Counting on Europe

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Abstract

Through a reading of Deleuze's thought of Europe, I show his concept of "becoming" to be constitutively anti-democratic. This issue is not reducible to a given moment or text of Deleuze's but is rather coextensive with his thought as thought of "becoming." For Deleuze democracy's crime is rendering the uncountable countable. That Deleuze even goes so far as to claim that democracy is *a-priori* without a future is surprising given the generous *ethos* of Deleuze's writing and teaching. Nevertheless, the force and sophistication of his critique merits response not just from students of Deleuze but from partisans of democracy in general. I think a 'democratic Deleuze' by means of the concept "right to singularity" conceived as the right to remain uncountable – to be counted as uncountable.

> Two possibilities: to unendingly make oneself small or to be small. The second is completion, thus inaction. The first is beginning, and thus act.
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> Kafka (2015), Aphorism #90[1]

Introduction

Europe is in crisis again. Leave aside, for the moment, the rigor of the concept of "crisis": we know that it probably has none. I'm only starting with what seems incontestable, that which insists on thought. According to Jean-Luc Nancy, Covid-19 would bring to Europe yet another 'identity crisis,' whereas North America and China, for example, will have been fundamentally unfazed:

> Today, Europe is importing a viral epidemic…. Europe stays open to visitors although it is not welcoming for those who can't pay … It is not surprising, then, that a virus enters the picture. Nor is it surprising that in Europe this virus creates greater confusion than in the place of its origin. Indeed, China had already established order,

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[1] I've modified the translation of this aphorism because it switches Kafka's descriptions of his two alternatives. The original German" reads: "Zwei Möglichkeiten: sich unendlich klein machen oder es sein. Das zweite ist Vollendung, also Untätigkeit, das erste Beginn, also Tat" (Kafka 1966: 50).

in regard to markets as well as diseases. Europe, on the other hand, was in a state of relative disorder: between nations and between aspirations. This led to some indecision, agitation and difficult adaptation. By contrast, the United States immediately fell back on its grandiose isolationism and its unhesitating ability to decide. Europe has always been trying to find itself – and the world, which it kept discovering, exploring and exploiting –, after which still not knowing where it stood… (Nancy 2020)

Without signing on to Nancy's characterizations of the United States or China, one should nevertheless maintain that if Europe is worth *counting on* today, this is not due to any particular cultural or historical trait, but – precisely on the contrary – due to Europe's perpetual 'identity crisis.' The name "Europe" *should* promise a milieu where one can pose political questions even when faced with an existential threat like a pandemic – a milieu where the possibility of decision is preserved rather than relegated *a priori* to sovereignty, an atmosphere where questions like "What sort of polity is worth living in?" can be heard and made to resonate.

To be sure, Europe tends to simply rediscover itself during its identity crises, only voyaging so as to come home, as Levinas had characterized Western Metaphysics. And for his part, Nancy finds in Covid what he has seemed to find everywhere else: a reason to think community, Covid as the "communo-virus" – that this name supposedly comes from an "Indian friend" doesn't make things any more convincing.[2]

Nevertheless, Covid-19 could invite us to ask questions that render Europe strange rather than familiar. And before so many states of emergency – both 'macro' and 'micro' – a rather blunt question insists: is *democracy itself* desirable? Every democrat should pose this question, even just to have something to say faced with democracy's most terrifying negations, viz. states of emergency of totalitarian intensity such as the one in Hungary (of indefinite duration and with no explicit legal tie to Covid -19 – and, curiously, many citizens demand this infinite duration of emergency be lengthened).

As it happens, the relation between Europe and democracy divides the two greatest thinkers of post-structuralism, Deleuze and Derrida: Derrida affirms Europe, while Deleuze sees it as a dead-end. Derrida's thought of democracy to come is for him essentially European, while for Deleuze democracy bars Europe from creation. My title gives away what I think is the key issue here: that of countability, along with calculability (they aren't quite the same thing).[3] I make intermittent use of the idiom "counting on" (common to French, English, and German) to connect countability to the question of faith and the promise, a connection this "literally" numeric idiom gives to think in a strangely non-numeric manner (the verb "count" here referring to and consisting in

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[2] "An Indian friend of mine tells me that back home they talk about the 'communovirus'. How could we not have thought of that already? It's so obvious!" (Nancy 2020).

[3] "It is indeed on the side of chance, that is, the side of the incalculable *perhaps*, and towards the incalculability of another thought of life, of what is living in life, that I would like to venture here under the old and yet still completely new and perhaps unthought name *democracy*" (Derrida 2005, 5; Italics in original).

nothing obviously numeric). One "counts on" something when one trusts it with futurity, to be sure, but in a particular mode, more determined than "believe in" or "trust," "count on" being used often but not exclusively in relation to a crisis present or virtual: in a common formulation, this or that person "can be counted on in a crisis" or even "in a time of crisis."

The link to "crisis," and to practicality and factual conditions, to economy too, to the structures of faith and credit which constitute every economy ("an employee/brand you can count on"), allows the idiom to communicate with the problematic of Europe, but it also perhaps bears us beyond the idiom, the insistent practicality of the idiom. To state things schematically, and in a manner which presumes forthcoming interpretation and citations: Deleuze critiques democracy in the name of what is uncountable, and Derrida affirms democracy in the name of what is incalculable. For and against democracy, each in the name of almost the same thing. That situation is already curious, even if "uncountable" and "incalculable" are not identical, and clarifying it will require a long excavation of Deleuze's anti-democratic argumentation, argumentation completely passed over, strangely enough, by the scholarship. Indeed, that Deleuze has for so long passed for a democrat is itself a symptom worth interpreting, though we won't do so here. Conversely, and primarily due to the work of Geoffrey Bennington, Derrida's affirmation of democracy to come appears much closer to the light of day than even the most circulated Deleuzian concepts, and so we'll permit ourselves to refer to Bennington's texts (1999; 2016) and to cite Derrida only sparingly.

Democracy and Futurity

In a superficial way, it's understandable that no one speaks of the anti-democratic character of Deleuze's thought, beyond an occasional acknowledgment of his aristocratic tastes, since, as far as I know, Deleuze only speaks about democracy *as such* a single time, in *What is Philosophy?*, itself probably the least understood and least read of his major works. He comments on the essence of democracy precisely when it's a question of the future of Europe, of whether there is any futurity to be had in Europe. And these are immense stakes — maybe even the only stakes possible, or at least bearing a relation to all stakes as such — since creation, the event, the new, the to-come, the X named by these terms is, for Deleuze just as for Derrida, the only unequivocal "good":

> Europeanization doesn't constitute a becoming; it constitutes solely the history of capitalism, which impedes the becoming of subjected peoples. Art and philosophy meet at this point, the constitution of an earth and a people not-there [*d'une terre et d'un peuple qui manquent*], as correlate of creation. It's not populist authors but rather those the most aristocratic who call for this future. This people and this earth won't be found in our democracies. Democracies are majorities, but a becoming is by

nature that which always subtracts itself from the majority. (Deleuze & Guattari 2005: 104)[4]

To those who expect creation either from European democracies ("our democracies") or the becoming-European of what is non-European (which is precisely not a becoming), don't count on it, says Deleuze, and the first thing to notice is Deleuze's certainty: there is no trace of "perhaps" in these lines. The tone is that of a warning, and it's a warning against counting on Europe, a correction of preconceptions one might have about "populist" authors or European democracies. You might have thought to find creation there, but Deleuze is certain you won't. The apodictic certainty doubtless derives from the status of the argumentation, namely that it's concerned with essence, the allegedly opposed essences of democracy and becoming. "Democracies are majorities" and a becoming is "by nature" what "always" subtracts itself from the majority (doesn't "by nature" pretty much already entail "always"? How to read the doubling of essential certainty marked by the addition of this "always"?).

There is a lot to say about this passage. I'll first pose two questions to leave suspended before moving to the question of minor/major which here seems central ("Democracies are majorities"). First, what does it mean to hold as negative that a people or earth not-there "won't be found"? Don't we know *a-priori* that a people and earth "not-there" won't be found? And even that they shouldn't be, because to do so would annul them? *What Is Philosophy?* depends at decisive moments on a "to come" structure analogous to Derrida's democracy to come. Philosophy would be of becoming rather than of history, that which is "to come" being co-extensive with historical conditions yet, crucially, not reducible to or determined by them (this indetermination being for Deleuze a necessary condition of any creation). It's quite interesting, besides, that Deleuze's only example of when philosophy does find its people and its earth in one of "our democracies" is a negative example, and it's none other than that of Heidegger finding a challenge to technology in National Socialism and the German people.[5] One would have to be more careful than I have time for here.

Second question, in fact indissociable from the first: what does "in" ([*dans*]) mean here ("…will not be found in our democracies")? It's clearly not a matter of merely cri-

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[4]   All Deleuze translations my own unless otherwise noted; page references are to French editions unless otherwise noted.

[5]   Deleuze's explanation of Heidegger's turn to national socialism deserves close attention; the accusation is milder than one might think. His diagnosis immediately follows the first passage we quoted in relation to democracy: "He wanted to rejoin the Greeks by way of the Germans at the worst moment of their history: what's worse, Nietzsche was saying, than to find oneself before a German when one was expecting a Greek? How would the concepts (of Heidegger) not be intrinsically tainted by an abject deterritorialization? Unless all concepts contain this indiscernible gray zone where the combatants get mixed up for a moment down on the floor, and where the tired eye of the thinker takes one for the other, not just the German for a Greek, but the fascist for a creator of existence and of liberty. Heidegger lost himself in the paths of reterritorialization because these are paths without beacons or parapets" (Deleuze & Guattari 2005: 104).

tiquing electoral politics, as if one would take "in our democracies" in the sense of "having to do with democratic governance" to have Deleuze saying something like "don't bother calling your senator." Deleuze's critique takes aim at democracy itself, not any particular empiric attempt to realize its essence or any aspect of its concept that could be accepted or rejected. It's clear that he doesn't mean "in" in a simple geographic sense, meaning "within the borders of European democracies," but, interestingly, the word "geographic" leads us to a helpful interpretation: Deleuze uses "in" in what can be rigorously called a "complex" geographic sense. Recall that this chapter is titled "Geophilosophy" and that geography is explicitly theorized in opposition to history. I find it most plausible to take this "in" in an "atmospheric" sense, such a sensitivity for atmosphere and milieus being what distinguishes becoming *qua* material element from history, argumentation Deleuze had developed a few pages earlier:

> [Geography] tears history away from the cult of necessity to privilege the irreducibility of contingence. It tears it from the cult of origins to affirm the power of a 'milieu' (what philosophy finds with the Greeks, Nietzsche was saying, is not an origin, but a milieu, an ambiance, an ambient atmosphere…) …The event itself needs becoming as a non-historical element. The non-historical element, says Nietzsche, resembles an ambient atmosphere where alone can life be engendered, which disappears when this atmosphere is wiped out. It's like a moment of grace… (Deleuze & Guattari 2005: 92)

The "ambiance" discussed here is positive, and even theorized in a manner that seems like it can't but be positive ("it's like a moment of grace"). Not positive, of course, in a calculable sense, but precisely in the sense of exceeding the determinability which would constitute history as such. The structure of the modality "ambiance" or "milieu" here is, in its form even before any given "content," more open to contingence than that of "origin." Yet why can't one imagine an enervating milieu, an ambiance of death, even of shame (this then being an essential tendency, for Deleuze, of every majority, including democracy as an example)? If one granted such a possibility, the form of "milieu" Deleuze here equates with becoming would be necessary but not sufficient for creation. One can't have it both ways: either becoming *qua* milieu would too have the possibility of going "bad," or the form of milieu would not be guaranteed its identification with becoming. In any case, an "atmospheric" reading of "in our democracies" lines up quite well with the discussion just above that phrase:

> And we don't experience the shame of being human only in [*dans*] the extreme situations described by Primo-Levi, but also in [*dans*] insignificant conditions, before the baseness and vulgarity of existence which haunts democracies, before the propagation of these modes of existence and of thought-for-the-market, before the values, ideals and opinions of our epoch. The ignominy of the possibilities of life given to us appears from inside [*du dedans*]. We don't feel ourselves to be outside of our epoch,

on the contrary we don't cease to make shameful compromises with it. (Deleuze & Guattari 2005: 103)

The enervating atmosphere of democracies has a peculiar relation to the word "in," and thus to the theorization of ambiance which constitutes "geology" and "geo-philosophy" (thought here, it's worth remembering, given the decisive citation of Nietzsche, in *opposition* to genealogy).

The danger is being reducible to your moment. The baseness and vulgarity which "haunts" democracies is of a piece with becoming-historical, understood as becoming closed into one's epoch, entrapped within the possibilities given by one's historical moment. The problem with democracies is not just "in" them, but also has, itself, the form of "inificiation," of becoming-enclosed within one's historical context. The threat of democracy, here, communicates precisely with the threat of "in" itself, the threat that the inside/outside distinction becomes rigorous, that one becomes really and actually reducible to one's historical context, which would be the ultimate or absolute violence, foreclosing the possibility of creation. This violence would also, *a fortiori*, be the absolute threat to Europe. Whether such an absolute violence is possible would be the whole question (it would not be thinkable in terms of tendency). On the one hand, the apodictic certainty of Deleuze's formulations regarding democracy seems incongruent with the geo-philosophical mode of analysis as he develops it – the whole point of the latter being to replace origins and necessity with tendencies and contingency and thereby disqualifying statements like "this people and this Earth won't be found in our democracies." On the other hand, it's also precisely the threat of democracy that ambiance be reduced to history and contingence to necessity: the tendency of democracy for Deleuze, of every majority, is *to eliminate tendency as such*, to reduce life to history, the becoming-pure of the constitutively impure (Deleuze & Guattari 2005: 90).

Deleuze's Minoritarian Thought

We can now pass more directly to the question of major/minor so clearly decisive in Deleuze's critique: "Democracies are majorities, but a becoming is by nature that which always subtracts itself from the majority." What is a majority for Deleuze? And a minority? How to distinguish between them, and what does it mean, exactly, to say that democracies "are majorities"? Would a formulation like "minoritarian democracy" be paradoxical, or merely oxymoronic? Don't democracies often try to protect minorities? It seems prudent to briefly leave *What is Philosophy?* in order to resolve such questions. *A Thousand Plateaus* and *Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature* develop explicitly and analytically Deleuze's thought of the pair major/minor, which, while perhaps not homogeneous across his work, is consistently characterized by an identifiable problematic.

That problematic is that of counting, of how to count, of what counts as countable, and

what it means to say of an element, or of a set or subset of elements that they are countable or not. What seems to happen in *What is Philosophy?* is that democracy, indeed criticized in *A Thousand Plateaus* and elsewhere, but only ever in its electoral form and related moments (we'll soon cite a relevant passage at length), accepts its crime, heretofore contingent or localizable to its determined forms, into its essence. Democracy's essential crime consisting in rendering the uncountable countable. One cannot delimit a majority without doing so. This operation is either indissociable from or identical to representation, a word whose political and philosophical significations meet at this point, thereby uniting Deleuze's seemingly disparate *œuvre*, at least its political and philosophical "sides." In this light, one considers, on the one hand, "the order of representation" (Deleuze 1995), the dogmatic image of thought which betrays the essence of thought, shown in *Difference and Repetition* to reach its apotheosis in Hegel's dialectic, and, on the other hand, political representation as the turning back to itself of the *demos*, the irreducible ipseity or wheel motion of democracy of which Derrida speaks at the beginning of *Rogues* (2005: 19).

The crime of rendering the uncountable countable is precisely the problem of majorities for Deleuze. Deleuze does not address what seems to me a natural question: is democracy simply an example of a majority, or is it in fact the majority *par excellence*, the constitutional form not only hospitable to but constitutively demanding majoritarianism? One suspects the latter. But how to define "majority" and "minority"? For Deleuze, "majority" and "minority" are first of all qualitative types, and insistently so, absolutely non-quantitative in the precise respect that the number of elements in the given set is irrelevant to its status as major or minor ("white male" is, according to Deleuze and Guattari, always a major category even if white males are numerically minor). What *is* relevant for distinguishing major and minor, indeed that which defines their distinction, is the criterion of countability. The difference between the major and the minor is the difference between the countable and the uncountable:

> Thus [this 'thus' referring to the argument I just mentioned, that whites becoming numerically minor would not prevent the category "white" from remaining qualitatively major] what defines a minority is not its number, but rather the relations interior to its number. A minority can be numerous or even infinite, a majority as well. What distinguishes them is that, in the case of the majority, the interior relation to its number constitutes a set, finite or infinite, but always countable while the minority is defined as a non-countable set, whatever the number of its elements. (Deleuze & Guattari 1980: 587)

Let's look at the example of "Man" to try to clarify Deleuze's admittedly difficult argument. Why, precisely, as Deleuze will go on to say, is the set denoted by "Man" qualitatively major? What does the "interior relation of its number" being "countable" mean here? The "countability" must be thought as internal to the set, and all countability in general

would seem for Deleuze to have its condition in such a structure. A major set contains a constant through which it evaluates itself: "Majority entails a constant either of expression or content, as a standard of measure in relation to which it evaluates itself," whereas a minority is "continuous variation" ("there is a universal figure of the minority conscience…it's precisely continuous variation", Deleuze & Guattari 1980: 133). A given minority can, of course, be defined in a majoritarian mode, that is, in relation to constants (ex. uncritical identity politics) but this would not be their essential tendency *qua* minorities. A majority *qua* majority presupposes a constant which allows it to self-evaluate and thereby be a majority. The majority is crowned in the double apparition of itself, pursued against the dispersion of elements which constitute the object of the constant's violent filtration. The self-evaluation enabled by the constant means a majority appears twice in the structure of its set, once as the constant functioning as evaluating criterion and the second time as the constant extracted from a given element of the set:

> Suppose that the constant or model is "any adult-white-heterosexual-city-dwelling-male-speaking-a-standard-European-language" (the Ulysses of Joyce or Ezra Pound). It is obvious that "the man" has the majority, even if he is less numerous than the mosquitos, the children, the women, the blacks, the peasants, the homosexuals…, etc. It's that he appears twice, once in the constant, once in the variable out of which one extracts the constant. The majority supposes a state of power and domination, and not the inverse. It supposes the standard of measure and not the inverse. (Deleuze & Guattari 1980: 133)

Numerous questions arise. First, what is the specifically major/minor character of this operation? That is, doesn't every category or operation of categorization, insofar as it necessarily has a "constant" which defines what is inside or outside the category, include an analogous structure to that of the majority as developed here? Yes, but that fact doesn't constitute an objection: it only testifies to the generality of such questions, which are just as political as they are philosophical. Yet if every category or model shares this operation, how is the concept "white male" any more majoritarian than "woman," "animal," etc.? This difficulty is resolved with the claim that minorities *qua* categories, as for example definable ethnic groups or a definable gender, do indeed have the same problem as majorities. Minorities are structurally homologous to majorities but are less capable of carrying out this sorting function. Minorities are sets definable in relation to the majority-function as mediums for becoming: "only a minority can serve as an active medium for becoming, but in such conditions that it ceases in its turn to be a set definable in relation to the majority" (Deleuze & Guattari 1980: 357).

The essential distinction is not between majorities on the one hand and minorities understood as identifiable sets on the other, but rather between majority and becoming-minor. Becoming-minor is even becoming *tout court* ("…there is no majoritarian becoming, majority is never a becoming", Deleuze & Guattari 1980: 134). In Deleuze's frame-

work, there are, on the one hand, majorities and minorities, which have the problems accompanying any definable set, but of which the latter distinguishes itself from the former as medium for becoming, and on the other hand, that which is minoritarian or becoming-minor:

> Women, whatever their number, are a minority, definable as state or subset; but they don't create but in rendering possible a becoming, which they don't own, in which they themselves have to enter… Of course, minorities are objectively definable states, of language, of ethnicity, of sex, with their ghetto territorialities, but they must also be considered as germs, as crystals of becoming, which don't count but [*qui ne valent qu'en*…] in precipitating incontrollable movements and deterritorialization of the average or of the majority. (Deleuze & Guattari 1980: 133)

Let's move to a brief typology of concepts to summarize, and we say "concept" in order to keep as close as possible the "philosophical" and "political" sides of this question, leaving aside, sadly, all the seismic upheavals in the structure of the concept pursued in *What is Philosophy?*. There are major concepts, or majorities, which denote countable sets and which are thereby always, in a strange manner, becoming smaller, cannibalizing themselves in the violent selection of elements in relation to their constant: a quick example is the progressively more and more desperate attempts of National Socialism to define "Aryan." There are then minor concepts, which are countable sets defined in opposition to major sets, those which major sets dominate in order to exist as major, and which encounter the same problems in relating their elements to their constant ("Jewishness," to take the same example, is as problematic an identity as any other) but, and this is the advantage over major concepts, the constitutive categorization process in minor concepts is somehow blocked or limited. One can even say that minor concepts "win in losing," that is, they become foyers of creation simply in the failure of their majority function relative to another more dominant majority function, even if they yet remain insufficient in themselves for becoming. There are, finally, minoritarian concepts, which don't denote countable sets, and whose minoritarianism consists in a certain displacement or infection of categoriality as such. These concepts don't, finally, denote sets at all, but rather "delimit" a sort of proliferating series (not really even being concepts), and are of the manner "and…and…and…" which is *a-priori* illimitable. Major concepts, minor concepts, minoritarian "concepts." Three respective examples: "white," "black," and "non-white":

> A minority can contain just a small number, but it can also contain the greatest number, constitute an absolute majority, undefined. It's what happens when authors, even supposedly of the left, reprise the great capitalist cry of alarm: in twenty years, "whites" won't form but 12% of the world population… They don't therein content themselves with saying that the majority will change, or already changed, but rather

> that it is worked over by a proliferating minority in its very concept, that is *qua* axiom. And indeed, the strange concept of 'non-white' does not constitute a countable set. (Deleuze & Guattari 1980: 586-587)

We leave a more detailed analysis of "non-white," indeed a strange concept, for another time, and note in passing that this final category, that of minoritarian concepts, can helpfully clarify the Deleuzian interest in concepts as varied as mass, assemblage, and multiplicity. Indeed, a multiplicity is neither one nor multiple precisely because it is not countable.

How to relate Deleuze's shift on the question of democracy to Europe, to the prospect of counting on Europe?[6] Again, Deleuze never spoke positively of democracy, indeed speaking of it almost never, but what is yet more crucial is that, before *What is Philosophy?* he never spoke on its essence, never made analyzing democracy *qua* democracy a theoretical concern, whereas in *What is Philosophy?* democracy appears at what could be called a properly anti-messianic moment in order for Deleuze to say: don't count on creation in democracy. The change is from an enervating tendency, majoritarianism properly so-called, related to democracy only contingently, to the assignation of a majoritarian tendency to democracy in an essential manner. To say "democracies are majorities," as if they were one majority among others, doesn't seem to grasp the radicality of the demonstration, even if it's what Deleuze "meant": democracy is for Deleuze, even if he doesn't know it, perhaps *the* majority, the most essentially major majoritarianism because it is figured as nothing but. We remarked earlier on the perplexity of supporting claims with apodictic certainty not only in a "geo-philosophical" framework (which wishes to grasp milieus and ambiances that give rise to contingent events), but also as regards this particular question, in which democracy's violence *qua* enervating atmosphere would paradoxically consist in "de-atmosphere-ing," thus in historicizing. Democracy threatens to historicize us, to trap us in our epoch. The "in" of "in our democracies" seemed to us to mean something like "among the (majoritarian) atmosphere of democracy," but we also noted that this violence is also that of "in" itself, of the possibility that inside/outside become identical, and that one becomes co-incident with one's historical moment — no future, no to-come, then, in that case.

After so many abstract glosses, let's make things a bit more concrete with what seems to be one of the most decisively programmatic passages of *A Thousand Plateaus*, just two

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6 There are substantial changes on the question of Europe across Deleuze's *oeuvre*. Compare two claims, properly opposites of each other, the first from *A Thousand Plateaus*: "Transcendence, a properly European sickness" and the other from *What is Philosophy?*: "Only the Occident expands and propagates its foyers of immanence." The reason we're concerned with democracy here rather than such changes is that even if *What is Philosophy?* has a more positive reading of Europe (insofar as immanence is "positive"), the decisive reason Europe still ends up being a dead-end for Deleuze seems to us its democratic character, provided of course one has also freed one's affirmation of Europe of any "Europeanization" (leaving open whether doing so is simple or possible, though this would be Derrida's hope and wager). See Deleuze & Guattari (1980: 28; 2005: 93).

pages from the book's concluding section, in a passage that opens with "Our age is becoming that of minorities":

> Here again, it's not to say that the struggle on the level of axioms is without importance: it is, on the contrary, determining (at the most varied levels, struggle of women for the vote, for abortion, for employment, struggle of regions for autonomy, struggle of the third world; struggle of masses and oppressed minorities in the regions of the East or of the West…). But, at the same time, there is always a sign to show that these struggles are the index of another coexisting combat. However modest a demand, it always presents a point that the axiomatic can't tolerate when people demand to pose for themselves their own problems, and to at least determine the conditions under which they can receive a more general solution (hold to the Particular as innovative form). One is always stupefied by the repetition of the same story: the modesty of minority demands, to start, along with the impotence of the axiomatic to resolve even the least corresponding problem. In a word, the struggle around axioms is even more important given it manifests and crosses, itself, the gap between two types of propositions, flow propositions and axiomatic propositions. The power of minorities is not measured by their capacity to enter and impose themselves in the majoritarian system, nor even to topple the necessarily tautological criterion of the majority, but to make prevail the force of uncountable sets, however small they are, against the force of countable sets, even infinite, even toppled or changed, even entailing new axioms, or even, and even moreso, a new axiomatic. The question is not at all "anarchy or organization," not even "centralization or decentralization," but that of a calculus or conception of problems concerning uncountable sets, against an axiomatic of countable sets. While this calculus can have its compositions, its organizations, even its centralizations, it doesn't pass along the path of States nor through the process of the axiomatic, but through a becoming of minorities. (Deleuze & Guattari 1980: 587-588)

The question of counting is here foregrounded as the central political question of *A Thousand Plateaus*, not just in relation to minorities, but in general (this is why it is opposed to "anarchy vs. organization" and "centralization vs. decentralization," which would be alternative political questions). Politics would be a matter of making uncountable sets prevail. Unfortunately, we don't have time to rigorously delimit the notions, here obviously decisive, of axiom and axiomatic. I only want to mark the structure of the importance given to what Deleuze thinks under this name, viz. one could also call them "democratic" struggles, struggles of minorities for representation or recognition (the vote, of course, but also employment, etc.).

How to interpret the passage? The set-up here is very curious, seeming to say everything at once. Democratic (thus axiomatic) struggles are "determining," yet also merely the index or result of another struggle, *but yet also* "even more important [than just being determining]" because they testify ("manifest and themselves cross") to the gap

between "flow propositions" and "axiomatic propositions," a distinction we won't examine in depth but which corresponds to something like "minoritarian propositions" vs. "majoritarian propositions." An axiomatic struggle would be "valuable" in a particular way: in failing its minoritarian essence, "manifesting" and "crossing" the gap between these two types of propositions, a gap which it would presumably attempt to bridge in integrating the minority into the prevailing axiomatic.

Permit an aside before we continue with the passage: how crucial is the concept of democracy for understanding Deleuze's trajectory? Could one say that, in fact, if one ignores what's going on with the word "democracy," Deleuze's position hasn't really changed from *A Thousand Plateaus* to *What is Philosophy?*? To say that a people and an earth not-there won't be found in our democracies – does that in the end translate simply to saying what he already said, over and over, including in the above passage: that majoritarian struggles, along with minority struggles as struggles of inclusion into majority, whatever their importance, are something other than and even opposed to creation? Maybe. But one would then be unable to explain the elevated importance of the word and concept democracy in *What is Philosophy?*. I haven't had time to talk as much about capitalism as would be necessary, but I mark now that capitalism, indissociable from democracy as Deleuze critiques it (we indeed saw this in the above quotations, but in fact the whole question of the axiomatic functions, in Deleuze's discourse, to unite, as a structure common to all of them, capitalism, democracy and the rights of man), is not worth counting on in *What is Philosophy?*. An immense transformation will have taken place between *A Thousand Plateaus* and *What is Philosophy?*: capitalism is none other than the anchor of the messianic dimension of the final pages of *A Thousand Plateaus*, and it is so according to its "most profound law":

> If the two solutions [in the relation of the axiomatic to minorities] of extermination and integration hardly seem possible, it's by virtue of the most profound law of capitalism: it never ceases to pose and repulse its own limits, but it doesn't do it but in giving rise to so much flux in all directions that escapes its limits. *It's not effectuated in the countable sets which serve it as models without constituting in the same stroke uncountable sets which traverse and dislocate its models*. (Deleuze & Guattari 1980: 590)

Very briefly – and in the lines immediately before this passage – Deleuze and Guattari had endorsed a reconceptualization of socialism as the necessity of challenging capitalism in the name of minorities. Yet things seem to be going pretty well as regards capitalism and minorities relative to *What is Philosophy?*. Indeed, from *A Thousand Plateaus* to *What is Philosophy?* the essential tendency of the epoch has changed, and massively so, from an *a-priori* if not victory, an *a-priori* confidence in the continual rebirth of the possibility of creation. Now the epoch is given over to the possibility, itself not yet absolute, of *absolute defeat* of creation at the hands of the essential tendency of democracy (or

capitalism, the difference matters little here). In *What is Philosophy?* the democratic epoch is the epoch to end all epochs, insofar as it is characterized by rendering its ep-ochality inescapable ("we don't feel ourselves outside of our epoch, on the contrary..."). That nothing essential has changed from *A Thousand Plateaus* to *What is Philosophy?* is not, it would seem, the most fertile hypothesis.

Not only does what's going on here seem crucial for the question of Europe, but the probable reason for the change is also indissociable from something very European: old age. *What is Philosophy?* is a book written by an old man, and Deleuze explicitly theorizes this fact, starting from the first line of the book, where he meditates on the conditions for asking the question "What is Philosophy?", or, more precisely, on the conditions of it finally becoming-direct:

> Perhaps one can't pose the question *What is Philosophy?* except late, when old-age comes, as well as the hour to speak concretely... It's a question that one poses in a discrete agitation, at midnight, when one no longer has anything to ask. Before, we were posing it, we weren't ceasing to pose it, but it is was too indirect or too oblique, too artificial, too abstract, and we were presenting it, we were dominating it in pass-ing more than being seized by it. We weren't sober enough. We had too much desire to do philosophy, we weren't wondering what it was, except as an exercise of style; we hadn't reached this point of non-style where one can finally say: but what was it, what I did all my life? There are cases where aging gives, not an eternal youth, but on the contrary a sovereign liberty, a pure necessity where one plays with and enjoys a moment of grace between life and death... (Deleuze & Guattari 2005: 1)

It is true that this passage is positive, in the sense that old age is argued to here have enabled the possibility that *What is Philosophy?* be written, but it's a positivity condi-tioned by a profound anxiety, a "discrete agitation" where one can't but ask after the point of one's whole existence. What Deleuze's shift might teach us is that perhaps Eu-rope, in its eternal old age, and along with the totality of its liberal capitalist democra-cies, lives off such a danger, has all its hope for creation conditioned by such a danger, that Europe can't but constitute itself as creative except in the shadow or light of such a danger. The *a-priori* would go the other way in our epoch, on the side of danger rather than creation, which would, paradoxically, confer the possibility of creation, just as old age granted the possibility of writing *What is Philosophy?*, because to know with apodic-tic certainty that creation will always be there is also to annul it. Reading Deleuze against himself, this thought of old age might provide resources for deconstructing Deleuze's critique of democracy.

Another (related) possibility, less deconstructive: what Deleuze brushes up against, perhaps without realizing it, and whether or not it is a "real" possibility, is the possibility that Europe, instead of being a to-come that is, to be sure, finite, in fact turns out to be essentially unkillable "itself" because it doesn't exist "in itself," being a structure that is

without identity or substance. For deconstruction Europe would be indissociable from a democracy to come empty/emptying of content to denude itself before the other and be (hopefully) irreducible to any Eurocentrism. But instead of Europe being that, what if Europe is an ambiance or atmosphere that has aged too much, is past its prime, and must make use of the "grace" of such a moment to become something else, in part, perhaps, through posing sobering questions, like, for example, "What was Europe?," or "What have we [good Europeans] been doing all our lives?"

Conclusion: From Becoming Democratic to the Right to Singularity

We've seen that, for Deleuze, becoming is something like the opposite of democracy. So it's quite mysterious when he appeals, at the end of the chapter of *What Is Philosophy?* that we've been reading, to "[a] becoming-democratic that is not reducible to the rule of law..." (Deleuze & Guattari 2005: 108). He doesn't explain what this is, but the phrase makes clear that Deleuze still wants to think becoming with democracy even though this combination appears nonsensical. Deleuze never said a word in favor of democracy, but here he seems unable to stomach giving up all reference to democracy – even when his argumentation demands it.

Tentative hypothesis: for a *democratic Deleuze* one must focus on what his texts *do* rather than what they *say.* At the level of propositions, Deleuze is an anti-democrat, and this anti-democratic desire lies at the heart of his thought. Earlier I had proposed a partial explanation for why Deleuze has passed for a democrat in the scholarship: *What Is Philosophy?* – the most obviously aristocratic text – is at once very difficult and very little read. But I underline that this is a partial explanation because the same conceptual rhythms that I have drawn out in *What Is Philosophy?* are at work everywhere in Deleuze, even if in a less explicit manner.

People read Deleuze as a democrat because, in a certain way, Deleuze wrote, argued and taught like a democrat. One indication of this that touches on my privileged example: Deleuze spoke as if he were dealing with democracy as such, but the timber of his accusations, including vocabulary like "the rights of man" and "rule of law," would seem to indicate that his opposition depends on an implicit splitting of the essence of democracy, an opposition between, on the one hand, democracy *qua* spirit of democracy or anti-authoritarian micro-event ("becoming democratic") and, on the other hand, democracy *qua* legislation and above all *atmosphere* of majoritarianism. But whoever said democracies must be majoritarian? Concern for protecting the rights and interests of minorities is, after all, an insistent concern of democratic political theory.

I leave aside, for lack of space, the dangers of Deleuze's anti-democratic tendency, however substantial I believe them to be. To be clear: I am not calling Deleuze's propositions fascist, but his already mentioned alibi for Heidegger's Nazism is, I believe, not the

only cause for alarm in this direction (another example: "The reverence that people display toward human rights – it almost makes one want to defend horrible, terrible positions" Deleuze 1996). The issue should be treated at length and with the utmost seriousness.

Instead of exploring that danger I want to conclude by asking, on the more 'positive' side: what would a "becoming-democratic that is not reducible to the rule of law" actually entail? Is there a way to think becoming-democratic in a Deleuzian manner? Certainly, human rights are off the table. Yet, fascinatingly enough, Deleuze's hatred of human rights and the "rule of law" coexisted with a professed admiration for jurisprudence, with Deleuze even going so far as to speculate that he would have been a lawyer if not a philosopher (de Sutter & McGee 2012: 1). Paul Patton seems to me to hit the nail on the head when he frames this incongruity: "[Deleuze] criticises … human rights … [a]t the same time, he advocates a practice of jurisprudence understood as the creation of new rights, thereby raising the question: what would it mean to create new rights?" (Patton 2012: 15).

I want to offer for reflection a 'new' right, even a Deleuzian right *par excellence*: the right to singularity. The phrase comes from none other than Félix Guattari, who nevertheless does not develop it.[7] I have elsewhere argued that the right to singularity is a plausible candidate for a constitutional 'first-principle,' if post-structuralism were to legislate itself, which I believe it must. I cannot here enter into all the paradoxes and *aporias* the concept entails. But I can give a basic outline and relate it to what we've explored, *viz.* the motif of counting.

What does "right to singularity" mean? First meaning: to bring right and rights *to* singularity – extending jurisprudence to the domain of singularities. There is no question of giving up on rights or the law, at least not for Deleuze, and probably not for any sober discourse. But the law as presently constituted orbits around "persons," "humans," and "subjects," – three inextricable concepts – and no constitution in the world escapes unscathed from this 'personologist' tradition of legal thought – it is in fact the Enlightenment tradition. It's not that the Enlightenment was bad, but rather that we need new visions of jurisprudence if we are to respond seriously to Deleuze's critique of democracy.

Nevertheless, "right to singularity" might seem a strange protagonist for a new legal order, given that the concept "singularity" is perfectly indeterminate and not organized by nominal or expressive content. What can we say about the "right to singularity"? Is it any right worthy of the name? A first signature predicate of singularity, which is in fact not rigorously a predicate: its *pre-subjective* status. Throughout his work, Deleuze ac-

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7   "Whatever the case may be, the purpose of the division of labour, like that of emancipatory social practices, will have to end up being re-centred on a *fundamental right to singularity*, an ethics of finitude that is all the more demanding with regard to individuals and social entities the less it can found its imperatives on transcendent principles" (Guattari 2013: 11-12. Italics in original).

cords the pre-subjective status of singularity a great deal of importance.[8] "One person, one vote" is today repeated as a truism, but how do we know *a-priori* how many or what sorts of singularities traverse each "person"? And non-persons like animals, ecosystems, aliens and affects are all singularities: can we swear there is no debt to them when they come before the law?

If we cannot swear to be without debt to singularities, it follows that we must ask: how to *count* singularity? How does singularity vote? Second meaning of "right to singularity": singularity has the right to be counted and perhaps even to be counted as uncountable. This is a solution for Deleuze's concerns regarding democracy insofar as singularity is *a-priori* minoritarian. 'Becoming-democratic' as the right to singularity – and for Deleuze singularity is even a synonym for becoming.[9]

But how, finally, could singularity have the force of a decision? How many legal cases, after all, have non-speaking beings actually managed to decide? Jacques Derrida would turn the question around. Perhaps pre-subjective singularity is all that ever decides, however difficult it remains to think "a freedom that would no longer be the power of a subject, a freedom without autonomy, a heteronomy without servitude, in short, something like a passive decision" (Derrida 2005a: 68).

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8   "We believe in a world where the individuations are impersonal and the singularities are pre-individual: the splendor of 'on' [*on* is an untranslatable French pronoun which can signify any pronominal place -DMM]. Thus the aspect of science-fiction, which follows necessarily from this *Erewhon*. What this book should have rendered present, this is thus the approach of a coherence that is no longer ours, neither that of man nor of God nor of the world. In this sense, it should have been an apocalyptic book (third 'time' in the series of time)" (Deleuze 1968: 4).

9   See, for example, the apposition "an event, a singularity" and phrasings like "Events or singularities" (Deleuze 2001: 30-31).

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