Entering Deleuze's Political Vision

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Abstract

How can Deleuzians make his philosophy as accessible as possible to political theorists and democratic publics? This essay provides principles to enter Deleuze's political vision, namely, to research the etymology of words, to discover the image beneath concepts, to diagram schemata using rigid lines, supple lines and lines of flight, and to construct rules that balance experimentation and caution. The essay then employs this method to explicate a fecund sentence about politics in *A Thousand Plateaus* and presents a case why Deleuze deserves greater visibility in the political theory canon.

Keywords: A Thousand Plateaus, Deleuze, democracy, philosophy, politics, vision

The task of political philosophy – according to Sheldon Wolin in his classic text, *Politics and Vision* – is to 'fashion a political cosmos out of political chaos' (Wolin 2004: 9). Many of the great statements of political philosophy arise in times of crisis, that is, when old paradigms and institutions have been shattered – for instance, in post-war Europe (Reggio 2007). A political philosopher advances a political metaphysics that includes categories of time, space, reality and energy; he or she describes what exists, but, more importantly, illuminates 'tantalizing possibilities' to inspire the formation of a better world (Wolin 2004: 20). A political philosopher may have a method, that is, a step-by-step procedure for initiates to arrive at predetermined destinations, but what gives a political philosophy richness is 'extra-scientific considerations', that is, knowledge of literature, cinema, religion, metaphysics, scientific

developments in other fields of inquiry, and the history of ideas (Wolin 1969). A political philosopher participates in a tradition of discourse, an ongoing conversation about how to order collective human life. And yet a great political philosopher innovates, that is, expresses a vision that no one has seen before, in the same way that Van Gogh's paintings have changed how many of us view sunflowers or starry nights. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, it seems, we need a new epochal political theory to make sense of our fast-paced, interconnected world in which multiple constituencies interact on many registers of being (Connolly 2002).

Deleuze may be becoming 'our Kant', that is, the philosopher who orients contemporary discussions of epistemology, metaphysics, ethics, politics and aesthetics in the same way that Kant dominated those discussions in the high Enlightenment (Protevi 2001: 6–7; see also Negri 1995: 108). Take Deleuze's magnus opus, *A Thousand Plateaus*.[1] The book constructs a stunning array of concepts to redescribe political time ('the geology of morals'), political space ('smooth' and 'striated', 'territory', 'earth' and 'the Natal'), political bodies ('assemblages', 'rhizomes', 'bodies without organs', 'multiplicities', 'apparatuses of capture' and 'war machines') and political energy ('macro- and micropolitics'). On the one hand, the book displays Deleuze's apprenticeship in the history of philosophy, with concepts recast from Hume, Kant, Leibniz, Bergson, Nietzsche and others (Jones and Roffe 2009). On the other, Deleuze presents a singular vision that seems to accomplish the mission he assigned transcendental philosophy in *Difference and Repetition*: to explore the upper and lower reaches of this world, that is, the mysterious factors that influence politics but that elude traditional categories of political science (Deleuze 1994: 135). For many leftist political theorists and activists today, Deleuze provides the impetus to replace or reformulate Marxist–Leninist and liberal–republican paradigms (Svirsky 2010).

Anyone who has read or taught *A Thousand Plateaus* knows, however, that the entry cost to glimpsing Deleuze's political vision is high. Consider, for example, Ian Buchanan's 'preliminary guide for how to get started' reading the first volume of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*: *Anti-Oedipus* (Buchanan 2008: 152). Buchanan recommends that newcomers to that book examine Deleuze's earlier work (particularly *Difference and Repetition*, *The Logic of Sense*, *Empiricism and Subjectivity*, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, *Dialogues* and *Negotiations*), study the classic texts of psychoanalysis (including by Freud, Lacan, Bettelheim, Klein and Reich), master the literature on

historical materialism (including books by Foucault, Sartre, Fanon and Turner) and peruse the referenced literary sources (including by Artaud, Lawrence, Proust, Beckett, Büchner, Nerval and Butler). Presumably, once one has accomplished this task, then one may begin to tackle the imposing secondary literatures addressed in *A Thousand Plateaus* on geology, linguistics, politics, aesthetics and (a thousand?) other topics. To be sure, great philosophers always demand time and effort and generate multifaceted research projects. Given that Deleuze envisioned his philosophy as an 'open system', whereby 'concepts relate to circumstances rather than essences', Deleuze scholars may rightly rejoice at all the myriad directions contemporary Deleuzians may explore (Deleuze 2005: 32). Yet setting the intellectual bar to entering Deleuze's political vision too high may confirm the accusation that Deleuze is a 'highly elitist author, indifferent toward politics' (Žižek 2003: 20). Is there a way to make Deleuze's 'grand style' (Olkowski 2011) more accessible without compromising its intellectual rigour or precision? May one democratise Deleuze's esoteric or hermetic passages, as it were, without collapsing into common sense?[2]

One of the more surprising remarks that Deleuze made in an interview about *A Thousand Plateaus* – a book in which one protagonist, Professor Challenger, empties a lecture hall (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 64) – is that he wants to forge alliances with like-minded people:

> The question that interests us in relation to *A Thousand Plateaus* is whether there are any resonances, common ground, with what other writers, musicians, painters, philosophers, and sociologists are doing or trying to do, from which we can all derive greater strength or confidence. (Deleuze 2005: 27)[3]

Deleuze was indifferent, though not necessarily hostile, to many features of democratic politics as traditionally understood, including governance by the majority and the rule of public opinion (Patton 2010a: 161–84). Yet Deleuze declared himself a leftist (*homme de gauche*) and envisioned a left composed of an 'aggregate of processes of minoritarian becomings' in which everybody has some hand in governance though no one easily identifiable group (majority) dominates (Deleuze and Parnet 1996; see also Tampio 2009). Deleuze saw *A Thousand Plateaus* as a work of left political philosophy and wanted his book to be comprehensible to a wide array of people (each of whom is plied by difference and does not fit neatly into categories that define a majority). Deleuze did not think or desire his work to be easily accessible to currently existing mass populations, but he also did not envision himself as a beautiful soul who

cared about his own salvation rather than the well-being of society.[4] The question remains, though, how can Deleuzians advance the project of identifying or making common ground with an array of intellectuals and activists to enact concrete change? How can one make *A Thousand Plateaus* as easy to understand as possible while still honouring Deleuze's vision in all its singularity and complexity and injunctions to use it as a toolbox rather than as a package containing a settled meaning (Buchanan 2000)?

This essay proposes a handful of principles to facilitate entering Deleuze's political vision. Initially, I offer several rules of thumb that make Deleuze's political theory comprehensible with little more than a good dictionary and sketchpad. To extract these rules I plumb Deleuze's writings on Hume, Nietzsche and Bergson, as well as his books written in his own voice; and, once again, I emphasise that Deleuze's political theory 'ceaselessly establishes connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences, and social struggles' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 7). Deleuze's philosophy is an intricate, plastic and porous system that demands both careful study and receptivity to developments in philosophy, art, science and politics.[5] There is no royal road to Deleuzian political philosophy: but there are straighter ones. To substantiate this point, I explicate a sentence that contains an important political teaching of *A Thousand Plateaus*. The aim is not to simplify the Deleuzian 'abstract machine', or conceptual system, but to present a way to diagram the machinery so that others may more readily plug into it. I conclude by explaining why Deleuze deserves a more prominent place in the academic political theory canon.

I. The Political Vision of *A Thousand Plateaus*

> To comprehend *what is* is the task of philosophy, for *what is* is reason. As far as the individual is concerned, each individual is in any case a *child of his time*; thus philosophy, too, is *its own time comprehended in thoughts*. (Hegel 1991: 21)

A Thousand Plateaus may be the philosophical work that best captures our time in thought. Such a statement must immediately be qualified. Deleuze's entire philosophical corpus evades and opposes the Hegelian account of the phenomenology of spirit (Hardt 1993; Widder 2008). Each chapter title of *A Thousand Plateaus* has a date, but the dates are not arranged sequentially, thus subverting any attempt to find a

historical metanarrative that explains humanity's roots or *telos*. Deleuze prefers to view history stratographically, rather than chronologically, meaning that 'luminous points', physical or noetic, from the past may rise up to enrich or disrupt the present (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 59; see also Lampert 2006). Yet our time expresses its own singularity, both because of political, economic, technological and social changes from earlier milieus – such as the collapse of the Soviet Union, the accelerated construction of global markets, the emergence of the Internet, and the growing consensus in favour of treating men and women as equals – as well as because the historical archive has a renewed vitality in our age. Today, we can travel the world quickly in thought and extension and thus take an interest in the history of humanity, religion, science, music, mathematics, the state, capitalism and other topics discussed in *A Thousand Plateaus*. Such investigations are spurred by curiosity, but also by a practical conviction that we have a much broader palette of ideas and practices than heretofore to paint, in words and deeds, our time. In this essay, I indicate why Deleuze may be the philosopher who best expresses the spirit of the age, though a fuller defence of his paradigm will require the sustained effort of Deleuzian political theorists to show its timeliness.

A Thousand Plateaus stretches the Greek definition of politics as *ta politika*, that which happens in a *polis*, or city. Take the sentence: 'everything is political, but every politics is simultaneously a *macropolitics* and a *micropolitics*' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 213). Most political scientists view politics as 'who gets what, when, and how' (Lasswell 1936). Deleuze differs from most political scientists by refusing to privilege human rational actors as the main or sole actants in the political realm as well as by attributing primary motivation to sub-representational desires rather than self-conscious interests. Political scientists may enter Deleuze's terminology by distinguishing levels of analysis, from state policies and elections to public opinion and political psychology. But that entry point may misrepresent the elusive and mysterious features of the micropolitical that Deleuze wants to illuminate. Deleuze views the political, in terminology he primarily used in the late 1960s, as an Idea. An Idea is a 'virtual multiplicity' defined by 'differential relations' and 'concomitant singularities' (Deleuze 2004: 100). Like a Platonic Idea, the Deleuzian Idea transcends the actual world that we perceive with our naked eyes and helps structure, or pilot, those things that we see and touch. Deleuze's Idea, though, is Dionysian, or wild, combating every effort to place an Apollonian, or static, framework upon it (Deleuze 2004: 101; see also Smith 2012: 106–21).

In the defence of his *doctorat d'État*, published as 'The Method of Dramatization', Deleuze uses terms that are both philosophic and poetic to describe the elusive forces that press us to think anew: Ideas inhabit 'a zone of obscure distinction' that generates more stable concepts and things, but Ideas also have an intrinsic power to overturn established orders (Deleuze 2004: 101). Like Hannah Arendt, Deleuze celebrates the political as the site of natality, the capacity to give birth to something new (Arendt 1998). Deleuze differs from Arendt, though, through his astonishing statement that everything – not just humans in their civic or personal roles – is political. Deleuze stretches and deepens the field that political theorists may investigate to determine how we – now including the trans- and non-human – do and ought to live together in the universe.[6]

So is it proper to describe *A Thousand Plateaus* as a work of political philosophy or political theory? Political philosophy, in academic political science departments, often refers to the quest 'to replace opinion about the nature of political things by knowledge of the nature of political things' (Strauss 1989: 5). Deleuze does not endorse Platonic metaphysics or its accompanying elitist politics, but given his extensive reflections on the nature of philosophy, we may still consider the possibility that he is a political philosopher. In the 1960s, Sheldon Wolin argued for a type of political philosophy – subsequently called political theory – that privileges the exercise of the imagination over reason. In this respect, Deleuze – whose first book, *Empiricism and Subjectivity*, dedicates a chapter to the power of the imagination in ethics and knowledge – would probably call himself a political theorist. But does this term connote a dualism – between theory and practice, or possible and real experience – that Deleuze sought to overcome (Smith 2012: 89–105)? *Theoria*, in Greek, means 'a looking at' (from *thea* 'a view' + *horan* 'to see'); *praxis*, from the Greek *prattein* 'to do', means 'action'. Theory, put simply, is what we do with our eyes and practice is what we do with our hands. The Platonic tradition tries to maintain a sharp distinction between these two activities. Deleuze recasts this dualism rather than discards it entirely. In an interview with Michel Foucault called 'Intellectuals and Power', Deleuze explains:

> The relationships between theory and practice are [...] partial and fragmentary. On one side, a theory is always local and related to a limited field, and it is applied in another sphere, more or less distant from it [...] Practice is a set of relays from one theoretical point to another, and theory is a relay from one practice to another. No theory can develop without eventually

encountering a wall, and practice is necessary for piercing this wall. (Foucault 1977: 206)[7]

For Deleuze, it is senseless to talk of disembodied philosophising. We always inhabit bodies that interact with other bodies in concrete physical locations. Nerves connect our eyes and hands, and skin is porous. There is an open circuit linking the images in our eyes, concepts in our brains, sensations on our fingertips, and actions of other bodies.[8] And yet, Deleuze insists, the relationship between sensibility and thinking is asymmetrical, meaning that there is always a disjunction between Ideas and concepts, on one side, and actuality on the other. Corporeal practices can jolt thinking, but they cannot determine it. Conversely, Ideas and concepts can prompt action that transforms the political sphere, but there is always friction in the transition from theory to practice. Deleuzian political theory is a sort of practice insofar as it enriches our vision of political possibilities and inspires us to work toward goals that would otherwise have remained occluded or unimagined.

II. How to Enter Deleuze's Political Vision

Let us now propose a few rules, extracted from years of reading and teaching *A Thousand Plateaus*, to facilitate a deeper comprehension of its political vision.

First Rule: Track Etymology

A philosopher masters concepts in the same way that a painter masters percepts or an author masters affects (Deleuze and Guattari 1994). Deleuze's method minimises as far as possible 'typographical, lexical, or syntactic creations' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 22). Deleuze's language is both strange and familiar.[9] How? In his *Introduction to Kant's Anthropology*, Foucault notes that Romance languages follow 'the secret law of a Latinity [. . .] which serves to guarantee the intrinsic exchange value of what is said' (Foucault 2008: 98). If one uses a dictionary to find the etymology of Deleuze's concepts in *A Thousand Plateaus*, one almost inevitably finds a Latin, Greek and/or Indo-European root. One of the key concepts of *A Thousand Plateaus*, for instance, territory (*territoire*) – and its cognates territorialisation and deterritorialisation – emerges from both 'earth, land' (*terra*) and 'to terrorise' (*terrere*) (Connolly 1995: xxii).[10]

Why does Deleuze say that 'etymology is like a specifically philosophical athleticism' (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 8) or that we learn to think in dictionaries (Deleuze 2005: 165)? Clearly, a philosopher must master the art of thinking and concepts are the basic thought units that enable us to mentally grasp the sensible. Intuitions without concepts are blind: to see with our minds, we need to have a reservoir of concepts. The purpose of Deleuze's earliest philosophical monographs is precisely to practise using mental tools and weapons that he can redeploy in his own philosophy (Deleuze 2005: xv). Reading a dictionary does not suffice to think new thoughts, but it is crucial exercise in a philosophical apprenticeship.

In addition, studying etymology lets you recover a language before Christianity 'ruined the Roman preservation of the Greek enlightenment' (Lampert 1996: 174). When Deleuze uses an ordinary word 'filled with harmonics so distant that it risks being imperceptible to a nonphilosophical ear' (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 8) he is taking up the project of the Nietzschean Enlightenment: to resituate the accomplishments of the 'West' upon an Epicurean, rather than a Platonic, metaphysical foundation (Lampert 1996: 166–86). 'The untimely is attained in relation to the most distant past, by the reversal of Platonism' – and the way to do that is to use words in a sense before they were overcoded by democratic Platonism, or Christianity (Deleuze 1990: 265). In sum, Deleuze, like Nietzsche, thinks the art of etymology empowers one to think clearly and in a way that circumvents, at least in part, the Christian inheritance (Nietzsche 2007: 34).

Second Rule: Find Images

Let us dwell more on why etymology helps clarify thinking. One of the surprising features of researching the etymology for concepts in Deleuze's most abstract, dense passages is that virtually all of them have a root in a concrete object. 'Art thinks no less than philosophy, but it thinks through affects and percepts' (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 66). Hegel drew a sharp line between concepts and percepts: 'in *thinking*, the object does not present itself in picture-thoughts but in *Notions*, i.e. in a distinct *being-in-itself*' (Hegel 1977: 120). According to the Hegelian narrative of the history of philosophy, primitives (such as the Egyptians) thought in terms of images and sculptures, whereas the march of self-consciousness is defined by its abstraction into concepts or Notions.

Deleuze, on this front as on many others, opposes Hegel's effect on philosophy. This is how Deleuze advises a fellow philosopher:

> In the analysis of concepts, it is always better to begin with extremely simple, concrete situations, not with philosophical antecedents, *not even with problems* as such (the one and the multiple, etc.). Take multiplicities, for example. You want to begin with questions such as what is a *pack*? [...] I have only one thing to tell you: stick to the concrete, and always return to it. (Deleuze 2006: 362–3)

Deleuze, like many of the canonical figures in the history of political philosophy, 'sticks to the concrete', even if the concrete today differs from that of earlier eras.[11]

Deleuze's defence of picture-thinking goes back at least to his reading of Hume. In *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Hume extols Berkeley's idea that 'all general ideas are nothing but particular ones, annex'd to a certain term, which gives them a more extensive signification, and makes them recall upon occasion other individuals, which are similar to them' (Hume 2000: 17). Abstract ideas always bear the trace of a sensation or impression: 'the image in the mind is only that of a particular object, tho' the application of our reasoning be the same, as if it were universal' (Hume 2000: 18). Thinking cannot be reduced to sensations given to us: Deleuze and arguably even Hume himself recognise that the mind imposes conceptual casting upon the raw material of sensation (Kerslake 2009: 4). Yet Deleuze shared Hume's suspicion of a priori theorising and thought that it led to duplicity or confusion. That is why Deleuze opens the English translation of *Dialogues* by declaring that he has always been an empiricist, committed to tracing 'concepts from the lines that compose multiplicities' (Deleuze and Parnet 2007: viii).

Finding the image, though, does not mean sticking to the banal. Hume's example of returning to the everyday, famously, is playing a game of backgammon (Hume 2000: 175). Deleuze calls his project *transcendental* empiricism, however, to suggest that we need to experiment with our philosophical studies and corporeal practices to open the aperture through which we receive the world. "'Transcendental empiricism" is a kind of cognition that violates the normal rules of experience, yet nevertheless attains a "superior" realisation of sensation, imagination and thought' (Kerslake 2009: 26; see also Colebrook 2002: 69–89). Deleuze is an empiricist, but he resists the attempts to domesticate the faculties through the doctrines of good and common sense. To visualise the strange, we may need to employ intellectual and

visceral techniques on our singular and collective bodies (see Connolly 2002: 80–113).

Third Rule: Diagram Schemata

A Thousand Plateaus uses the method of 'stratoanalysis' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 22). Stratum is from the Latin *stratum* 'layer' (and the Indo-European base **stre-to-* 'to stretch'); analysis is from the Greek *analysis* 'break up, unfastening'. Stratoanalysis means to diagram the layers, sides and components of a body. Deleuze wrote his book on Francis Bacon with reproductions of the paintings in front of him (Smith 2005: xi). One helpful exercise when reading Deleuze's texts is to reverse this project: to diagram their conceptual arrangements, or schemata.[12]

In *What Is Philosophy?* Deleuze advises philosophers to master 'the art of the portrait':

> It is not a matter of 'making lifelike', that is, of repeating what a philosopher said but rather of producing resemblance by separating out both the plane of immanence he instituted and the new concepts he created. These are mental, noetic, and machinic portraits. Although they are usually created with philosophical tools, they can also be produced aesthetically. (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 55)

A 'noetic' portrait – from Greek *nous* 'mind' – represents the structure and content, the bones and flesh, of a philosophical argument. We need to grasp a philosophical argument with our minds; but we can also use our hands and eyes to make the argument more intuitive.

Take, for example, the paragraph from *A Thousand Plateaus* that opens: 'Let us consider the three great strata concerning us, in other words, the ones that most directly bind us: the organism, signifiance, and subjectification' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 159). One way to diagram this argument is to draw a circle with a compass, lifting the head frequently to convey 'the principles of connection and heterogeneity' that makes all borders in the universe porous (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 7). Then, with a ruler, one may draw lines to make three strata, which may be labelled organism (body), signifiance (soul) and subjectification. And yet, the purpose of this paragraph is to draw attention to the side of the body (the one facing the pole of scission) that fluctuates and decomposes.[13] We may then make one side of our circle more perforated, with lines of flight fleeing this side of the body, and label the strata disarticulation, experimentation and nomadism (Figure 1). There is much more work to do to make this paragraph comprehensible
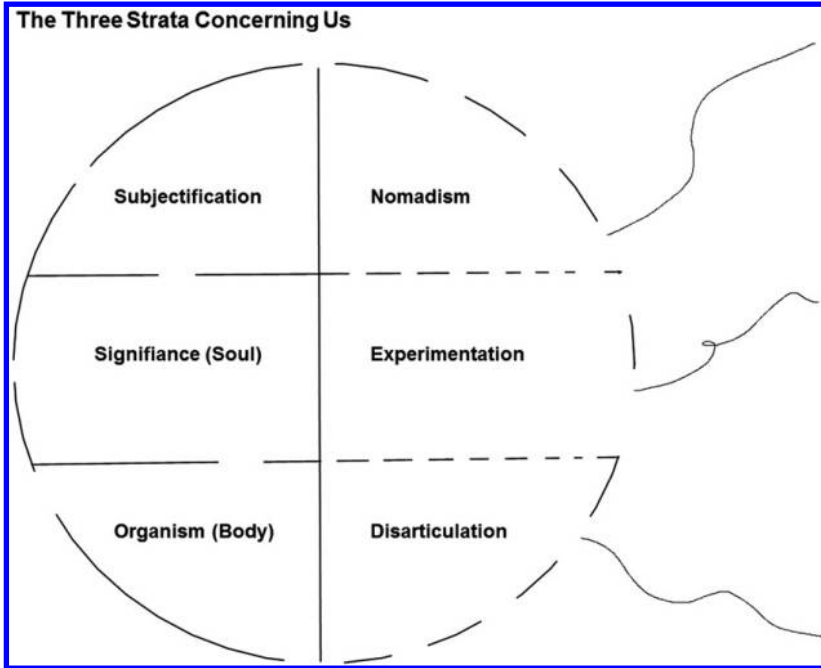
Figure 1. A diagram of the schema for *A Thousand Plateaus* (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 159–60).

or usable: but we can begin to appreciate the Apollonian (and not just Dionysian) features of Deleuzian political theory.

This strategy also gives us a clue to why Deleuze calls his philosophy a 'constructivism' in *What Is Philosophy?* Like Kant in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Deleuze thinks that philosophers can gain insight from mathematicians about how to construct concepts, objects and figures. What makes Deleuze a Kantian is his recognition that *we* draw the lines that define our concepts and mental representations of reality. Yet, in his practical philosophy, Kant thinks that *pure* practical reason lays the ground for the object of our striving (the 'realm of ends'), whereas Deleuze agrees with Hume that imagination is the key faculty of ethical and political thinking (Deleuze 1991: 55–72). The significance of this fact, for us, is that each of us may draw or fill in the schema with our own impure content. Just as there are no straight lines in nature, so too there are no straight lines in Deleuzian schemata (a wooden, plastic or metal ruler always has tiny divots). That is why Deleuze recommends cartography rather than decalcomania, map-making rather

than tracing: because any such drawing (one circle, two sides, three strata) is a provisional start to practical reflection or experimentation (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 12).

Fourth Rule: Construct Theories

A norm is an ought-claim; it is also, etymologically, a 'carpenter's square' (Latin *norma*; Greek *gnomon*). By diagramming Deleuze's arguments, we begin to see that he is a profoundly normative thinker when he asks how we ought to draw the lines that compose our individual and collective bodies (see also Jun 2009). 'How do you make yourself a Body without Organs?' – the title of Plateau Number 6 – could also be restated: how ought we balance the side of our bodies that tend towards order with the side that opens up onto difference? An ethical question: how do I experience the heightened sensations afforded by drugs without self-destructing or contributing to social violence (Connolly 1999: 97–114)? A political question: how do we delimit the identity and borders of Europe or North America in conditions of globalisation (Braidotti 2006)? Once we attend to the normative dimension of *A Thousand Plateaus*, we begin to see a pattern of injunctions.

First, map or diagram the body of which we are composed. Deleuze speaks of 'territories and deterritorializations measured with the craft of a surveyor' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 160). Political theorists ought to avail themselves of empirical research produced by political scientists using techniques such as multiple linear regression, as well as relevant scholarship produced by sociologists, historians and economists.

Next, chisel the borders that delimit our identities. 'It is an inevitable exercise' for humans who must breathe, eat, defecate and perform other activities that involve taking or releasing things into and out of our bodies (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 149). But it is also a political question par excellence: how do we define our ethical and political subjectivities? What historical material do we want schools to teach or not teach? With what countries, international organisations and foreign political parties do we want to forge alliances? What bodies threaten our integrity or amplify our joy? Deleuze's criteria for addressing these questions are Spinozist: 'life and death, youth and old age, sadness and joy' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 151). Sadness and joy diminish or increase the power of a body; thus, evaluative criteria always shift depending on the body and the forces that act upon it: 'each individual's pleasure or pain differs from the pleasure or pain of another to the

extent that the nature or essence of the one also differs from that of the other' (Spinoza 2002: 309). There is no a priori answer to the question of how to draw or puncture the lines that define us: so we need to experiment. And the sensibility of *A Thousand Plateaus* – though more sober than *Anti-Oedipus* (Holland 1999; Buchanan 2008) – is that we need to experiment more aggressively: 'Let's go further still' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 151).

Yet Deleuze also recommends the 'art of caution' to ensure that we do not experiment recklessly. 'You don't do it with a sledgehammer, you use a very fine file. You invent self-destructions that have nothing to do with the death drive' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 160). Philosophy, for Deleuze, may be about exploring the powerful and mysterious forces above and below the level of perception (the molecular), but *political* philosophy means translating these insights into concrete practice: 'molecular escapes and movements would be nothing if they did not return to the molar organizations to reshuffle their segments' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 216–17).

In an article on 'Dramatization as Method in Political Theory', Iain Mackenzie and Robert Porter detail the provisional and experimental procedure that Deleuze recommends for constructing concepts and principles. 'Dramatization is a method aimed at determining the dynamic nature of political concepts by "bringing them to life", in the way that dramatic performances can bring to life the characters and themes of a play script' (Mackenzie and Porter 2011: 482). A philosopher performs the role of screenwriter and director, issuing prompts on what to think as one goes through a text. But the text itself does not come alive unless the reader invests his or her own thoughts, interests and desires into it. Deleuze's philosophy has a systematic character that rewards determining how the parts fit together. Deleuze viewed his writing as an egg in which concepts and themes shoot off into every direction and yet reunite into a whole (Deleuze 2005: 14). At the same time, Deleuze encourages his readers to experiment with the concepts, looking for new ways to use them and to enlarge the stock of concepts. 'In political theory, dramatization as method requires that we stage new relations within and between the concepts that animate politics in order to express the indeterminate yet endlessly provocative nature of the Idea of the political' (Mackenzie and Porter 2011: 494). This process combines intellectual, aesthetic and practical faculties: no two people will dramatise a political theory the exact same way. Still, a political theory can provide a useful function by outlining a 'realistic utopia' towards which political bodies can strive (Patton 2010a: 185–210).

III. A Political Aphorism

> An aphorism, properly stamped and moulded, has not been 'deciphered' just because it has been read out; on the contrary, this is just the beginning of its proper *interpretation*, for this, an art of interpretation is needed. (Nietzsche 2007: 9)

There is a difference between how philosophers exposit their ideas (*Darstellung*) and how they formulate them (*Forschung*) (Hardt 1993: 87). I have been articulating an 'art of interpretation' that enables us to see a pattern, a refrain, in many of Deleuze's key political arguments; in this section, I employ this art to decipher a remarkable political theoretical statement in *A Thousand Plateaus*. This analysis reveals more of the steps (the *Forschung*) than may be necessary for most Deleuze commentary or application. But my hope is that this procedure will help us understand and explain to others – who may be on the fence about whether to invest time and energy in the Deleuzian venture – the power and appeal of Deleuze's vision. The aphorism addresses the question: how you do make yourself a body without organs? Or, how does one, as a political actor, maximise joy and minimise sadness (cf. Deleuze 1988: 28)?

> This is how it should be done: Lodge yourself on a 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 new land at all times. (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 161)

The image that informs the title of *A Thousand Plateaus* may be 'the landscape of Limousin, specifically the Millevaches plateau [Deleuze] could see from the windows of his house at Saint-Léonard-de-Noblat' (Dosse 2010: 249). Regardless, the terms in this passage paint a landscape of land (stratum, place, deterritorialisations, land), sky (lines of flight) and water (flow conjunctions).

Deleuze invites us to imagine ourselves inhabiting this landscape. Lodge is from the Frankish **laubja* 'shelter'; stratum is a 'horizontal layer'. To lodge yourself on a stratum means to inhabit a slice of the world: to be part of a family, country, religious group, profession, school of thought or any other customary practice. In each of our worlds, there are elements of stability, flux and uncertainty; the challenge is to diagram them with the 'craft of a surveyor'.

We can schematise this passage, like so many in *A Thousand Plateaus*, by drawing a circle with a perforated line down the middle, with the left side of the circle more solid (though, importantly, with holes) and the right side more porous, with lines of flight escaping out the side. The circle represents ourselves: the left side is our 'normal' or 'established' side (with a family, career, major language, profession, favourite sports teams, and so forth), the right side is our more experimental side (that gently challenges established family norms, that stretches the canon of our academic disciplines, that ignores popular customs and adopts unusual ones, and so forth), and the 'lines of flight' emanating from that side represent our nomadic tendencies of which we may not recognise their origin or anticipate their destination (listening to new music may germinate these tendencies).

Deleuze's practical rules in this passage are more 'counsels of prudence', given the various landscapes we each inhabit, than 'categorical imperatives', which apply unconditionally to every rational being (Kant 2002). On the one hand, Deleuze clearly presses us to test out (Latin *experiri*) new possibilities of life, to make the hemisphere of traditional values and practices smaller and the hemisphere of new values and practices larger. For each layer, stratum, we can try out appropriate strategies: say, by making friends with peoples of other religions, by attending lectures in other academic disciplines, by learning other languages, by going to the movies, by ingesting hallucinogens, by practising yoga, and so forth. If we are to imagine ourselves inhabiting a landscape, Deleuze presses us to cultivate a more 'wild' garden. On the other hand, Deleuze's advice to 'keep a small plot of new land at all times' indicates that we should not gamble everything at once in our experiments. Hard drugs or violent revolutionary politics may be terrible ways to become a BwO. From the perspective of a United States citizen, Deleuze reveals how misleading the dualities between liberals and conservatives, Democrats and Republicans, can be: we all balance traditional and experimental elements, though that fact does not diminish the still-relevant ethical distinction between how we balance those sides.

Finally, we have many options for how to flesh out this passage, for one, because we all inhabit multiple strata. In the same paragraph, Deleuze notes that 'We are in a social formation; first see how it is stratified for us and in us and at the place where we are; then descend from the strata to the deeper assemblage within which we are held' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 161). Social is from the Latin *sequi* 'to follow' and implies any way in which two or more humans

are connected. We could apply this passage to ourselves and our spouses, ourselves and our mentors, ourselves and Egyptian activists, ourselves and other people who aren't rich, and so forth. An aphorism 'must produce movements, bursts of extraordinary speed and slowness' (Deleuze 2006: xiii). The aphorism we are considering can move fast, as when a college student interprets this immediately in connection to how she ought to participate and intervene in her sorority ('gently tip the assemblage'); but the aphorism can also linger in our minds and produce new thoughts and connections ('actually, what happens in Egypt affects our own way of life', or 'maybe I thought I was more open-minded than I was on this particular issue: how can I expand my thinking or acting in productive ways?'). Deleuze's political vision bears the mark of its creator; but it also aims to enrich rather than supplant the singular ways that each of us views the world and ourselves. A genius does not want to be imitated but to be emulated 'by another genius, who is thereby awakened to the feeling of his own originality' (Kant 2000: 195). By this definition, Deleuze's political vision is both genius, or profoundly original, and aims to help all of us produce our own fresh ways of seeing the world.

IV. Deleuze and the Political Theory Canon

Wolin's *Politics and Vision* has been an extraordinarily influential text for leftist academic political theory since its original publication in 1960 (Frank and Tambornino 2000; Connolly and Botwinick 2001). Yet the updated edition dismisses postmodernists such as Deleuze for both misreading Nietzsche and corrupting democratic theory and practice with playfulness (Wolin 2004: 708). In a recent survey of political theorists in the United States, Deleuze is ranked number thirty-eight among scholars who have had the greatest impact on political theory in the past twenty years (Moore 2010: 267). Several decades into Foucault's prediction/invocation of what would come to be known as a Deleuzian century, Deleuze has not yet entered the canon of the history of political thought, though an increasing number of anglophone political theorists in political science departments employ Deleuzian approaches (see Beltrán 2010; Bennett 2010; Connolly 2010).[14]

Why should political theorists treat Deleuze with the seriousness hitherto reserved for Rawls and Habermas (numbers one and two in the aforementioned survey)? First, Deleuze illuminates aspects of the virtual level of politics that elude traditional political science and

theory. Joshua Ramey has shown that Deleuze participated in the hermetic and mystical traditions, as when he extols 'a politics of sorcery' in *A Thousand Plateaus*. As Rawls's and Habermas's constant invocations of reason and reasonableness attest, there is something deeply unsettling for post-Enlightenment philosophers to think about magic and the occult. Yet Kant himself recognised that there were limits to what could be explained phenomenally, and thus many of his most interesting (and controversial) passages consider the realm of reality that we can only think about but not know. Deleuze's explorations of the 'virtual' – his recasting of the Kantian 'noumenal' – illuminate 'the multiplicity of experiential states in which lines are blurred between human consciousness and animal awareness, between biopsychic life and the nature of matter itself' (Ramey 2010: 10). From the perspective of thinking about the subtle forces that influence politics – for instance, the way that support for a political idea or movement, as in the 2010 Arab Spring, can spread like wildfire – Deleuze provides an invaluable pair of lenses. Just as Van Gogh presented the energy radiating from trees, stars and sunflowers in a way that cameras cannot, Deleuze portrays the political flows and lines of flight that slip beneath the radar of most political scientists and theorists.

In addition, Deleuze provides a normative framework that enables us to recognise both the greatest threats to contemporary liberal democratic societies as well as the most fruitful avenues to their transformation. Al-Qaeda is a 'rhizome' – that is, an acentred, multidimensional, often-imperceptible network – that has befuddled political scientists and actors around the world. Deleuze helps us recognise the existence of these non-State 'war machines' and, as should be clear from Deleuze's more 'conservative' statements, marshal the resources to combat them.[15] More affirmatively, though, Deleuze's vision presses us to live life with a greater appreciation of the porosity that defines our ethical and political subjectivities. Many of us know, on some level, that bodies take things in from and leak out into the world and that, for instance, in seven years our bodies will retain none of their current cells. Yet this philosophical insight constantly combats the common-sense habit of ascribing fairly stable identities to bodies. Part of Deleuze's brilliance is that he provides a philosophical vocabulary – grounded in the roots of European languages and anomalous – to appreciate the plasticity and openness of our political identities, territories, parties, economies, and so forth. Reading Deleuze gives us insight into how to fold joy into our political practices.

Notes

1. Félix Guattari contributed key concepts – including the 'refrain' (*ritornello*) – to *A Thousand Plateaus* and wrote important essays and books on his own, including *The Three Ecologies* and *Chaosophy* (Dosse 2010; see also Guattari 1996 and Genosko 2009). In this essay, I focus on 'Deleuze' rather than 'Deleuze and Guattari' for two reasons. First, Deleuze had expressed his political vision before meeting Guattari in 1968 – see, for instance, the discussion of institutions in *Empiricism and Subjectivity* or the treatment of nomads in *Difference and Repetition*. Second, Deleuze wrote the final drafts and built a conceptual system from Guattari's 'schizoid writing-flow' (Smith 2006: 36–7). Deleuze is the proper name for the candidate to enter the history of political philosophy. On how proper names describe a collective machine of enunciation that includes multiple voices, see Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 37–8.
2. Or: 'Can we really envision and concretise a Deleuzian political activism, a becoming-active so badly needed in relation to today's political state of affairs?' (Thiele 2010: 29).
3. See also Deleuze's remark in an interview about *Anti-Oedipus*: 'We're looking for allies. We need allies. And we think these allies are already out there, that they've gone ahead without us, that there are lots of people who've had enough and are thinking, feeling, and working in similar directions: it's not a question of fashion but of a deeper "spirit of the age" informing converging projects in a wide range of fields' (Deleuze 2005: 22).
4. Deleuze rejects the mantle of 'the self-styled lucid thinker of an impossible revolution, whose very impossibility is such a source of pleasure' (Deleuze and Parnet 2007: 145).
5. 'Deleuze and the political can only refer to an open-ended series of relations between philosophy and politics, a series of encounters between philosophical concepts and political events' (Patton 2000: 10). Political thinkers can better grasp the singularity of contemporary political events by using and modifying Deleuzian concepts; see Hickey-Moody and Malins 2007. This process can be intensified, though, by a deeper grasp of how Deleuze's system fits together, and this essay aims to disclose a procedure to do that.
6. Deleuze's main contribution to contemporary political theory, according to Nathan Widder (2012: x) is 'an unwavering attempt to expose [the micropolitical], investigate its mechanisms and dynamics [...], show how it unfolds to form the concepts and categories that define so much of personal, social, and political life, and explore how it can be engaged and adjusted'.
7. On the differences between Deleuze's and Foucault's conceptions of the theory–practice relation, see Patton 2010b.
8. On the political implications of a Deleuzian conception of the body–brain–culture network, see Connolly 2002.
9. 'Perhaps it is finally the strangeness of the lexicon, the heterogeneity of the abstract terms and their sheer number that are most striking about Deleuze's diction: an abstract, incorporeal, alien vocabulary for a new foreign language' (Bogue 2004: 12). The question becomes, though, how can we democrats popularise Deleuzian insights?
10. The etymologies in this essay draw upon the *Oxford English Dictionary* (http://www.oed.com) and the *Online Etymology Dictionary* (http://www.etymonline.com).
11. Classical political philosophy 'hardly uses a term which did not originate in the marketplace and is not in common use there' (Strauss 1989: 130). On the one hand, Deleuze, in the Straussian narrative of the history of political philosophy,

is a modern, refusing his assent to otherworldly metaphysics or elitist politics. On the other, Deleuze replicates the ancients' efforts to follow 'carefully and even scrupulously the articulation which is inherent in, and natural to, political life' (Strauss 1989: 61). Robert Pippin (2005) argues that Kant and Hegel do the best job articulating the concepts of modern life. I contend that our era – the 'postmodern', for lack of a better alternative – requires a different conceptual system and that Deleuze may be its finest exponent. Even though Deleuze's political philosophy requires intense effort to analyse the concepts and synthesise the whole, the language almost always emerges from simple images, such as the flow of a stream or a gust of wind.

12. Much of the best Deleuzian secondary literature may be similarly diagrammed; see, for instance, Véronique Bergen's essay on the Deleuzian 'cartographic task' (Bergen 2010).

13. *A Thousand Plateaus* employs intuition, the method of Bergsonism: 'If the composite represents the fact, it must be divided into tendencies or into pure presences that only exist in principle (*en droit*)' (Deleuze 1988: 23). In *Bergsonism* Deleuze speaks of any body having two slopes, or directions, space and duration, whereas in *A Thousand Plateaus* Deleuze employs other comparable distinctions, such as between the poles of fusion and scission. On the one hand, Deleuze's philosophical corpus as a whole grapples with the question of how to convey the distinctions and interconnections between the visible and the invisible, the actual and the virtual. On the other, Deleuze tries out several 'planes of immanence' that do not necessarily present the (political) cosmos in the same way (Patton 2010a: 9–15).

14. Deleuze is a prominent figure in academic disciplines across the humanities and social sciences, but his name rarely appears in top political theory journals such as *Political Theory*, the *American Political Science Review* or the *Journal of Politics*. One purpose of this essay is to help Deleuzians explain Deleuze's importance to political theorists and indicate how his work may be translated into debates about matters such as immigration, the environment or economic justice.

15. For instance, Marc Sageman's (2008) examination of terror networks may be enriched through Deleuzian concepts of the crack (*fêlure*), regimes of signs, war machines and lines of destruction. This topic merits its own books and articles: I merely mention it as a promising research agenda for Deleuzian political scientists.

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