only the products of an active and temporary selection, which must be renewed.” We therefore need to take up this challenge and attempt to rethink the functioning of corporate governance mechanisms.

It is important to acknowledge that Deleuze and Guattari do not present the rhizomatic as an alternative to arboreal root-tree structures. Though Deleuze and Guattari are critical of some of the social and economic orderings that have emerged as part of our desiring-production, they are not trying to argue that all territorialization and stratification is necessarily bad, or immoral. Stengers (2009, p. 281) argues that we should not be under the misconception that Deleuze and Guattari are only critical of structures and stratification. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, it is made clear that stratification is essential. Deleuze and Guattari remind us that though what they call “smooth space” and “striated space” are not of the same nature, they are not to be neatly separated. In fact, smooth space is constantly being translated and transverse into striated space, and striated space is constantly being reversed or returned to smooth space (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, p. 474). They use experiences as diverse as music, art, math, and maritime models to illustrate this point. It is therefore important to acknowledge that within corporate governance, hierarchical structures and more rhizomatic dynamics will inevitably co-exist. This should be perceived as an opportunity, rather than as a threat. Instead of arguing that we no longer need something like a Board of Directors or an audit committee, we may want to think about how these structures could engage with patterns of influence that emerge more spontaneously in organizations, and how we could facilitate a fruitful contamination of these structures with perspectives that they otherwise would overlook. Instead of aiming for a top-down control of these dynamics, we need to be creating opportunities for engagement, experimentation, and creative responses to an ever-changing environment.

Another interpretation that we should avoid is viewing the rhizomatic as a later stage of development that replaces such root-tree structures. The contemporary prevalence of virtual organizations and multinationals that are not tied to a physical location tempts this interpretation, but this should not be misunderstood as an escape from root-tree systems. In fact, in these virtual organizations, hierarchies are in a lot of cases even more clearly circumscribed. Deleuze and Guattari (1987, p. 20) go to great lengths to explain that the root-tree and the rhizome-canal are not two opposed models. They describe the root-tree as a transcendent model, as a tracing, whereas the rhizome operates as an immanent process that outlines a map. But they acknowledge that root-tree structures also generate its own escapes, just as the rhizomatic can constitute its own hierarchies and even generate despotic channels. Hierarchy

and rhizomatic canals coexist in the same environment, and continuously unsettle the patterns that are characteristic of each. In the context of corporate governance, it allows us to acknowledge the importance of certain hierarchical structures, and even the foundational principles upon which they rely. However, what the coexistence of rhizomes and root-trees implies is that much escapes from formal, hierarchical structures, and that what escapes should be of great interest to those within Business Ethics.

The coexistence of root-tree structures and rhizomes in corporate environments has important implications for our thinking about corporate governance. It indicates that we do not necessarily have to get rid of best practice governance codes and systems, though another perspective on such codes and their capacities would be necessary. We may want to acknowledge that governance codes are always open to “genetic drift.” Deleuze and Guattari (1987, p. 53) explain that codes are supposed to be inseparable from processes of decoding inherent to it. Though the reference here is to genetic, biological codes, the implications for corporate governance codes are interesting to explore. What would “genetic drift” be in corporate governance terms? What seems to have happened within corporate governance is that social codes were replaced by axioms. The “Codes” that have recently emerged and best practice ethics standards seem to assume that setting certain normative parameters “fixes” the problem of ethical transgressions. There is no awareness of how the “fix” installs other problems as permanent “fixtures.” For instance, the governance practice of auditor rotation, or at least the rotation of the senior partner responsible for the audit within the audit firm, which designed to guarantee objectivity, discounts the importance and value of long-term knowledge of the multiplicities that exist within the organization and shapes its environment. It assumes that documents present an “objective picture,” a kind of molar order that can be transferred from one person to another, instead of acknowledging the molecular dynamics that create real ethical risk.

Another example of how a well-intentioned policy sometimes create other problems is its wake, is the practice of declaring conflicts of interests once per annum on a paper or online form. This policy and practice assume that the transparency of this act will somehow “fix” problems created by these relationships. But in fact, requiring of a person to fill out a conflict of declaration form does not necessarily guarantee that this person will now more carefully manage that relationship to avoid ethical lapses. The contrary may be true. The submission of a form often transfers the ethical responsibility to manage this conflict to the organization, and leave the individual no more morally responsive or alert.

Our critical scrutiny of corporate practices should therefore extend to ethics initiatives in the governance

realm. Instead of using the concepts offered within the CSR and ethics management discourses uncritically, we may want to scrutinize how they are being used and for which purposes. Concepts like “corporate culture” and “corporate citizens” are often used as if it depicts fixed entities with specific identities. But in fact, these notions are molar constructs that cover over the desiring flows on a molecular order. It is these flows that produce these identities as a kind of side-effect of what is going on between people and institutions. This does not mean that we should do away with these notions. The kind of structuring that they afford us is indeed very important. However, it becomes problematic if these constructs leads to a kind of fixed coding that makes any challenge to them, or exploration of possibilities beyond them, impossible. It should be an ongoing part of Board agendas to discuss these initiatives and to engage with the critics of their own initiatives in this area to better understand the dangers it may pose. For instance, some of these concerns raised against the notion of a “corporate citizens” is that corporations start to function as social and political agents without having the legitimacy to do so (Banerjee 2007; Jones and Haigh 2007). It may allow us to always think critically about what an emergent molar order like “corporate citizenship” implies for our embodied interactions with one another and with the animate and inanimate entities we interact with.

Exploring the rhizomatic in corporate governance requires quite a mind-shift. Where much of our attention used to be focused on delineated units that operate according to specific foundational principles and checks and balances, we now have to be open to “dimensions or rather directions in motion” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, p. 21). Our interest has to be on what we and our institutions are becoming, rather than what they currently are. This requires a different kind of methodology as well. Where Boards are typically concerned with how they can direct their corporations from where it is now, to where it wants to end up, understanding the rhizomatic requires starting in the middle, rather than from a beginning or end. This may entail looking at how projects are affecting people and environments, rather than whether targets are met or compliance boxes are checked. Looking at the rhizomatic map will indicate multiple points of entries and exists, and no, not all roads lead to Rome... we have to question the various paths in terms of their ability to open up new life-affirming possibilities.

## Conclusion

Deleuze and Guattari make us aware of the fact that corporate reality could be very different from what it seems to

be at first glance, and therefore, much more difficult, if not impossible to control in the ways that many corporate governance measures assume. To understand the challenges that face us, we have to be aware of the processes of desiring-production, of flow, and of multiplicity, that escape the forces of organization that we have come to institutionally rely upon. Capitalism thrives on flows, and in the process, it is inevitable that much of what we value escapes. At the same time, social orders are created that confront us with problems of inequality, disenfranchisement, and poverty. In a very real sense, the crisis of containment creates all kind of social crises in its wake.

Deleuze and Guattari offer us no safe position from which we can exert our moral agency and reestablish our control. Instead they show that agency as such is an effect, a side-product, of our desiring-production and of the structuring and destructuring that is always part of this process. We are therefore confronted with an identity crisis, which can only be dealt by embracing the multiplicity that is part of our relationships and interactions with others. In and though these engagements, various the relational constraints will emerge, which will allow us a better account of what is meant by “moral agency.”

It is toward exploring the multiplicities of what we, and our organizations can be, and what we are still in the process of becoming, that we should direct our ethical attention. Here, our main task entails rigorously investigating and experimenting to find what is truly life-affirming. We saw that no one definition of what is “life-affirming” exists. Instead, it requires constant rearticulation by all those involved. If we embrace the relational constraints that emerge, the “life-affirming” criteria can function as a very powerful force for ethical questioning and action.

The emergence of this form of “agencing,” however, requires engaging with the material reality within which we live, and being part of relationships with a broad variety of real people. What we may find is an “agencing” that is based on affects that have powerful effects, some of which may come as a surprise to us and even disrupt our sense of self, and redefine what we understand as “control.” We may even be left with a more serious crisis of control.

One can therefore anticipate that these “disruptions” may not be very welcome within certain capitalist institutions. But then, this may just be exactly what Business Ethics needs to remain a resource for, and a force of, ethical questioning. We should embrace these disruptions as moments to pause, reflect, and consider what kind of world is being produced in the wake of our capitalist practices. Instead of allowing capitalism to confront us with crises upon crises, we may need to seek out those relationships and practices that would allow a better social order to emerge.

## References

- Alvesson, M., & Willmott, H. (2002). Identity regulation as organizational control: Producing the appropriate individual. *Journal of Management Studies*, 39(5), 619–644.
- Banerjee, S. B. (2007). The problem with corporate social responsibility. In S. Clegg & C. Rhodes (Eds.), *Management ethics: Contemporary contexts* (pp. 55–76). London: Routledge.
- Bonta, M., & Protevi, J. (2004). *Deleuze and geophilosophy. A guide and glossary*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Buchanan, I. (2008). *Deleuze and Guattari's Anti Oedipus. A reader's guide*. New York: Continuum.
- Deleuze, G. (1988/1970). *Spinoza: Practical philosophy*. San Francisco: City Light Books.
- Deleuze, G. (1990). Postscript on control societies. In: *Negotiations* (M. Joughin, Trans.). New York: Columbia University Press.
- Deleuze, G. (2006/1983). *Nietzsche and philosophy* (H. Tomlinson, Trans.). New York: Columbia University Press.
- Deleuze, G., & Guattari, F. (1992/1983). *Anti-Oedipus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Hurley, R., Seem, M., & Lane, H. R., Trans.). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Deleuze, G., & Guattari, F. (2007/1987). *A thousand plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (B. Massumi, Trans.). London: University of Minnesota Press.
- Driscoll, D.-M., & Hoffman, W. M. (1999). *Ethics matters: How to implement values-driven management*. Boston: Bentley College Center for Business Ethics.
- Erokovic, L. (2007). Corporate governance. In R. W. Kolb (Ed.), *SAGE encyclopedia of business and society* (pp. 471–480). London: SAGE.
- Frederick, W. B. (2004). *The evolutionary firm and its moral (dis)contents, business, science, and ethics* (The Ruffin Series No. 4, Society for Business Ethics).
- Freeman, E. (1984). *Strategic management: A stakeholder approach*. London: Pitman Publishing.
- Freeman, E. R., Wicks, A., Harrison, J., Parmar, B., & de Colle, S. (2010). *Stakeholder theory: The state of the art*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ibarra-Colado, E., Clegg, S. R., Rhodes, C., & Kornberger, M. (2006). The ethics of managerial subjectivity. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 64, 45–55.
- Institute of Directors. (2010). *King II Report, King Code and the Companies Act 71 of 2008*. Lansdowne: Juta Law Publishing.
- Jones, M. T., & Haigh, M. (2007). The transnational corporation and new corporate citizenship theory. A critical analysis. *Journal of Corporate Citizenship*, 27, 51–69.
- Kolk, A., & Pinkse, J. (2010). The integration of corporate governance in corporate social responsibility disclosures. *Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management*, 17(1), 15–26.
- Lawley, S. (2005). Deleuze's rhizome and the study of organization: Conceptual movement and an open future. *TAMARA: Journal of Critical Postmodern Organization Studies*, 3(4), 36–47.
- Martin, J. (2002). *Organizational culture: Mapping the Terrain*. Thousands Oaks: SAGE.
- Massumi, B. (1993). *A user's guide to capitalism and Schizophrenia: Deviations from Deleuze and Guattari*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Message, K. (2005). Stratification. In A. Parr (Ed.), *The Deleuze dictionary*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Painter-Morland, M. (2006). Redefining accountability as relational responsiveness. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 66, 89–98.
- Painter-Morland, M. (2008). *Business ethics as practice: Ethics as the everyday business of business*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Painter-Morland, M. (2011). Rethinking responsible agency in corporations: Perspectives from Deleuze & Guattari. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 101(1), 83–95.

- Parker, M. (1998). Organisation, community and Utopia. *Studies in Cultures, Organisations and Societies*, 4, 77–91.
- Petry, E. (2005). Assessing corporate culture part 1. *Ethikos*, 18(5), 1–11.
- Pirson, M., & Turnbull, S. (2011). Towards a more humanistic governance model: Network governance structure. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 99(1), 1–101.
- Roberts, J. (2001). Corporate governance and the ethics of Narcissus. *Business Ethics Quarterly*, 11(1), 109–128.
- Roberts, J. (2003). The manufacture of corporate social responsibility: Constructing corporate sensibility. *Organization*, 10(2), 249–265.
- Rossouw, G. J., & Sison, A. J. G. (2006). Introduction. In G. J. Rossouw & A. J. G. Sison (Eds.), *Global perspectives on the ethics of corporate governance*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Ryan, L. R., Buchholz, A., & Kolb, R. (2010). New directions in corporate governance and finance: Implications for business ethics. *Business Ethics Quarterly*, 20(4), 673–693.
- Stengers, I. (2009). Leven/denken. In E. Romein, M. Schuilenburg, & S. van Tuinen (Eds.), *Deleuze compendium*. Amsterdam: Boom.
- Thanem, T. (2004). The body without organs: Nonorganizational desire in organizational life. *Culture and Organization*, 10(3), 203–217.
- Trevino, L. K., & Nelson, K. A. (2010). *Managing business ethics: Straight talk about how to do it right* (5th ed.). Hoboken: Wiley.
- Ul-Bien, M., Marion, R., & McKelvey, B. (2007). Complexity leadership theory: Shifting leadership from the industrial age to the knowledge era. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 18(4), 298–318.
- US Federal Sentencing Commission. (2013). *US Federal Sentencing Guidelines*. [http://www.ussc.gov/Guidelines/2011\\_Guidelines/Manual\\_HTML/8b2\\_1.htm](http://www.ussc.gov/Guidelines/2011_Guidelines/Manual_HTML/8b2_1.htm). Accessed 26 March 2013
- Weaver, G. (2011). Comments on BEQ's twentieth anniversary forum on new directions for business. *Business Ethics Quarterly*, 21(1), 157–187.

Copyright of Journal of Business Ethics is the property of Springer Science & Business Media B.V. and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.