

Reconsidering Kinship

Beyond the Nuclear Family with Deleuze and Guattari

TIMOTHY LAURIE AND HANNAH STARK

UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY AND UNIVERSITY OF TASMANIA

Following its French publication in 1972, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus* received wide attention for its criticisms of the bourgeois family. But most commentaries have focused on the rejection of the nuclear family as an Oedipal configuration. The potential that Deleuze and Guattari's work offers for thinking forms of family beyond the nuclear has rarely been addressed in Deleuze studies, nor has their work been utilised in kinship studies or critical theories of the family.¹ This is perhaps because of assumptions that 1970s feminist critiques and rejections of the bourgeois family are now irrelevant to contemporary debates about politics, economics and subjectivity, which is where most discussions of *Anti-Oedipus* can be found. However, the social importance of the family does remain a topic firmly on the public agenda, particularly concerning marriage, new reproductive technologies, and the sanctity of the child and childhood.² We thus see work on the family, kinship and other forms of interpersonal dependency as still significant to broader concerns in critical theory, especially in relation to gender and sexuality, and contend that key arguments in *Anti-Oedipus* provide valuable ways to unravel the myth of the nuclear family as more natural, stable or normal than non-nuclear formations.

We begin by surveying Deleuze and Guattari's critique of psychoanalysis in *Anti-Oedipus*, focusing on the limits of 'familial symbols' as the lenses through which

we understand desire and repression. This leads to a broader discussion of the 'domestic' household in the context of bourgeois political economy, in which we argue against a 'micro-' understanding of the family in relation to 'macro-' social structures, looking instead at the slippages between different spheres of social production, reproduction and consumption in which no single institution is the 'prime mover', so to speak. We then point to the ways celebrations of 'variant' family forms and 'families of choice' risk reproducing traditional assumptions about how so-called normative families work, and in doing so preclude discussion of the wider economic and cultural factors that underpin all family and kinship practices. Finally, we examine the critical shift towards intimacies in the work of Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner, and suggest that celebrations of counter-hegemonic collectives often slip into moral polarisations between conservative and progressive cultural practices. We argue that these dichotomies lend themselves easily to the highly charged 'culture wars' that continue to confuse, and in some cases stifle, public discussions of diverse family forms. Throughout, we use the conceptual tools that Deleuze and Guattari develop in *Anti-Oedipus* to reframe questions about the workings of families outside the dichotomies between the conservative and the progressive. By examining the overlap between theoretical models used to describe families and normative assumptions about how they *should*, or even *don't* work, we point to the difficulties inherent in collapsing complex practices into one, or even several, ideal models of family, intimacy or kinship.

—DESIRE, PSYCHOANALYSIS AND *ANTI-OEDIPUS*

Published in the wake of the May 1968 student-led uprising in France, *Anti-Oedipus* responded to the failures of Marxist revolutionary movements to purge themselves of the vices they were seeking to overthrow, including prejudice, dogmatism, nationalism and hierarchies of power.³ Reflecting on the psychological 'fascisms' of revolutionary praxis, *Anti-Oedipus* engaged with contemporary critiques of psychoanalysis and the social management of desire and sexuality, drawing at times on Guattari's own experience with Institutional Psychotherapy at the La Borde Psychiatric Clinic.⁴ Given its dialogic relationship to the ongoing academic and political debates of its era, any reading of *Anti-Oedipus* must acknowledge its specific concerns with French bourgeois life and politics in the late 1960s and early 1970s,

which gave many of its arguments a highly polemical tenor. Nevertheless, we hope to demonstrate that *Anti-Oedipus's* accounts of the political construction of the bourgeois family still has traction in contemporary debates about gender, sexuality and social organisation.

Discussions of the family are not central to *Anti-Oedipus*. In the second chapter of the book, 'Psycho-Analysis and Familialism: The Holy Family', the politics of the bourgeois family becomes visible only within a scattered but provocative discussion of psychoanalysis and the explanatory limits of the 'Oedipus complex'. Deleuze and Guattari begin by endorsing Sigmund Freud's early discovery of desire in the form of the libido, agreeing that the libido, a drive that can invest into anything and everything, is primary in the subject's relationship to his or her world. But the authors accuse Freud of betraying his own discovery, by limiting the libido to sexual drives and collapsing them into variations of the Oedipal triangle, forcing desire 'to repress its flows in order to contain them in the narrow cells of the type "couple", "family", "person", "objects"'.⁵ For the psychoanalyst, the psyche's relation with its world must be mediated by symbols; for Deleuze and Guattari, desire invests directly into the social field, into politics, history, communities and mythologies, and also into objects, events, and affects, whole spheres of non-familial attachments that begin with the child's earliest experiences. For this reason, Deleuze and Guattari's discussions of the family are always coupled with recognition of 'intrusions' from the outside: 'an uncle from America; a brother who went bad; an aunt who took off with a military man ... Families are filled with gaps and transected by breaks that are not familial.'⁶

Rather than attaching itself to pre-existing objects, desire is productive (it 'makes' things), and whenever there is desire, there is also spillage and excess. Symbols can never be desired without new offshoots springing up, departures and attachments that refuse to settle on Daddy, Mummy or Me. Desire does not restrict itself to Oedipal microcosms that reflect or represent social macrocosms; rather, political, financial, religious, workplace, and familial activities are all mixed up by desire, because it knows nothing of discreet persons. As Deleuze and Guattari put it, desire is a workshop, not a theatre.⁷ The psyche thus has no need of symbolic mediation, familial coordination or rational justification in order to desire, nor does it need to 'believe' in the Family to produce love for family members, or anyone else,

for that matter. Oedipus is not a false belief, 'but rather that belief is necessarily something false that diverts and suffocates effective production'.⁸ Treating desires as equivocal to beliefs makes it hard to understand how people are able to articulate one set of values, principles or commitments, but still do things—sometimes spontaneously, unpredictably, even zealously—that contradict their stated political or moral worldviews. Put another way, ideological understandings of the world are cobbled together from experiences and activities shaped by desire, or desiring-production. Marxists creating fascist hierarchies, feminist activists at Metallica concerts, media scholars watching daytime soaps: desire cannot be reduced to the camps of the ideologically committed. But if desire itself has no ideology, what would a politics of desire look like? And if desire does not 'believe' in the family, how can Deleuze and Guattari explain psychoanalysts' case studies of parricidal fantasies, incestuous neurosis, and patriarchal paranoia? For Deleuze and Guattari, the emergence of the bourgeois family during the Industrial Revolution does have important consequences for how desire is produced and circumscribed in capitalist societies. A closer inspection of Deleuze and Guattari's critique of capitalism will thus help us to understand the normative construction the family within the organisational demands of bourgeois society.

—CAPITALISM AND THE NUCLEAR FAMILY

In the third chapter of *Anti-Oedipus*, 'Savages, Barbarians, Civilised Men', different social formations are described in relation to social 'codes', which make bodies and things recognisable, exchangeable and socially meaningful. Deleuze and Guattari understand codes in the most general possible terms, including marking, writing, singing, dancing, tattooing, painting and architecture, as well as activities often described within anthropology under the rubric of 'myth', 'ritual' and 'oral storytelling'. Capitalism, however, is a unique case, because it does not depend on fixed codes or ritualised forms of exchange. Economies of capital investment demand variability in exchange-values and use-values—pumpkin has a different value today than it did yesterday, and so does one's labour in growing them—and so results in a decoding of persons and things. At the limit of capitalist decoding, social activity is reduced to a quantitative, rather than 'signifying', equation between Labour and Capital: 'your capital or your labour capacity, the rest is not important'.⁹

The meanings, symbols and ideologies produced in the interests of capital accumulation are perfectly capable of being dismantled, rearranged, or connected to something quite different, including social formations with all sorts of codes—state communism, national socialism, despotism and fascism. One might look for contradictions in principles, values or forms of political representation, but no one ‘has ever died from contradictions’.¹⁰

Nevertheless, the separation of capital from labour does place certain demands on human relationships and their social organisation. Following Karl Marx, Deleuze and Guattari argue that industrial capitalism’s separation between *collective forms of production* and the *private ownership of the means of production* is dependent upon a physical divide between public workplace and the private domestic sphere. Within non-capitalist societies, the household has sometimes functioned as a workplace utilised by both working family members and non-relatives; the boundaries of the family are not clearly demarcated by the private household, nor necessarily by the specification of ‘blood’ relatives. Under these conditions, there is no acute divide between public and private domains: the household is but one of many sites for social labour, while the means of production—public horticultural lands, for example—can be partially owned by individual labourers (Karl Marx’s classic example is the crop-sharing of feudalism). In contrast, the collective labour force demanded by the Industrial Revolution is separated from the ownership of the means of production, which is privatised in the hands of the capitalist. The nuclear household becomes the exclusive site for the consumption of goods and services in the interests of so-called reproduction: ‘Daddy’ and ‘Mummy’ become the trustees for nourishing and developing the worker-child—‘Me’. In the place of kinship structures that saturate the social field, the bourgeois family and ‘private man’ become the privileged site of material investment and also emotional fulfilment, insofar as enduring human relationships are exorcised from the labour marketplace. Thus while demanding a general decoding of social relationships and hierarchies (the collapse of non-working nobilities, for example), capitalism also engenders a *reterritorialisation* on the citizen as property owner, whose right to private accumulation is rendered inviolable by the legal and moral principles of individual autonomy.

Deleuze and Guattari's analysis of the bourgeois family intersects with that of many feminist political economists and Marxists, who have interrogated the ideological separation between the so-called reproductive labours—domestic, unwaged and 'feminine'—and the productive sphere, in which wages are paid out only to sustain private investment in new (and in the contexts discussed by Deleuze and Guattari, male) workers.¹¹ In the final chapter of *Anti-Oedipus*, the gendered private family becomes the hinge through which Freudian psychoanalysis and Marxist political-economy are tied together. By critiquing both psychic and monetary investments in the male worker, Deleuze and Guattari connect the bourgeois privilege of the male 'breadwinner' with the psychoanalytic reification of the Father as the organising symbol of collective investment. But far from being micro- and macro-articulations of the same symbolic order, these formations intersect, overlap, and are co-productive: strategies of patriarchal domination learned in the workplace creep into 'domestic' life, and visa versa.¹²

However, escaping Oedipalising forms of domination does not mean finding better principles or ideals to believe in. Marxist attempts to demystify social relations, revealing hidden economic determinants beneath false bourgeois ideology, assume that the psyche can relate to the mode of production (here, capitalism) only through the mediation of symbols—the Church, the State, and the Family as illusory images. On the contrary, Deleuze and Guattari insist that desire invests immediately into capitalism itself: 'It is not for himself or his children that the capitalist works, but for the immortality of the system.'¹³ Rather than being deceived into supporting capitalist forms of social domination, people come to desire capitalism, and that desire is part of the system's reproduction.

It is not enough to say: they were fooled, the masses have been fooled. It is not an ideological problem, a problem of failing to recognise, or of being subject to, an illusion. It is a problem of desire, and desire is part of the infrastructure.¹⁴

The psychic repressions of bourgeois households, workplaces, politics and economics do not result from believing in the 'wrong' symbols, but from the channelling of desire into specific relations of power, of which symbols are only secondary manifestations. Oedipus is not, at its limit, a familial construction, but a product of *social* production, reproduction and repression.

In summary, the bourgeois family unit is not merely an ideological construct, but rather the effect of intersecting psychic and material economies, in which the separation between public production and private consumption reproduces social relations in the interests of capital accumulation. The corresponding alienation of the labourer from the means of production enables an artificial separation between production and reproduction, which has led, until the 1960s at least, to an explicit division of labour between the sexes.¹⁵ But while the bourgeois household tends to block desire by limiting it to Oedipal symbols, these symbols neither explain nor contain desiring-production: every familial desire necessarily spills into other domains, and results in the production of something new. Correspondingly, relations of domination from outside the household come to transverse familial intimacies, but do not depend on them. Deleuze and Guattari thus stress that the nuclear family is a specific historical formation tied to the political and cultural demands of industrial capitalism in the West, rather than a universal social structure that might be ‘discovered’ in other societies or within other historical junctures. In the following section, we look at instances in which capitalist political economy itself can undermine or transform the coherency of the bourgeois private sphere in the interests of expanding labour markets.

—COLLECTIVE CARE AND POLITICAL RESISTANCE

While critical of capitalist economics and the bourgeois private sphere, Deleuze and Guattari seem anxious to avoid opposing the Oedipal family to collectivism or communism. They frequently acknowledge lines of ‘flight’ or ‘escape’ within every regime of domination, while bemoaning fascist or hierarchical tendencies in even the most idealistic and revolutionary movements. They even employ a distinction between ‘subjugated’ and ‘subject’ groups, the former hierarchical and the latter more open to desiring-production, to avoid mechanically linking ‘Oedipal’ tendencies to any one institution or social formation.¹⁶ Nevertheless, it is unclear whether Deleuze and Guattari do actually embrace the ambivalence towards family that their analysis of subject and subjugated groups would seem to suggest. Their brief discussion of the an-Oedipal ‘family-as-matrix for depersonalised partial objects’ (later described as ‘a depleted flux of a historic cosmos’) is abandoned without any clarification of how the concept of ‘family’ might be used to understand

this matrix.¹⁷ Key passages in *Anti-Oedipus* even seem to suggest, as Eugene Holland reads it, that schizoanalytic practice must 'eliminate the nuclear family'.¹⁸ Holland contrasts the Oedipal family to 'an-Oedipal family forms', including 'more generations and more distant relatives than the nuclear family' which would be 'more fully imbricated in social relations'.¹⁹ The appeal to the 'an-Oedipal', which for Holland might involve 'communes or collectives of some kind', is by no means foreign to discussions of non-hierarchical communes by many feminist scholars in the early 1970s, although these experiments in alternative living have not been immune to the problems of patriarchy or unequal divisions of labour.²⁰ Holland's work does make an important contribution to the critique of the private household and 'familial' relations as privileged sites of moral investment, but neither extended family structures nor more 'socialised' living arrangements necessarily escape Oedipalisation or the emergence of new social hierarchies. After all, Oedipus begins as much in the 'socialised' workplace as it does in the 'familial' sphere.²¹ Correspondingly, not all desires produced within the household are Oedipal—this is, in fact, Deleuze and Guattari's most important criticism of psychoanalysis, leading them to insist that it 'is not a question of denying the vital importance of parents or the love attachment of children to their mothers and fathers'.²² Deleuze and Guattari are particularly critical of the nuclear household's blockage of broader social desires, but their criticisms are directed towards an assemblage of power relations including the family *and* the workplace *and* state bureaucracies. Deleuze and Guattari refuse to find their solutions to social inequality or moral 'fascisms' by re-arranging the family furniture. In fact, it is precisely this evacuation of the workplace, the state, religion and, indeed, *politics* from discussions of family that naturalises the bourgeois separation between public exploitation and private morality. We should not confuse the authors' critiques of Oedipal triangulation as a coproduction of the bourgeois household, the workplace and the state (and a little help from psychoanalysis, of course) with the suggestion that individuals do not need parents, that affection for other human beings is always Oedipal, or that arrangements of care based on some notion of 'familial' obligation are always a bad thing.²³

Rather than proposing a fixed 'alternative' to the bourgeois family, Deleuze and Guattari offer an ethical response to capitalism as flexible and dynamic as capitalist

economies themselves. The final chapter of *Anti-Oedipus* examines the differences between the ‘industrial essence’ of capitalism—flows of public labour pitted against flows of private capital—and other movements of a distinctly post-industrial character, including the increasing predominance of finance capital and industrial deregulation that, now more than ever, undermines the Fordist ideals of habit, routine and a firm work-home divide. At the horizon of capitalist decoding, the firm geographical and temporal separations between work and leisure, public and private, production and reproduction, seem to be untenable. To what extent, then, are the Oedipalising effects of the bourgeois nuclear family really relevant to post-industrial capitalism?

Historically, the demands of the labour force have often eroded fixed family forms, even bourgeois ones. The nuclear family has never been entirely stable, has often blended into other, non-nuclear forms, and has not always been shaped by strict notions of privacy.²⁴ In recent years, strains on the white, middle-class nuclear household have become most visible in debates around childcare. Susan Prentice notes a marked shift towards the economic rationalisation of universal day-care both as an ‘investment’ in children and as a means of bringing more women into the labour force. The coding of the private family as the exclusive and feminine space of reproduction has been undermined in the interests of a problematic re-imagining of the child as the recipient of long-term social investment, or sometimes short-term profitability for childcare service providers, completely divorced from the possible needs of either parents or childcare workers.²⁵ Rather than continuing to deprive ‘children of supportive role models outside the nuclear family’ or to produce ‘strong authoritarian identifications fostered by the Oedipal family’, as Holland suggests,²⁶ the service industry has further prised open the hallowed walls of domestic sanctity, bringing children into often highly dependent relationships with childcare workers, kindergarten teachers, sports coaches, music instructors—the list is constantly growing. Duties previously performed within bourgeois family spaces can be outsourced so that parents become consumers of childcare services, enabling more flexible forms of public and private labour. In the case of technologically mobile white-collar employees working from home, the corresponding shift back to the household as a site of salaried labour collapses the divide between ‘working’ and ‘domestic’ environments, leading to more ambiguous distinctions between work-

time and leisure-time that refuse the productive/reproductive distinctions. As Judith Stacey has argued, feminists have often become the scapegoats for a decline in nuclear family forms actually brought about by the new working conditions of post-industrial capitalism, which has also left the privileged male 'breadwinner' both ideologically and economically an unviable norm.²⁷ If we expand the definition of 'the family' to include already extant diverse family forms and arrangements of care, the problem becomes less whether to be 'for' or 'against' the family than what sorts of social services, working conditions and legal frameworks are most needed to curb the inequalities and deprivations existing across the whole spectrum of private households.

Of course, regardless of real changes in the economic conditions making this 'norm' viable, the ideological privilege of the nuclear, heterosexual family subsists in most Western cultural forums. But throughout *Anti-Oedipus*, Deleuze and Guattari are careful to recognise that deviations from Oedipus do not, in themselves, challenge its normative structure—in fact, 'transgressions' are essential to the myth of a 'status quo' being violated. Claims that progressive social changes are threatening family life appeal to the family of a constantly revised 'recent past', an ideal to be fixed, rejuvenated, saved, or returned to. The nostalgic narrative of the nuclear family as a paradise lost even slips into quite liberal or progressive discourses, especially when those pushing for radical changes are forced to advocate their struggle in terms of a confrontation with 'traditional' family forms. Following Deleuze and Guattari's account of desire and familial structures as always-already open to socio-historical forces and movements, we question whether it is meaningful to talk about nuclear family forms as *distinct* from the 'alternative' family arrangements that have attracted so much (often negative) press coverage in recent years. Would it be better to recognise that 'conventional' households have always been traversed and disrupted by 'unconventional' forms of desire, commitment and care?

For Deleuze and Guattari, capitalism both separates the social world into public and private domains, and generates spillages between these spheres, as the examples of childcare and the increased blurring between the workplace and the home tend to indicate. For the remainder of this article, we want to build on Deleuze and Guattari's analysis of capitalism and desire to offer a notion of family beyond the

polarised notions of the norm and its alternatives. In particular, we want to explore the following set of theoretical questions: If families have always been inseparable from modes of production and consumption, how can these economies be transformed, within the limits and excesses activated by capitalism, to redefine citizenship outside privileged heteronormative spaces? How are problems of state legitimation and legal rights then figured or displaced and what does this mean for negotiating modes of citizenship? In responding to these questions, we examine more closely issues around gender and sexuality within contemporary studies of kinship, the family and intimacy, focusing on both the merits and limitations of political positions based on 'resistance' to familial and heterosexual norms.

—BEYOND THE NUCLEAR FAMILY

Deleuze and Guattari's work on the family in the 1970s occurred at a time when the very existence of 'family' was being brought into question through developments in second-wave feminism, and gay and lesbian activism, and, as mentioned previously, in which alternative models of socialised living were being experimented with. In our own historical moment in Australia, the nature of what constitutes family and who can be a parent is still being contested within political debates about gay marriage, the changing legislation surrounding adoption and new reproductive technologies, and the increasing prominence of non-nuclear families in cultural production. Acknowledging such changes in the social conditions of family building, Judith Stacey describes a shift towards a 'postnuclear family world in which no single culturally mandated family pattern prevails and all forms of intimacy contend with instability, reflexivity, cultural conflict, contradiction and experimentation'.²⁸

Judith Butler's work in *Undoing Gender* can be seen as commensurate with Stacey's discussion of the 'postnuclear family'. She influentially re-works the term 'kinship', which she opposes to 'family' because she feels it to be more ideologically loaded as 'normative', 'dyadic' and 'heterosexual'.²⁹ Butler describes kinship practices as 'those that emerge to address fundamental forms of human dependency and support, generational ties, illness, dying and death (to name a few)'. She thus follows David Schneider in situating kinship as an 'enacted practice'. This can be contextualised with her general theory of performativity in which subjectivity and community are constituted through doing rather than being. If family is re-imagined

as based on participatory actions, then it cannot be built on prior models dictated by perceived gender roles, instead the transformative relay between ontological practices and epistemological framings means that it is always mutable and dynamic. The implication of this, Butler writes, is that it permits us 'to consider how modes of patterned and performative doing bring kinship categories into operation and become the means by which they undergo transformation and displacement'.³⁰ What Butler suggests is that it is precisely because we *do* family that there is always the scope to engage in new constitutive practices. Because these family practices are always in excess of our epistemological frameworks and cannot be assumed to follow neatly from ideological commitments, family must remain open to constant critical contest and interrogation. The re-imagining of family is also taken up by Kelly Oliver who argues in a utopian bent: 'Our relationships, family structures, and family dynamics change when we can imagine them differently; and as we recreate our families outside the restrictive and unrealistic ideal of the nuclear family, we transform our images of ourselves, our relationships to others, and the possibility of love.'³¹

The exploration of diversity in family forms must be seen as a positive direction for scholarship on gender and sexuality. Nevertheless, dichotomised notions of family practices risk being reiterated in the framing of non-heteronormative families as 'families of choice'.³² Kath Weston, whose ethnographic studies of non-heterosexual kinship have been central to the emergence of this discourse in the academic study of the family, traces the discursive life of this phrase from her 1980s' ethnographic research in San Francisco, in which she examined the non-biological kinship structures in the queer community. In the preface to the paperback edition of her book (1997), she acknowledges that in the 1990s this phrase was adopted to engage question about non-heterosexual parenting.³³ These examples have in common the positive valance placed on non-normative practices. Weston does not simply polarise the norm and its alternatives because she acknowledges that choices in regards to all families are constrained by '[h]istorical developments, material conditions, and complex social negotiations'.³⁴ Wilson and Donovan also draw attention to the ways in which choice is curtailed by access to social resources, and this needs to be understood in the context of class, race and regional inequalities. Speaking about non-heterosexual parenting in particular, they caution that there is a

significant difference between the new possibilities we can imagine for family and our ability to ‘negotiate the economic, political and biological realities involved in realising those opportunities’.³⁵ Weston explains that despite these limitations, there is value in maintaining the descriptor ‘choice’ as a ‘rhetorical strategy’.³⁶ We hesitate to adopt the language of choice because it tends to simplify the ways choice is both enabled and constrained in any family formation, regardless of the family’s relationship to normative ideals of family life. The notion of choice has come to evoke the discourse of ‘lifestyle choices’, creating the impression that an ontological claim to queer sexuality is tenuous. This is not to say that the current arrangement of gender and sexuality is ontological and therefore invariant, but rather that there is ontological reality to desires beyond the heteronormative framework. What is problematic about describing non-heterosexual kinship practices in terms of choice is that it frequently leaves unexamined the assumption that nuclear families are a natural outcome of heterosexual intercourse, and thus reproduces the dichotomy between the heterosexual identity as a natural configuration and queer sexuality as cultural or lifestyle experiment.

This critique of taxonomical distinctions between different ‘types’ of families also risks supporting an unqualified plea for political inclusivity. In *Undoing Gender*, Butler cautions that struggles for state recognition of so-called ‘deviant’ families risks privileging the state as the sole instrument for cultural and moral legitimation. State-oriented activism both empowers those who make claims to social inclusion and validates the state’s power to decide what counts as intelligible or appropriate sexual behaviour or parenting practices.³⁷ The legitimation of certain family forms requires conformity to an imagined set of cultural values tied to the national project of conferring and policing both cultural and legal citizenship. This is particularly relevant to current debates about marriage, which operate as dominant sites for public discussions of gender, sexuality and parenting. In relation to marriage, John Borneman suggests:

A simple appeal for tolerance or pluralism, for inclusions of other, already existing forms within the marital type will do little to challenge the boundaries between the married and the non-married; rather, we must create a framework that allows for recognition of a proliferation of forms

of sexual expression and intimacy as well as arguments for their public legitimisation.³⁸

A critical examination of kinship and family involves both unpacking normative terms of inclusion and exclusion, and questioning privileged institutions of knowledge production. For the rest of this section, we examine Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner's work on 'public intimacies' as key sites through which diverse sexualities and 'familial' identities are produced and negotiated.

Sexual identity is certainly not the only lens through which families should be understood, but the notion that family practices extend beyond heterosexual spaces does require complicating our understanding of what heterosexuality is.³⁹ In 'Sex in Public', Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner link the myth of 'heterosexuality' as a unified set of sexual practices to the public hegemony of what they call 'hetero-intimacy'.⁴⁰ They contend that the separation of public and private spheres depends on a normative alignment of intimacy with 'social reproduction, the accumulation and transfer of capital, and self-development'.⁴¹ In this way, sex is positioned as the '*elsewhere* of political public discourse',⁴² the intimate sphere becoming the unquestioned non-place that anchors heteronormative public discourses, especially those concerning marriage and adoption rights. In popular political cultures, heterosexual families are rarely scrutinised, but instead become the imaginary yardsticks by which so-called deviations are measured. Heteronormativity's core mythology of coherent bourgeois family life, the fabric from which all 'normal' social relationships must be cut, becomes both hypervisible and unassailable. Berlant and Warner's key claim here is that 'heterosexual culture' is self-constructed as coherent, but is actually 'failing'. They offer the anecdote of talk show hosts discovering that 'people who are committed to hetero intimacy are nevertheless unhappy'.⁴³ In contrast, they celebrate 'queer culture' and the 'queer counterpublic' as a mobile, unsystematised and insurgent movement, with 'no necessary relation to domestic space, to kinship, to the couple form, to property, or to the nation'.⁴⁴ This argument connects with similar themes approached in Berlant's *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City*, which asks 'why acts that are not civic acts, like sex, are having to bear the burden of defining proper citizenship'.⁴⁵ Like Deleuze and Guattari, Berlant is deeply suspicious of the ways in which intersubjectivity and 'intimacy' become indexes for appropriate moral behaviour, and where Deleuze and

Guattari complain that social conflicts were tirelessly filtered through the lens of Oedipal dramas ('what's going on with the Father?'), Berlant is concerned that political moralities cannot be articulated outside the familial language of the heterosexual household.⁴⁶

However, there are slippages in 'Sex in Public' from analyses of 'heterosexuality' and 'non-heterosexuality' as they are constructed 'in public', to positive statements about what, in the 'sexual culture straight people inhabit', people actually want and do: 'People feel that the price they must pay for social membership and a relation to the future is identification with the heterosexual life narrative.'⁴⁷ Although Berlant and Warner do recognise the inherent diversity of sexual practices, suggesting that 'normal intimacy may never have been an accurate description of how people actually live',⁴⁸ it is unclear whether the symbolisms of public 'heteronormative culture' are truly reflective of how people actually view or experience families, intimacies, sexuality or 'reproductivity'. In Berlant and Warner's case study of heterosexual people they know, the authors speculate that these 'are people whose reproductivity governs their lives, their aspirations, and their relations to money and entailment, mediating their relations to everyone and everything else'.⁴⁹ Not only does the suggestion that familial activities are pathologically 'reproductive' trivialise the (still gendered) labour involved in maintaining domestic households and kin-networks,⁵⁰ it also forces a simplistic dichotomy between the ideologies that supposedly 'organise' desire; that is, between heteronormative, familial 'reproductivity', and queer counter-cultures. Little space is left for loves, desires and intimacies that do not conform to these two ideological commitments. Berlant and Warner thus risk dismissing families as a bad ideological choice, rather than as a network of personal, financial, and political investments in which multiple, often contradictory desires are produced.

Furthermore, while 'families and the institutions of *loca parentis*, namely, schools and religions'⁵¹ are certainly *invoked* within conservative ideological frameworks, this does not mean that being 'pro-family' is actually a coherent political agenda. Might it be that people continue to have anxieties about the well-being of private households because, far from supporting 'the family', conservative policies of economic rationalism and the resulting upheavals of the labour market have actually undermined the stability of *all* family forms? By critiquing the family

or heteronormative intimacies as yet another set of ideologies coextensive with capitalism, Reaganism or 'right-wing culture', Berlant conflates actual concerns about housing, working-hours, health care and education (among others) with the 'pro-' and 'anti-' family rhetoric employed by the media and 'shock jocks' to sensationalise, but also to obscure, these diverse issues. In *The Queen of America*, Berlant indexes her chosen case studies (magazines, television programs, court cases and so on) to symbolic struggles over narratives of nation, which she then links to 'mass culture', 'a sublime collective manufactured consent', the 'consumption of nationality', and 'a collective desire to reclaim the nation for pleasure, and specifically the pleasure of public self-entitlement'.⁵² By assuming that the 'masses' passively digest a message in a tablet laced with hetero-intimacy, she displaces questions about why intimacy, family and socialised forms of care and guardianship continue to be important concerns for viewers and voters. Ultimately, Berlant's opposition between 'mass-mediated' intimacy and the 'less institutionalised events, which might take place on the street, on the phone, in fantasy, at work',⁵³ depends on an assumption that social institutions are self-evidently a bad thing (something with which many neoconservative or 'Reaganist' economists would also agree), making it difficult to talk about the need for infrastructures supporting all 'intimate' relationships, both inside and outside familial environments.

Where Berlant draws a line between normative, hegemonic desires and their ideological adversaries, Deleuze and Guattari insist that no commitments are intrinsically Oedipal, 'familial', 'heteronormative' or perversely 'reproductive', but only become so within specific contexts shaped by other sorts of desires, frustrations, angers or aspirations. Familial spaces are constantly traversed by workplace anxieties, classroom failures, even lingering road rage, a whole *melange* of concerns that animate, sometimes threaten, those interpersonal relationships on which we nevertheless depend. There are, of course, immense dangers in romanticising the family as a natural site for the expression of 'human' desires, but there are equal risks in reducing family to a false consciousness caught up in 'domesticity', 'reproduction', 'procreation', 'patriarchy', 'ideology', or even 'hetero-intimacy', whether in the interests of moral conservatism or anti-hegemonic critique. Deleuze and Guattari's analysis of capitalist decoding allows us to separate

the provisional ideologies generated within specific contexts of bourgeois production from the vicissitudes of the labour market itself, which intrude upon the private sphere and can create forms of domination not dependent on, although sometimes coextensive with, bourgeois family norms. Furthermore, by treating desiring-production as *irreducible* to the objects it passes through, Deleuze and Guattari move beyond the critical sleight of hand that judges intimacies, values, commitments, loves and frustrations from the ideologies produced by the mass media or conservative politicians. Rather than trying to fix desire on to better objects (public or counterpublic, the effects can be the same), Deleuze and Guattari focus more on regimes of judgement—from the Left and the Right—that prevent desire from producing different ways of being or desiring, sometimes, but not always, recognisable as intimacies.

We do not deny that struggles around rights, representation and the public recognition of sexual diversity are important. In *Anti-Oedipus*, Deleuze and Guattari acknowledge the importance of struggles over moral or legal ‘axioms’, insofar as structures of visibility and invisibility, recognition and exclusion, determine the limits of political activism and revolutionary praxis.⁵⁴ The crucial point, however, is that recognition should never be an end in itself: it must always be coupled with a *destabilisation* of the mechanisms of recognition. Important distinctions need to be made between the sorts of public recognition generated by ‘mass medias’ or legal discourses, the ways in which symbols of inclusion or exclusion trickle through popular and everyday cultures, and the complex configurations of kinship, family and interdependency to which such popular discourses around identity are actually applied. The privilege of certain intimacies over others is certainly problematic, especially within political discourse, but having to choose between authentic and inauthentic, or ‘non-institutional’ and ‘mass mediated’, intimacies makes it difficult to talk about what people actually desire, the contexts in which desire is produced, or the concrete effects that desiring-production can have.

—CONCLUSION

This article may have raised more questions than it has answered, but this has been a necessary part of exploring the ways in which Deleuze and Guattari’s *Anti-Oedipus* might enable a more complex understanding of family. Their work provides valuable

and under-utilised tools for complicating notions of the 'nuclear family' by opening it up to questions of political economy and desire, so that it is not reduced merely to an ideological construction. While this article supports the disinvestment of the nuclear family's social privileges, we have been hesitant to support dichotomous understandings of the so-called 'normative' family and its alternatives (even when these are framed in celebratory language), and have argued against a taxonomical understanding of the diversity of family form. Rather than seeing a particular structure of the family as inevitable for social (or psychic) organisation, we envisage family as a continuum composed of varied and shifting practices. This means that family is something we are engaged in doing and as such our material practices cannot be based on prior or 'innate' models of being, related to limited and limiting notions of gender and sexuality. Family practices will always operate in excess of their empirical classification and consequently the way it is politically acknowledged and discursively framed will continue to shift. This article has argued for better ways to theoretically acknowledge the intricacies of contemporary family practices, surely an important and neglected aspect of the study of gender and sexuality, and a project that is vital for the recognition of new forms of intimacy, desire and love.

—

Tim Laurie is a PhD candidate in Gender and Cultural Studies at the University of Sydney. His thesis examines music production in the United States, drawing on critical race theory, feminist historiography and the political economy of Deleuze and Guattari. He is currently researching the sexual politics of hard rock in the 1970s.

Hannah Stark has recently completed her PhD, *Deleuze's Differential Ontology and the Problem of Ethics*, at the University of Adelaide. She is now an associate lecturer in the school of English, Journalism and European Languages at the University of Tasmania.

—NOTES

¹ Deleuze and Guattari's critique of the nuclear family is addressed mostly in introductory material on *Anti-Oedipus*. See for example, Philip Goodchild, *Deleuze and Guattari: An Introduction to the Politics of Desire*, Sage, London, 1996, pp. 99–100; Jeffrey Weeks, *Making Sexual History*, Polity, Cambridge, Oxford and Malden, 2000, pp. 92–5; Eugene Holland, *Deleuze and Guattari's Anti-Oedipus: Introduction to Schizoanalysis*, Routledge, London and New York, 1999; Eugene Holland, 'On Some Implications of Schizoanalysis', *Strategies*, vol. 15, no. 1, 2002, pp. 27–40. Holland's reading of the family in Deleuze and Guattari will be addressed later in this article.

² This is not to say that the sanctity of the child has not been prominent in public discourse before this. For a discussion of how this played out in post-'68 France see Julian Bourg, *From Revolution to Ethics: May 1968 and Contemporary French Thought*, McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal and Kingston, 2007, pp. 204–18. For an example of well-publicised moral panic about the sanctity of the child in an Australian context, see debates surrounding Bill Henson's self-titled photographic exhibition held at the Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery in Paddington, Australia, in May 2008.

³ For a discussion of *Anti-Oedipus* as a May 1968 book see Ian Buchanan, 'Is *Anti-Oedipus* a May '68 Book?', in Claire Colebrook and Jeffrey Bell, *Deleuze and History*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2009, pp. 206–24.

⁴ Bourg, pp. 125–37.

⁵ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen R. Lane, Continuum, London and New York, 2004, p. 323.

⁶ Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, p. 107; see also pp. 34, 51, 250–1.

⁷ Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, p. 62

⁸ Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, p. 117

⁹ Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, p. 272, emphasis in original. Here Deleuze and Guattari directly follow Karl Marx's discussion of labour as an abstract quantity in capitalism. See Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Volume 1, trans. Ben Fowkes, Vintage, New York, 1977, p. 128.

¹⁰ Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, pp. 166, 252.

¹¹ Deleuze and Guattari later critique Marxists' privilege of the male worker in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi, Continuum, London, 2004, p. 117. For feminist political economist exploring similar issues, see Jane Fishburne Collier and Sylvia Junko Yanagisako, 'Toward a Unified Analysis of Gender and Kinship', in Jane Fishburne Collier, Sylvia Junko Yanagisako, and Maurice Bloch (eds), *Gender and Kinship: Essays toward a Unified Analysis*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1987, pp. 14–50; Marilyn Strathern, 'Kinship and Economy: Constitutive Orders of a Provisional Kind', *American Ethnologist*, vol. 12, no. 2, 1985, pp. 191–209.

¹² See Micaela Di Leonardo, 'The Female World of Cards and Holidays: Women, Families, and the Work of Kinship', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, vol. 12, no. 3, 1987, pp. 440–53.

- ¹³ Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, p. 380.
- ¹⁴ Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, p. 114.
- ¹⁵ Within different contexts, Mark Poster, Carol Stack and Linda Burton have all noted that 'bourgeois' norms have never completely taken hold, with many women in working-class or socially marginalised contexts being forced into the workplace, sometimes—in the case of non-white domestic workers, for example—in the service of bourgeois families themselves. See Mark Poster, *Critical Theory of the Nuclear Family*, Pluto Press, London, 1978, pp. 166–78; Carol B. Stack and Linda M. Burton, 'Kinscripts', *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, vol. 16, no. 2, 1993, 157–70.
- ¹⁶ Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, pp. 309–11.
- ¹⁷ Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, pp.306–9.
- ¹⁸ Holland, 'On Some Implications of Schizoanalysis', p. 36.
- ¹⁹ Holland, 'On Some Implications of Schizoanalysis', pp. 27–40.
- ²⁰ Holland, 'On Some Implications of Schizoanalysis', p. 36. Holland's work might be complemented by the important research on communes conducted in the early 1970s, which indicated that patriarchy does not disappear with 'socialised' living. Commentators have also noted that oppositions between 'nuclear families' and seemingly 'variant' or 'expanded' family forms are not as clear cut as both conservatives and radicals have imagined. See Rosabeth Kanter, Dennis Jaffe and D. Kelly Wiesberg, 'Coupling, Parenting, and the Presence of Others: Intimate Relationships in Communal Households', *The Family Coordinator*, 24, 4, pp. 433–52; P.W. Cononer, 'An Analysis of Communes and Intentional Communities: Sexual and Gender Relations', *The Family Coordinator*, vol. 24, no. 3, pp. 453–64.
- ²¹ Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, p. 251.
- ²² Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, p. 51.
- ²³ Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, p. 319.
- ²⁴ See Barbara Laslett, 'The Family as a Private and Public Institution: A Historical Perspective', *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, vol. 35, no. 3, 1973, pp. 482–87.
- ²⁵ Susan Prentice, 'High Stakes: The "Investable" Child and the Economic Reframing of Childcare', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, vol. 34, pp. 702–4.
- ²⁶ Holland, 'On Some Implications of Schizoanalysis', pp. 29–30.
- ²⁷ Judith Stacey, 'Good Riddance to "the Family": A Response to David Popenoe', *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, vol. 55, no. 3, 1993, p. 546.
- ²⁸ Judith Stacey, 'The Families of Man: Gay Male Intimacy and Kinship in a Global Metropolis', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, vol. 30, no. 3, 2005, p.1913.
- ²⁹ Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender*, Routledge, New York and London, 2004, p. 104.
- ³⁰ Butler, pp. 103, 123.
- ³¹ Kelly Oliver, 'Conflicted Love', *Hypatia*, vol. 15, no. 3, 2000, p. 16.
- ³² For example, Kath Weston, *Families We Choose: Lesbians, Gays, Kinship*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1997; Jeffrey Weeks, Brian Heaphy and Catherine Donovan, *Same Sex Intimacies: Families of*

Choice and Other Life Experiments, Routledge, London and New York, 2001. The conflation of non-nuclear family forms with 'voluntary' or 'artificial' families may be traced to 1970s sociologists' grouping of 'alternative' family arrangements (like the Twin Oaks commune) with single-parent families and non-heterosexual relationships under the moniker 'variant'. See Betty E. Cogswell, 'Variant Family Forms and Life Styles: Rejections of the Traditional Nuclear Family', *The Family Coordinator*, vol. 24, 1975, pp. 391–406.

³³ Weston, *Families We Choose*, p. xv.

³⁴ Kath Weston, *Longslowburn: Sexuality and Social Science*, Routledge, New York and London, 1998, p. 87.

³⁵ Catherine Donovan and Angela Ruth Wilson, 'New Parenting: Opportunities and Challenges', *Sexualities*, vol. 8, 2005, p. 113.

³⁶ Weston, *Longslowburn*, p. 88.

³⁷ Butler, pp. 104–5.

³⁸ John Borneman, 'Until Death Do Us Part: Marriage/Death in Anthropological Discourse', *American Ethnologist*, vol. 23, no. 2, 1996, p. 231.

³⁹ The alignment of heteronormativity with an empirically determinate heterosexuality was most famously challenged by the Kinsey reports, especially the *Sexual Behaviour in the Human Female*, in which sexual practices were taxonomised through over five thousand interviews with women across the United States. For conservative proponents of 'heterosexual' norms the results were alarming, to say the least. See A.C. Kinsey, W.B. Pomeroy, C.E. Martin and P.H. Gebhard, *Sexual Behaviour in the Human Female*, W.B. Saunders, Philadelphia, 1953.

⁴⁰ Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner, 'Sex In Public', *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 24, no. 2, 1998, pp. 552–8.

⁴¹ Berlant and Warner, p. 553.

⁴² Berlant and Warner, p. 553, italics in original.

⁴³ Berlant and Warner, p. 556.

⁴⁴ Berlant and Warner, p. 558.

⁴⁵ Lauren Berlant, *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City: Essays on Sex and Citizenship*, Duke University Press, Durham and London, 1997, p. 5.

⁴⁶ Berlant, *The Queen of America*, p. 19.

⁴⁷ Berlant and Warner, p. 557.

⁴⁸ Berlant and Warner, p. 559.

⁴⁹ Berlant and Warner, p. 564.

⁵⁰ See Di Leonardo.

⁵¹ Berlant, 'Intimacy: A Special Issue', *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 24, no. 2, 1998, p. 287.

⁵² Berlant, *The Queen of America*, pp. 147–8.

⁵³ Berlant, 'Intimacy', p. 283.

⁵⁴ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 520.