

Paul Patton

Deleuze and the Political

London: Routledge, 2000. 174 pages.

Politicizing in today's time without indulging into the quintessential questions of politics such as "What is the nature of a government?" and "Is democracy the best form of government?" and even without the foundational theorizations of Plato, Hobbes, and Machiavelli, to name a few, would give us a barrage of skepticism regarding its legitimacy. But what is impossible in this milieu is still possible in life.

Gilles Deleuze, one of the affirmatively maverick philosophers of the 20th century, presents us a political philosophy which is itself anti-politics. But before this peculiarity leads us into confusion, it must first be clarified that primarily, the term "politics" is demystified in the Deleuzian archipelago, and his political project immanently nomadizes the molar, if not the representationalist plateau of traditional western philosophizing. These are only some of the reasons why a "Deleuzian politics" would bring the French philosopher into his crucifixion intellectually. At this juncture, "Deleuze" and the "political" would conceivably give us adequate theoretical capillaries. Henceforth, despite these predicaments, his anti-political philosophy introduces us into new experiences and perspectives in understanding the *political*.

This latter claim is the initial standpoint of Paul Patton's book *Deleuze and the Political*. For him, this opus does not aim at an illustration of a definitive characterization of Deleuze's political philosophy. Rather, it seeks to present possibilities, viz., virtualities derivable from the compositely unceasing interface between Deleuzian thoughts and politics, including the in-between becomings spawned by this relation.

The book contains six chapters or plateaus where each one is closely-knitted with the other, and without the overarching teleology of homogenization. Patton starts his book with a descriptive caveat that this is a literature of rhizomes. This pronouncement entails that the movement of thought found in this book traverses variegated directions and plateaus open-endedly, as it deterritorializes the very normativity of political life and discursive-formations. It converges with Deleuze's capitalization of philosophy's aptitude of *becoming-other* whose primary vision is to liberate philosophy from the metaphysical incarceration posed by its whim of self-

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transparency, towards the creation of new machinic relations and their democratization in the only ontology that we cannot deny—life.

Deleuze's political career cannot be wholly presented and diagnosed without the integral inclusion of the psychoanalyst-activist Felix Guattari. Both philosophers' malleable utilization of idiosyncratic vocabularies undoubtedly challenges contemporary readers of political theory. This radiant quandary was also confronted by Patton with a very resilient intellectual grip, as he was convincingly inspired by Deleuze's categorization of Nietzsche as a systematic thinker. In this vein, every time one is faced with conversations pertaining to desiring-machines, creative assemblages, plane of immanence, and nomadism, one is given an aesthetic panorama of Deleuze and Guattari doing politics. As they argue in *A Thousand Plateaus*, "All we talk about are multiplicities, lines, strata and segmentarities, lines of flight and intensities, machinic assemblages and their various types."¹ All these abovementioned concepts fragmentarily disseminated across the entire book, are elucidated by the author in a meticulous and lucid fashion. Since writing also means philosophizing for them, the author has embattled successfully the Promethean challenge of writing in differential soul while providing systematic rationalizations to manifold Deleuzian concepts.

The answer to the question of "What is Philosophy?" is a paramount guiding thread of the whole book that simultaneously depicts a transition from Deleuze's early works going to the mature writings in companionship with Guattari. Their famous definition of philosophy as the creation of new concepts, seemingly materializing as a mere conventional philosophical reading, radicalizes when the very context of "concept" is profoundly explained under the backdrop of the task of philosophy, along with the naiveté of the 1968 French revolution. At this very juncture, we can perceive philosophy as indispensably a political activity. Essentially, this is the main theme of Chapter 1 (Concept and the Image of Thought) expounded by Patton in conjunction with the vigorous movements of thought reaching its utter culmination in his later political projects such as *A Thousand Plateaus*, *Anti-Oedipus*, and *What is Philosophy?* Here, philosophy metamorphosized as a critical production of untimely concepts and

¹Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. by Brian Massumi (London: The Athlone Press, 1988), 4.

creative praxiologies characterized by dice-throw multiplicities geared to make the future dissimilar from the past theoretically and practically.

Throughout the early works such as *Nietzsche and Philosophy* and *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze thinks, according to Patton, of identitarian images of thought as obstructive of philosophy's immanent capacity for difference. By distinction, Deleuze locates in the works of untimely philosophers in the names of Hume, Spinoza, and Nietzsche, among others, the model of a counter-culture—a going against the grain of foundational thinking capable of fashioning alternative terrains of philosophizing.²

Along with other poststructuralists, Deleuze is dubbed as a philosopher of difference due to his steadfast commitment to the molecular voices—systemically marginalized in the history of philosophy, and his earnest concern in overturning the primacy given to being or representation in western rationality, famously portrayed in the Platonic and Hegelian epistemologies. Chapter 2 (Difference and Multiplicity) concentrates on the assemblage theory developed in *A Thousand Plateaus* and refined in *Anti-Oedipus*. Patton incorporates this theory to the elements of the principle of multiplicity. This principle provides the basis for Deleuze's distinctive influence to the philosophy of difference *contra* the logic of identity. His noteworthy contribution, Patton opines, lies in his elaboration of a philosophical theory of multiplicities and excavation of its ethical and political significance to political philosophy (30). Certainly, I commend him here for effectively generating an avenue where the relationship between the politics of difference and Deleuze's approach to the concept of difference are deeply expounded (29).

Meanwhile, the aim of Chapter 3 (Power) is to delineate the concept of power in connection with Deleuze's indebtedness to Nietzsche's ethical philosophy—principally found in *Nietzsche and Philosophy*. Here, Patton illustrates how Deleuze surveys his reconstruction of the Nietzschean principles of the *will to power* and the *eternal return* in terms of active-reactive Heraclitean model and the ascending-descending typology, along with the present Foucaultian archaeology of power. Moreover, Deleuze's differential interpretation of the will to power doctrine, as the inner principle of the genealogical and interpretative relations of forces,

² Gilles Deleuze and Claude Parnet, *Dialogues*, trans. by Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (London: Athlone Press, 1987), 16.

affords the model for concepts' evaluative structure developed in *Anti-Oedipus* and *A Thousand Plateaus*. This aspect of Nietzsche's notion of power forges a friendship with Spinozian materialism, Deleuze observes.³ The noble relationship crafted between these thinkers likewise, is constituted by Patton, as a bridge between Deleuze's concepts of power, desire, and becoming—slated in Chapter 4 (Desire, Becoming, and Freedom).

Patton has resourcefully mobilized Deleuzian and Guattarian political jargons in the immanent field of social criticism—intelligibly apt in presenting how their politics are perceived and examined by contemporary thinkers, radical or otherwise. For instance in the discussion of “concept”, the author has arrived into a “strange proximity” as he terms it, with the poststructuralist philosophy of Jacques Derrida. He has prudently created a common basin for Deleuze and Guattari's formulation of a philosophical concept vis-à-vis Derrida's notion of a deconstructive concept. Perhaps, a Derridean scholar will be immediately excited in scanning the subsequent explanations regarding this valid comparative analysis, but he/she might end up being frustrated due to the economy of words offered by the author. However, this is only a preamble, if not a forceful caress, to Patton's rhizomic leveling of Deleuze and Derrida's philosophies, dealt with judiciously in his co-edited book with John Protevi entitled, *Between Deleuze and Derrida*. Another one is Antonio Negri, who is familiar to us because of the famous book *Empire*, written with the presence of Michael Hardt. His fundamental gratitude to Deleuzian philosophy is premised on the claim that philosophy will only be called “political” when it is informed by the self-evolving capitalist war-machinery.⁴ Of course, this is only an overture to Negri's continuing engagement with Deleuze, as well as Guattari's philosophies.

The assemblage of chapters 4, 5 (Social Machine and the State; the History and Politics of Deterritorialization) and 6 (Nomads, Capture, and Colonization) discuss the important concepts located in Deleuze and Guattari's later political works such as: becoming, minority, war-machine, and deterritorialization. One of the focal points of these tripartite is the deepening of the deterritorialization principle—the very driving force of

³ Cf. Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. by Hugh Tomlinson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 30.

⁴ Antonio Negri, “On Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, and *A Thousand Plateaus*,” trans. by Charles T. Wolfe, *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal*, Vol. 18, 1171.

Deleuze and Guattari's philosophical, viz., utopian vocation. Since their philosophies always point out to what is *yet-to-come*, to the *l'avenir*, the various conceptual explications configured these chapters virtually convert as a theoretical sequel to another of Patton's book, *Deleuzian Concepts: Philosophy, Colonization, Politics*.

More importantly, Patton clearly presents Deleuze and Guattari's project of revolutionary politics. For him, these thinkers do not envisage a universal revolutionary transformation but rather a process of *active experimentations* and *gentle cutting of assemblages* fleshed out in-between economic and political institutions, as well as the minortarian viz. institutional movements of desire and affect. The element of *becoming-minortarian* plays a decisive role in the deterritorialization process as it slashes molar social codes that catalyzes fascism, and in turn constitute the essence of revolutionary politics.

Again, Deleuze and Guattari's political literatures, in Patton's view, do not resemble a political philosophy in the sense that it renders tools for the justification or critique of political institutions and processes. Rather, it is a political machine offering us devices in describing transformative and creative forces, as well as nomadic movements. Additionally, he niftily diagrams both philosophers' utopian vocation with their relatively fragmentary revolutionary project fuelled by deterritorialization, for a qualitatively molecular and nomadic mapping out of new territories, thoughts, and people to come. Before ending the book, he swiftly clarifies both philosophers' staunch position, i.e. in offering justifications regarding the concept of the *political* using non-traditional epistemological rubrics. Rather:

They provide a series of concepts in terms of which we can describe significant features of the contemporary social and political landscape. These include concepts of social, linguistic and affective assemblages; concepts of a micropolitics of desire founded on the dynamics of unconscious affect and the different ways in which this interacts with individual and collective subjectivities; a concept of capital as a non-territorially based axiomatic of flows of materials, labor and information; a concept of the state as an apparatus of capture which, in the forms of its present actualization, is increasingly subordinated to the requirements of the capitalist axiomatic; a concept of

abstract machines of metamorphosis which are the agents of social and political transformation; and concepts of processes of becoming-minor or becoming-revolutionary.⁵

Although the book indubitably enlivens the *political* in Deleuzian scholarship, Patton's innovative project still needs more molecular penetration. If philosophy's vocation is the cultivation of concepts both cognitive and practical, then it must exuberantly and diligently condition material and machinic pragmatics for increased socio-epistemological democratization. Perhaps, Guattari's book *Molecular Revolution in Brazil* and *Chaosmosis*, can aid this book's slight shortcoming.

Despite various criticisms (active and reactive) from his contemporaries like Slavoj Žižek and Alain Badiou, as well as other hardcore revolutionaries and anarchists, this book by Patton magnificently stands as one of the daring efforts to put Deleuze into deterritorialized and reterritorialized contexts, and to make him vibrantly relevant in the present discourse. Indeed, this philosophical labor has escalated the theoretico-praxiological pragmatics of Deleuze's works not only in the field of philosophy, but also in the wide spheres of politics, history, cultural studies, up to the disciplines of literature, genetics, geography, and aesthetics.

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⁵ Ibid., 133-134.