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Introduction: Beyond the Royal Science of Politics

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Anxieties over democracy in the post-war era, reinvigorated by philosophical nostalgia for the modern icons of civic engagement—including Jean-Jacques Rousseau, John Stuart Mill and James Madison—resulted in a flourishing industry of academic writing on political participation, especially in the English-speaking world and particularly in the field of political science. Almond and Verba’s legendary *The Civic Culture* (1963) and Carole Pateman’s *Participation and Democratic Theory* (1970), together with Robert Dahl’s and Seymour Martin Lipset’s works on democratic theory, are just a few of the most prominent names and different works that have become the pillars of a very influential clergy, which has helped circumscribe contemporary understandings of politics. The paradigm introduced by such thinkers (and supported more effervescently by republicans than by liberals) did not seek to replace or challenge the privileged political form that is ‘representative democracy’; rather, it assumed that ‘mass participation is the lifeblood of representative democracy’ (Norris 2002: 5), and identified elitism as that which impedes the reinvigoration of democratic regimes (see Schumpeter 1950).

As a sequel to this colossal effort, researchers on political activism have anchored the concept firmly within official politics through the invention of a statistical science of voting fluctuations, participation in party politics and other formal indicators; only lately has this school of thought devoted any critical attention to the evident limits and barriers of formal political participation (see Norris 2002). Other trends in political theory have derided the efficacy of activism by forcing the concept into a reductive alignment with merely habitual social habits, thereby making the future of political life dependent on banalities such

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as ‘bowling together’ (cf. Putnam 2000). By default, such developments in political theory tend to categorise the informal protests of the citizenry as the most radical of activist practices. Ultimately, the tides and modes of civic engagement (or disengagement) are seen as symptomatic of either the flourishing or the declining state of an existent ‘democratic spirit’, which is invariably celebrated *per se*, leaving no room for significant criticism of the nature of the ‘democracy’ supposedly animating that ‘spirit’.

As Deleuze and Guattari have explained, this characteristic ‘royal’ science of politics ‘continually appropriates the contents of vague or nomad science’—those forms of political investigation looking ‘to understand both the repression it encounters and the interaction “containing” it’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 367–8). One major task of new activist war machines is, then, to escape entrapment within the black hole of the majoritarian discourse on civil society, captured and defined by pervasive notions of ‘representative participation’. Although the ‘NGOisation’ of the public sphere since the 1980s (see Yacobi 2007), together with other forms of political proliferation, have broadened the visible political field, the potential of non-institutional forms of action has been weakened ideologically by a whole state apparatus comprised of research centres and budgets, instrumental teaching, and a parliamentary politics that has incorporated the discourse of civil society—all of which have effected a *sectorisation* of society and political life. The epistemological aspirations of the three ‘ideal circles’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 367) of the state, economy and civil society are commonly used to categorise political eruptions as forms of participation in the official, representative state politics. It is in this light that we must interpret the failure of academia to come to terms with the division of labour lately being imposed by the transversal relations between intellectual investigation and political situatedness embodied in *militant research*. As Deleuze and Guattari suggest, ‘we know of the problems States have always had with journey-men’s associations or *compagnonnages*, the nomadic or itinerant bodies...’ (368).

It is clear that a Jamesonian ‘strategy of containment’ is at work in the narrative tradition of royal political science. It is in the notion of ‘representative participation’ that a function of formal unity or a strategy of containment has been founded, which, as Jameson puts it, ‘allows what can be thought to seem internally coherent in its own terms, while repressing the unthinkable... which lies beyond its boundaries’ (Jameson 1981: 38). By tying official politics together with every form of political participation it can ensnare, what royal political science does

is ‘radically impoverish . . . the data of one narrative line’ – namely, that of the new activism – ‘by their rewriting according to the paradigm of another narrative . . .’ – namely, that of representative participatory politics (Jameson 1981: 22). The subversive power of political *potentia* is thus contained by this reductive strategy; civil society becomes the main territory of this imprisonment, assisted by a false equation of official participation with challenging politics.

Rather than problematising the political, this royal understanding of activism uses its ‘metric power’ to axiomatise politics, while simultaneously repressing activist experiences that refuse simply to align with ‘the given’ of formal politics. An example of this can be seen in the hostility of western states towards organisations such as ‘Wikileaks’ or the ‘Animal rights movement’, each of which are immersed in creative acts of citizenship that actualise *ruptures*. Such new scenes and acts are constantly at risk of being appropriated by this royal science of politics, which imposes upon them a model that channels civic participation according to established rules and concepts. Activisms that seek *only* to guarantee the workings of representative democracy are essentially *slave activism*s; they dwell in safety and their impact and potential is expected to be absorbed without drawing the system into new structures of resonance.

The assumption that ‘mass participation is the lifeblood of representative democracy’ not only imposes a particular model of the political, it also reinforces a pejorative way to conceive activism. By positing representative democracy (or any other regime) as the reified model of political process, theory necessarily idealises certain forms of involvement over others. For example, classical participatory theory is often blind to the creative significance of the activist energies being unfolded in such events as critical teaching in schools, revolutionary philosophical writing, the deconstructive effect of a critical assemblage that confronts patriarchal power, or of civic homosexuality which disrupts heterosexism. In fact, the assumptions underlying ‘representative’ participation are troublesome for at least two reasons. Firstly, participation in the formal political process of ‘representative democracy’ does not in itself necessarily implicate a critical attitude or action, seeking a less repressive and more creative life. To evidence this, it is enough to keep in mind some fearful recent examples of mass political support for ‘representative’ state violence, as occurred last May when thousands of Israelis marched in Tel Aviv and the streets of Jerusalem to back the killing by the Israeli Defence Forces of nine activists from the Turkish Foundation for Human Rights and

Freedoms and Humanitarian Relief, as they boarded the *Mavi Marmara* ship sailing to Gaza as part of a humanitarian flotilla. Similarly, we might remain mindful of other, no less electrifying, cases of popular support for wars and genocides in South America, Asia, Eastern Europe and Africa, or of events such as the Holocaust. In these instances, mass participation more accurately falls within the Reichian analysis of a popular ‘desire for fascism’—which lies worlds away from a participatory liberalism that idealises the commitment of the public to activist citizenship (see Isin 2009) and to the tolerant ‘good life’ that western democracy claims to represent. Secondly, passivity is not necessarily a sign of political anaemia, but may be a cultural expression that requires local explanation. Here, research at times confuses the visible with the political: absence of visible mass participation might be a sign of unconscious and pre-conscious compliance with ongoing forms of oppression, and can impact more energetically on the perpetuation of a regime than can tangible acts of the body—these modes of active abandonment produce the reign of daily microfascisms.

After Deleuze and Guattari, political activism may be approached in a fundamentally different way: without an image, without a form. As Deleuze and Guattari make clear, the interaction between royal and nomad science produces a ‘constantly shifting borderline’, meaning that there is always some element that escapes containment by the ‘iron collars’ of representation (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 367; see also Deleuze 1994). This occurs when the plane of consistency is passionately thrown against the plane of organisation, when a nomad element inserts itself in political struggles in which, for instance, the boundaries of citizenship are challenged and reopened (as occurred in the struggle associated with the *sans-papiers* movement, see Isin 2009), or barriers of ethnic segregation are challenged by new forms of interculturalism (as occurs with bilingual forms of education). It is through these ‘smallest deviations’ that smooth types of political activity dwell within the striated forms of state politics (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 371). Deleuze’s and Deleuze and Guattari’s political philosophies have created some of the conceptual tools which may be put to innovative use in activism that seeks to break with repressive traditions. Their alien relation to the standards set by the royal science of politics (see Patton 2000)—an alienation laid out in the philosophical resources they draw on, in the issues and concepts that characterise their work and, principally, in the incessant movement of their thought—points towards a richer philosophical weaponry with which to confront and possibly overcome political inhibitions, in both knowledge and practice.

In truth, Deleuze and Guattari do not provide ready-made blueprints for revolution – neither recipes nor rules – but they do certainly describe a minor art of thinking/doing, one which allows activists to target stable forms of life wherever they impede creation, wherever they are mystified by representation. Activists couldn't hope for more powerful tools to assist their diverse struggles to overcome oppression, where this is a phenomenon understood comprehensively as a reactive style of power manifested in techniques of conceptual and material capture. Indeed, the two volumes of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* are slowly but surely beginning to share some of the glory that volume one of Karl Marx's *Capital* occupied for more than a century; henceforth, we are faced with the urgency of thinking anew the nature of social struggles, and how to engage them successfully.

Exchanging conservative for 'radical' ideologies, proving the guilt of the majoritarian group, celebrating recognition of identity, seeking political representation, instigating litigation and arousing strikes, marches and protests – all these conventionally privileged resources for transformative action are now seen as conforming to a certain model of activism. As Buchanan warns, 'from conformity it is but a short step to complicity' (Buchanan 2000: 75), because activism that treads established paths of dissent is always in danger of being besieged and contained by the organism of the State. A new horizon stretches out: by engaging more forcefully with the celerity of the 'itinerant' activist, a coextensive plane between the conceptual apparatus of politics and the more radical activist practices of rupture and creation may be constructed beyond the royal science of politics, while remaining prudent with respect to the 'gravitational field' of representative participation (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 372). This is where a new science of activism is to be found:

Whenever ambulant procedure and process are returned to their own model, the points regain their position as singularities that exclude all biunivocal relations, the flow regains its curvilinear and vertical motion that excludes any parallelism between vectors, and smooth space reconquers the properties of contact that prevent it from remaining homogeneous and striated. (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 373)

The task undertaken by the contributors to this special issue is to launch a preliminary experimentation with the conceptual tools appropriate for a new science of activism, each exploring different dimensions of the 'Deleuzian horizon' outlined here. The issue is the result of a conference held at the Centre for Critical and Cultural Theory, Cardiff University,

in November 2009. Here the participants gathered to discuss the idea that Deleuze offers activism a new kind of freedom from capture by the state-forms of representative politics; indeed, the speakers described how Deleuzian frameworks often engage with the smooth spaces that radical activism simultaneously practice and seek to create.

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