

**IAN BUCHANAN AND NICHOLAS THOBURN  
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If, somewhere out in the world, there was a social-political theory-marketing firm, its CEO would have to conclude that the Deleuze brand has done exceptionally well. Over the past four decades it has moved from marginal Francophone export to a near hegemonic discourse that has infiltrated multiple academic disciplines, areas of political discussion, and sections of the art world. Moreover, it has attained this status, spawning various cottage industries, while continuing to hold the interest of many people involved in social movement politics. It is this sense of Deleuze's work as connected to radical politics, even if there is still a lingering uncertainty about the nature of its radicality (Buchanan, 2000), that continually renews interest in his ideas and facilitates their circulation.

Thus we come to *Deleuze and Politics*, a collection edited by Nick Thoburn and Ian Buchanan, as part of the ever-growing flagship line of the Deleuze brand, the 'Deleuze Connections' series. It is a series that takes seriously the much quoted injunction of Deleuze to move from an ontology based on the notion 'or' (this or that) to one of the multiplicity of 'and' (this and that, and that, and that). And this has been followed through quite literally, spawning a whole series of collections connecting Deleuze and an immense array of topics: *Deleuze and... Contemporary Art* (Zepke and O'Sullivan, 2010), *Feminist Theory* (Buchanan and Colebrook, 2000), *Geophilosophy* (Bonta and Protevi, 2004), *History* (Bell and Colebrook, 2009), *Literature* (Buchanan and Marks, 2000), *Music* (Buchanan and Swiboda, 2004), *New Technology* (Savat and Poster, 2009), *Performance* (Cull, 2009), *Philosophy* (Boundas, 2006), *Queer Theory* (Nigianni and Storr, 2009), *Space* (Buchanan and Lambert, 2005), *The Contemporary World* (Buchanan and Parr, 2006), *The Postcolonial* (Bignall and Patton, 2010), *The Social* (Fuglsang and

Sorensen, 2006), as well as the *Deleuze Studies* journal. And one would not want to forget forthcoming titles in the series, including ones on *Ethics* (Smith and Jun, 2011) and *The Body* (Guillaume and Hughes, 2010). At times it seems that the assemblage of Deleuzian theory is capable of proliferating in almost absurdly expansive ways, recombining itself with almost anything and everything.

Such concerns aside, what does this collection tell us about the relation between Deleuze's ideas/approach and politics? And in what ways could these insights be used for rethinking ongoing political questions today? First and foremost there is a strong effort to show that Deleuze is a political thinker in his own right, and not just in his collaborations with Guattari. While this argument might not seem that surprising, it is a good counter to the tendency to strip Deleuze's work of politics (often but not just through the stripping away of Guattari), rendering it into a clever machine that can be endlessly recombined with almost any topic to say interesting but relatively harmless things. But more important than the affirmation of Deleuze as a political thinker, what we find in this collection is a wide range of topics which can both enlighten and be enlightened by the concepts and questions found in Deleuze's work.

The essays in this collection address a variety of areas including questions of micropolitics, war, friendship, thermodynamics, political militancy, ethnicity, the European Union, mythmaking, cynicism, as well as others. As Thoburn and Buchanan describe in their introduction, if the events of May 1968 resulted in a kind of failure that rendered strategic thinking impossible (a debatable argument), Deleuze and Guattari's work responds to this challenge, tracing out genealogies of how desires are formed and invested within particular configurations. From there, they explore how the reconfigurations of these social relations and associations are possible. From this perspective, the dizzying array of ways that Deleuze's work can be thought in relation to politics is not a fault, but rather a key concept: political strategies are not formed within a particular isolated realm of the political, but through the spaces created by conjoining and carving out spaces within these realms.

It is the varying nature of these conjunctions, or creating of space in an area, that is of the most crucial importance. It is how the 'and' of the Deleuzian connection becomes more than a grammatical operator and indeed becomes a properly conceptual one. This becomes more complex as it put to different uses. This can be seen in Buchanan's assertion that Deleuze and Guattari's approach to

understanding social formations through the flows of desire that structure them as 'though complex in its details, is in fact relatively simple and not unfamiliar in its thrust' (18). One encounters a similar argument in the essay by Isabelle Garo, in which she comments that the political dimension of Deleuze's work is 'as evident as it is allusive'(68). For Garo the political dimension of Deleuze's work is indeed real, but more problematically, and interestingly:

that does not mean that political analysis or even a political perspective can be found in a strictly defined way in his work. And the paradoxical feeling that his thought does have a specifically political contemporary relevance perhaps stems from the fact that what was in the process of disappearing when he wrote his work is, precisely, in the process or re-emerging today: in both cases a figure becomes blurred and persists at the same time, the very idea of politics dissolves and is redefined, as that which never ceases to haunt philosophy and also to escape it. (71)

Perhaps it is this blurred persistence that makes Deleuze's work and its applications useful, but at the same time occasionally frustrating in their proliferation. For instance, you could argue, as Paul Patton does on the relation between Deleuze and democratic politics, that because Deleuze and Guattari do not directly address the normative principles that inform their work, or how they might be articulated within present social conditions, 'their machinic social ontology remains formal in relation to actual societies and forms of political organization' (183). Conversely one could see this, far from being a weakness, as the foundation of why Deleuze's ideas remain relevant: in their open relation to rethinking questions and political strategy and forming new concepts. Phillippe Mengue seems to hint towards this in his essay on political fabulation when he discusses Deleuze's oft-quoted statement that the people are missing. For Mengue, the absence of the people as pre-given formation, far from eliminating the possibility of politics, 'makes possible not only a new concept of politics but also a new function for the people, essentially and exclusively the function of resistance' (225). This could just as easily be said about Deleuze himself: that his absence as a fixed pre-given form within this area known as 'Deleuze studies' (or work inspired by

or using Deleuzian ideas) is so productive precisely because of its absent center, around which other forms can be generated. It is thus both a limitation and possibility, or a proliferation of endless possibilities (and, and, and) that might also conversely be an unrealized limitation. After all, there is a limit to what a body of work can do.

Let's broadly say, then, that there are three main approaches to how the conjunction between Deleuze and politics is understood and developed, both within this collection and more broadly. Roughly they are:

1. Deleuzian politics: working from Deleuze's particular engagements with ideas or politics, or elaborating the politics argued to be inherent to a concept or set of ideas.
2. Deleuze & politics: using Deleuzian concepts to analyze given political phenomena.
3. Deleuze in & against politics: working from within the entangled and mutated bastardizations of concepts that start from, drift around and/or through a Deleuzian landscape.

This is obviously a rough typology, to say the least, but one that is still useful. For the most part it is the first two modalities that are prevalent within academic work and writing. These approaches attempt to fix, whether precisely or not, an object that is identified as Deleuze, and then seek to develop a politics directly out of those concepts or by applying them to analyze other phenomena. These are approaches that maintain the theoretical real estate of the proper name. And indeed work done from such perspectives can be quite useful. But it runs into two problems. First, a limit might be reached to the theoretical creativity of a body of work. Second, there might be a problem with pinning down a relation for long enough to work with it. Closure and the lack of closure can have the same effect: both can limit the productivity of engagement.

And this brings us to the third category, namely the area of bastardization, mutation, and recombination. At first sight, this area would seem to be properly Deleuzian, even if the continual transformation and encoding was precisely serving to avoid being fixed as this or that, or this and that. This flux seems to cause problems for how something like a Deleuzian politics is understood. Take for instance Peter Hallward's *Out of this World* (2006), which

employs an approach very much like Deleuze's to the history of philosophy to tackle Deleuze's work itself. Hallward centers his book around the idea of creation, arguing that Deleuze's work is based on the endless power and possibility of the virtual over the compromised capacity of the actual. This results in a politics that can only lead out of this world, because the potential of the actualized world is always compromised in comparison to the virtual. Therefore, Deleuze's concepts and politics are insufficient for the demands of radical politics precisely because of how they lead one out of the world rather than through the pressing tasks and demands of the present. There is substance to this book and it is worth reading and considering. One could take issue with Hallward's understanding of how the virtual and actual are coupled, but the issue here is more pressing: Hallward never considers the ways that people engaged in political movements use Deleuze's concepts. It is curious that a book claiming Deleuze's concepts are insufficient for engaging with politics in the world spends little time actually looking at what happens when such ideas are mobilized in politics.

One could offer as a counter to this kind of argument many of the pieces found within this collection. These chapters illustrate clearly that Deleuzian concepts do not necessarily mean a flowing out of the world. Perhaps they refocus the task of exiting from this world, or plotting an exodus to a more liberatory form of social relations contained within the virtual potential of the present. But going out of this world need not be interpreted literally, but in terms of finding escape routes from the domination of the present to reshape, or to find weapons and concepts in that fleeing that would be useful for reshaping the present. For instance one could take as a prime example Radio Alice and the Italian autonomist movements of the late 1970s. The first broadcast of Radio Alice in February 1976 invited people to stay in bed and make musical instruments and war machines. The activities of Radio Alice (as well as its name) were based around a playful reading of Deleuze's *The Logic of Sense*, and thinking about the effects of language, of breaking communication and meaning, and how these ideas could be fused with the tactics of the historical avant-garde into a strategy for media politics and confrontation. These ideas spread to other autonomous movements of the time, such that there were demonstrations that included slogans based on the ideas of *Anti-Oedipus*.<sup>1</sup>

Or to approach this another way, when considering the relation between Deleuze and politics (or any other thinker), the politics of

that conjunction do not necessarily follow from characteristics inherent to the concepts employed but from how they are employed. This is another way of saying that a great part, perhaps even the majority, of the politics of any concept is in how it is enacted within social relations of that enactment rather than in and of the concept itself. As Hakim Bey once observed, it is not necessary to fully or properly understand a concept in order to use it. And this is why the bastardized, mutated forms of how ideas are employed become important (often without proper reference at all), particularly with theorists such as Deleuze and Guattari, whose influence is key within social movements and radical politics. This conjunction of Deleuze and politics, of Deleuze in the movement of the political, is much more difficult to track with any certainty.<sup>2</sup> To give an example of this, the work of someone like Bey has been quite influenced by the ideas of Deleuze and Guattari, which have in turn been translated into concepts (such as the idea of Temporary Autonomous Zones) that have been quite influential within anarchist politics during the past two decades. But even as Deleuze's ideas influence someone like Bey (he once described his politics as based around 'non-hegemonic particularities in a nomadological or rhizomatic mutuality of synergistic solidarities' (Bey, 1996), a phrase inflected with more than a degree of Deleuzian influence), he very rarely cites Deleuze directly. In this way, much of the influence of Deleuze's in political social movements, flowing and developing in minor and subterranean modalities, gets passed over or not noticed.

Deleuze and politics, therefore, becomes a composition that animates and underlies the social configuration that embodies an elaboration of politics using Deleuzian concepts. This is what Nick Thoburn suggests in his essay on political militancy and subjectivity when he says that if *Anti-Oedipus* was a book of antifascist ethics (as Foucault claimed), then *A Thousand Plateaus* is 'precisely concerned with the exploration of modes and techniques of intensive composition, often of a most experimental and liminal kind' (114). This is how Thoburn frames Deleuze and Guattari's work in terms of thinking through questions of militant subjectivity, of finding ways around the hardening or ossifying closure of political possibility, or a diffuse form that becomes untenable. The question of militant subjectivity as composition is precisely one of unfolding subjectivity within a broader process of social movement, or the reconfiguration of the social world. Very much the same question is taken up by Jason Read in his contribution to the volume as he explores questions around the production of subjectivity within

capitalism, arguing that every mode of production is at the same time inseparable from a form of subjection that is necessary to its operation. For Read, this illustrates the ways in which capitalism is both a revolution in production and subjectivation, as revolution that appears as liberation, one that Deleuze and Guattari explore to show how it constantly tries to constrain and make productive that which escapes it.

This focus on questions of composition and subjectivation within capitalism picks up on some of the most fruitful directions for the development of Deleuzian concepts, by hybridizing them with concepts and arguments coming out of autonomist and post-workerist traditions of politics and analysis. The composition of subjectivity is understood as a form of political composition, but also in relation to the changing technical composition of capitalist valorization. Perhaps it is the lingering effect of *Empire*, where previously there seemed to be an implicit divide between using ideas developed by figures such as Deleuze and Foucault at the same time as drawing from the Marxist tradition. This, thankfully, has fallen away. This sort of autonomist-Deleuze influence approach to politics and social theory can be seen in the work of Thoburn (2003), Read (2003), Terranova (2004), DJ Spooky (2004), Bratich (2008), Papadopoulos, Stephenson, and Tsianos (2008), as well others. To the same tradition, we can add a recent issue of *Deleuze Studies* which takes up the relation between Deleuze and Marx (Jain, 2009), an issue of *New Formations* (Gilbert and Nigianni, 2010) on Deleuzian politics, and the work of the Team Colors collective (2010). All of these elaborate a compositional approach to similar questions.

Paolo Virno once described the miracles of the multitude as being the awaited but unexpected events that radically change and transform the political configuration of the present (1996). Over the past several decades the work of Deleuze has become seemingly indispensable in the ongoing task of analyzing the transformations and mutations of capital, subjectivity, ethics, aesthetics, and an almost endless list of topics and areas. Indeed, at times the proliferating assemblage of politics taking up Deleuze's ideas nearly stretches beyond a point that would hold them together with any sense of coherence. At the same time, enacting a precise closure or delimitation of these proliferations in any particular configuration would shut down the very productivity that makes them interesting. This is the problem and possibility that lingers in the question of Deleuze and politics: how far can this relationship be stretched

without breaking, or held together without losing its vitality? While this collection is not likely to answer that question conclusively (and it is doubtful whether it could or if this would be desirable), it does provide a number of tools, weapons, and routes for teasing out this conjunction. If we take up the idea that 'desire belongs to the infrastructure' (139), which is central to Jason Read's piece, we might conversely say that the imagination of a Deleuzian politics, in so far that there is one, belongs to the infrastructure of politics that compose that infrastructure, constantly folding over and recreating itself in new mutations.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> For more on the use of Deleuze's work in Italian autonomous movements see Beradi (2009) and Berardi, Jacquemet & Vitali (2009).

<sup>2</sup> Hopefully the forthcoming post-anarchist reader (Rousselle and Evren, forthcoming 2011) will at least partially address this.

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