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minor politics and territorialisation

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(EDS)

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Contemporary Social Issues*

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In *Deleuzian Encounters: Studies in Contemporary Social Issues*, editors Anna Hickey-Moody and Peta Malins unapologetically position Deleuzian theory as the radical agent for a (be)coming social revolution. It is fitting, then, that this anthology, situated on the intersection between philosophical discourse and sociology, begins with that most fraught of revolutionary concepts: utopianism.

The opening essays by Gregory Flaxman and Jonathon Roffe take up this theme, and explore the political and philosophical dimensions therein. This is an effective strategy for the anthology; it serves to focus and foreground the key philosophical premises, and makes an effective introduction for readers unfamiliar with Deleuze and Guattari's preoccupation with revolutionary thought.

Flaxman attempts to shore up Deleuze and Guattari's revitalisation of utopianism by re-directing its fraught historical associations to an etymological distinction:

Where *eutopia* displaces the real world onto another, better, world, such that the initial deterritorialization gives way to the actualization of a new transcendence, utopia intervenes in the actual world by means of another reality, a 'virtual' reality, which opens up a disjunction in the space-time of the present. (36)

It is argued that this opening upon a real, if virtual, potentiality, secures the ongoing possibility of revolutionary change. This potentiality signals a different kind of temporality than the

series of successive states recorded by chronological history; it invokes an 'untimely' future, brought about by acts of creative innovation. For Deleuze and Guattari, this is a necessary move to secure the sense of the term revolution; no longer conceived as the realisation of ideal socio-political configurations within historical events, it is rather a *caesura*—a pure virtuality, in a permanent and perpetual state of becoming.

Roffe argues that this renewed revolutionary sense is conditioned by certain conceptual modifications to the theory of subjects and their affective relations. Roffe outlines that, for Deleuze, revolutionary agency prefigures both the individual and the collective; neither individuals nor collectives enact revolutionary movements, they are, rather more radically, constitutive of them. In this way, utopianism is above all creative: it is thought to literally actualise from the untimely, subjects and social configurations that 'do not yet exist'. This signals a recurring motif of the anthology: the call for 'a new earth' and a 'new people' (so much so that the anthology itself is dedicated to the 'people to come').

But this pure, and distinctly philosophical, potentiality would seem insufficient to inspire a revolutionary enthusiasm for political or social change. For it is not just (e)utopianisms that have inspired our wariness toward revolutionary concepts; we have learnt to regard the relationship between idealism and actual life cautiously, even suspiciously. As Hickey-Moody and Malins astutely point out, for sociology 'the question is not whether a particular concept is

"true", but whether it works, and whether it opens up the range of possibilities in a given situation.' (2) To wit, it is the variety of ways that Deleuzian theory reconceptualises the dialectical constraints between thought and matter, theory and praxis, which most directly supports the creative potential utopianism presents for sociological problems: 'For Deleuze, these interconnected realms of theory and practice are both locations of applied (practical) action. There is no "theory and practice" divide in Deleuze's ontology because for Deleuze, theory is a practice.' (3)

It is this marriage between a utopian taste for revolutionary transformation, and a confidence in real pragmatic lines of affect between theory and praxis that forms the logic of much of this anthology. And while this configuration may succeed in linking 'virtual' and 'actual' dimensions, another seemingly paradoxical problem remains: how does one turn the fundamentally 'minor' orientation of Deleuzian politics towards the collective, social world? While it is true that paradoxical or disjunctive relations are properly Deleuzian problem spaces, it remains to be determined what value this approach offers to new social forms or actions.

As such, two distinct and inter-related orientations emerge in the approaches to Deleuze in this anthology. The first 'minor' or deterritorialising orientation concerns strategies of escape from oppressive state or collective formations. This generally focuses upon individuals or 'minority groups' and implies a more or less direct application of Deleuzian concepts to the theoretical dimensions of sociological

problems. The second orientation is more complex and heterogeneous, and seeks to transform or contextualise 'minor' movements—to reterritorialise them within social milieus. While this second operation remains strictly Deleuzian, it nonetheless opens up formal and experimental dimensions of the territory arguably undertheorised by Deleuze and Guattari's utopian orientation; areas that are perhaps consequent of the unique demands of sociology itself.¹ Let us examine these in turn.

Edward Mussawir's essay 'Intersex: Between the Law and Nature' highlights the inability of the legal system to account for indeterminately sexed bodies. Mussawir follows Deleuze in locating a pre-ontological sexual difference (transsexualism/hermaphroditism), which precedes the binary logic of gender identity that defines bodies before the law. However, the logical foundations of the law are the real focus here (dialectics, representation), and Mussawir's essay might be read as a more general problematisation of it: 'Are there ways in which the law [and sexuality] can be configured other than through judgment?' (51)

In fact, Mussawir's location of judgment at the site between subjects and the state is critically astute, and may signal a site of significant contestation for Deleuzian sociology. Deleuze's philosophical imperative is resolute: there can be no legitimacy in judgment, insofar as it merely redistributes a preformed morality (*doxa*) through a self-authorising logic (representation). It is thus the responsibility of *ethics* to perform this function, where ethics is characterised by immanence, uncertainty, multiple

distribution across subjects, complexity and decentralisation. As such a key strategy of the minor-political orientation is the potentialisation of individuated ethics as a method of resisting centralising and subjectifying circuits of judgment.

Felicity Colman exemplifies the value of this strategy in her essay on the intensifying problem of 'virtual terrorism' in contemporary society. While the focus remains squarely upon state apparatus' utilisation of identification as an affective weapon (fear and misinformation, whose purpose is to subdue dissent amongst citizens), Colman shows that the act of analysis may work against judgment (whom the state determines as terrorist individuals and groups) by exposing our complicity in the mechanism. If bodies are indeed defined by their capacity to affect and be affected, then I can mount a real and affective challenge to the judgment of the state, with my own ethical and critical affects. But there is no guarantee the affective lines potentialised by Deleuzian insights (which here have a liberating affect), will not be reappropriated by the state: in tracing the peculiar power that migration exerts upon national identities, one might note that Dimitris Papadopoulos and Vassilis Tsianos's 'The Autonomy of Migration: The Animals of Undocumented Mobility' simultaneously presents an ironic potential; the act of critical explication may be seen to work against the very imperceptibility uncovered at the locus of migrations affective power.

But things become rapidly complicated if we attempt any kind of analogical transformations from the strictly 'minor' dimensions of Deleuzian

politics to broader collectives (from individual to social bodies). Simone Bignall takes up the necessity of an immanent ethical shift in discussing the reconciliation movement between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians: 'Indeed, Reconciliation requires all Australians to develop an alternative mode of agency and type of sociability appropriate to our becoming-postcolonial.' (206) If there is a problem in such conceptions it is in the idealisation of collective subjects under the conditions of an analogous becoming, which recalls the conditions of those revolutions which have failed us so badly (people are essentially good, reasonable or benevolent, or else, by some mechanism, may become so). In short, the 'minor' orientation (which properly concerns individuals, difference and decentralisation) becomes a casualty of the desire for a collective ethic of the 'all'; a force of the same, which would be indistinguishable from judgment and at best reiterates a desire for an idealised, eutopian world.

More problematic still is the overcoming of ethical mediation, by the essentially anarchic, machinic indifference of the structure itself. Mark Halsey's chapter 'Molar Ecology: What Can the (Full) Body of an Eco-Tourist Do?' teeters on a slippery slope: it is not that his account of the mediation and control of 'natural' encounters by state formations is without merit or critical importance, but rather the way he renders all the complex lines in this affective network (whales, Indigenous land owners, tourists, ocean, flora) value neutral or the same (as though whales had an agency equal to humans or that Indigenous Australians had no

more claim to ancestral lands than tourists). Outside ethics or judgment, this similitude grounds upon a certain nihilism, which assigns value only in the order of inevitable destruction.

What these two essays bring to the fore are some of the peculiar dangers in transiting the disjunction between sociology and Deleuzian politics, and testify to the difficulty the second orientation faces in grounding radical theory into social praxis. Whether this indicates a more general, structural, limitation that the minor orientation presents for sociology remains to be determined. In any event, the political and philosophical conditions that oblige Deleuze and Guattari to privilege the minor orientation need not necessarily be so strict for sociology. As such, the demands of a properly Deleuzian sociology might suggest a different *privileging* is necessary; namely, that deterritorialising movements contextualise, through effectively mobilised strategies of reterritorialisation, new formal and experimental figures of the territory. It is this orientation toward the territory (previously identified as the second orientation), which arguably locates the most logical site for a Deleuzian sociology, and indeed it is this orientation that occupies the more successful essays in the anthology.

In 'Complex and Minor: Deleuze and the Alterglobalization Movement(s)', Graeme Chesters discusses the formation of new territorial assemblages in the loose network of groups comprising the Alterglobalization Movement: 'As such, they are moments of temporary but intensive network stabilization, where the rhizomatic components of the

movement(s)—groups, organizations, individuals, ideologies, cognitive frames and material resources—are simultaneously manifest and re-configured.’ (240) Chester follows Manuel DeLanda’s explication of mathematical influences in Deleuze’s early work, to conceive territorial frameworks, which not only remain open to, but also potentialise the kind of revolutionary utopianism Deleuze and Guattari’s latter works demand.²

Christa Albrecht-Crane and Jennifer Daryl Slack affirm this position through contextualising deterritorial movements within the porous territory of the classroom: ‘the line of flight opened up by a pedagogy of affect recognizes the work of molar, binary lines, but is no longer hostage to them’. (105) This moderation bespeaks not only a privileging of the territory, but perhaps the instantiation of a different point of view, inseparable from the territory itself. As such, the affective circuit between virtual and actual dimensions becomes complete when the territory exerts affective power upon the deterritorialising lines that shape it. In short, this assures the reciprocity of affect between sociology and Deleuzian politico-philosophy; as Todd May suggests in ‘Deleuze and the Tale of Two Intifadas’, within the actualised territories of sociology ‘there is a lesson for Deleuze’s own thought’. (213) This implies the occupation with(in) the territory, may require re-orientations or transformations of certain Deleuzian concepts (even if this ultimately requires overturning or moving against them).

Finally, this returns us to the call opening the anthology—the revolutionary call for a ‘new earth’ and a ‘new people’. While utopianism

assumes a distinct prominence in the final stages of Deleuze and Guattari’s politico-philosophy, it would seem to require attenuation to its sociological re/territorialisations. For example, while Albrecht-Crane and Daryl Slack are referring specifically to pedagogy, their corrective speaks to a more general point: ‘too much effort by educational theorists is spent on painting a picture of schooling that seeks to overcome the present in an effort to attain the utopian school of the future, free of oppression, subjectification, and victimization’. (105)

We may indeed need to invoke the ‘future people’ and the ‘future earth’ to retain the sense of revolution, but there is small comfort and little meaning in its eternally deferred, virtual potentiality. We need acts and actualisations. This task which turns us toward new ways of conceiving reterritorialising movements in order to construct more vibrant, flexible and creative territories is a critical task, and one which arguably, lies squarely in the field of a properly Deleuzian sociology.

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1. There is no suggestion here that Deleuze and Guattari eschew their theorisation of territories or reterritorialising movements. We might indeed, more easily elucidate this ‘second orientation’ by direct quotation from *A Thousand Plateaus*: ‘This is how it should be done: Lodge yourself on the stratum, experiment

with the opportunities it offers, find an advantageous place on it, find potential movements of deterritorialization, possible lines of flight, experience them, produce flow conjunctions here and there, try out continuums of intensities segment by segment, have a small plot of land at all times' (Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Athlone Press, London, 1988, p. 178). But the distinction emerging here between Deleuze and some of the sociological applications of his thought, are rather more subtle, and perhaps fall toward value or ethics (even, dare it be said, a kind of *doxa*). The fate of this burgeoning distinction remains unclear; in any event, it is far beyond the scope of this review. This note is merely designed to signal that it seems like there is something here, underwriting structural relations between Deleuzian thought and sociology (even if this 'here' is ultimately enveloped by other aspects of Deleuzian theory, or else turns out to be 'nothing').

2. Manuel DeLanda, *Intensive Science and Virtual Philosophy*, Continuum, London, 2004.