

# The Event of Revolution: Thinking the Radically New

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In stormy seas can halcyon seasons make,  
Turn rapid streams into a standing lake;  
—Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, book VII<sup>1</sup>

In the popular imagination political revolutions are thought of as moments of radical rupture, as veritable metamorphic events that radically change the 'body' of the state.<sup>2</sup> In political and social theory, in which the phenomenon is given an important place when reflecting upon change, it is, however, looked upon quite differently. Rather than focusing on the moment of revolution itself, these theories have generally concentrated on its causes and, to a lesser extent, also on its outcomes.<sup>3</sup> This makes revolutions into simply one moment in a chain of historical progress, robbing it of its 'romantic' radical potential. This general consensus on approach does not mean, however, that there is general agreement on what a revolution is, how it is caused, why it occurs or what it can effect.<sup>4</sup> It remains an elusive phenomenon, and has recently become even more equivocal with the contributions of cultural studies to the field of research which focuses on conscious agency rather than structuralist determinations.<sup>5</sup>

In this paper I want to foreground the 'event of revolution' rather than the historical context or the conscious actors within this context. I want to explore the characteristics, dynamics and possibilities of this 'event' with the theories of Deleuze, one of the contemporary theorists of the event.<sup>6</sup> I will mark out, for reasons of clarity, some minimum qualifiers of the present common sense idea of 'political' revolutions and will compare and contrast these with Deleuze's conceptualization of the revolutionary event. This will, I believe, clarify some of his ideas and positions and might also help explain some peculiarities of revolutions. What I ultimately want to know is whether the 'event of revolution' can be seen as a catalyst for radical political and social

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<sup>1</sup> trans. by Samuel Garth, John Dryden and others <<http://www.sacred-texts.com/cla/ovid/meta/meta06.htm>> [accessed 16 November 2006]

<sup>2</sup> I am referring with the term revolution here, as most historians and social scientists who study this phenomenon implicitly do, to the common sense meaning of the word which denotes a political and/or social revolution. This excludes broader, metaphorical uses of the term like 'industrial revolution', 'internet revolution' etc. I will explicate this later in this paper.

<sup>3</sup> Clifton B. Kroeber, 'Theory and History of Revolution', *Journal of World history*, 7.1 (spring 1996), 21-40 (p. 21).

<sup>4</sup> Kroeber, p. 24

<sup>5</sup> Cf. John Foran, 'Discourse and Social Forces: The Role of Culture and Cultural Studies in Understanding Revolutions', in *Theorizing Revolutions*, ed. by John Foran (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 203-226.

<sup>6</sup> I do not want to downplay the contribution of Guattari to Deleuze's thought, but I will nevertheless refer only to Deleuze, except where I refer explicitly to their joint works.

change and, concomitantly, whether thus Deleuze's 'virtual metaphysics' can have a bearing on actual developments in today's world.

To say that I will focus on the 'event of revolution' rather than on its historical conjecture presumes that one can isolate an event from its context and actors. Taking the opposite position, however, presupposes that a revolution not only 'comes about' in a specific context, but that it is caused by it and that the dynamics of the revolution effects its outcomes. This is the structuralist position as well as the cultural studies perspective, only their focus is different—with the structuralists concentrating on long-term historical social and economic (even demographic) cumulative or incremental causes and equally long-term aftereffects, and the culturalists instead zooming in on the role of revolutionary agents in the breakdown and successive reconstruction of the structures of the state.<sup>7</sup> Empirical evidence, however, does not always fully substantiate these presuppositions.

Think for instance of what has become known as the revolutions of 1989. The collapse of Soviet-style communism was predicted at regular intervals since its establishment.<sup>8</sup> When it finally came, however, it came totally unexpected. Even political observers or members of the lingering opposition within the Eastern European states did not see it coming nor could have hoped for the speed at which regime after regime collapsed.<sup>9</sup> Retroactively several causes have been identified, but none can as yet convincingly argue why the revolutions took place at that specific time.

At the other end of the event, Forrest Colburn has questioned the link between revolutions and their outcomes.<sup>10</sup> He has concluded on the basis of remarkable parallels of revolutionary outcomes in culturally and geographically disparate settings that 'ideology' can serve as a blueprint for post-revolutionary regimes. He attributes this to the ideological 'vogue' of socialism which started around the end of WWII until, roughly, the end of the 1970s. From that time on 'liberalism', a mix of a specific kind of democracy and capitalism, has become

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. Timothy P. Wickham-Crowley, 'Structural Theories of Revolution', in *Theorizing Revolutions* (see Foran, above), pp. 38-72.

<sup>8</sup> Stephen White, *Communism and its Collapse* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 73.

<sup>9</sup> White, p. 71. Ash quotes several people involved in the Polish Solidarity movement who, as late as spring 1989, believe that the final collapse will 'maybe [come] in thirty years' (p. 16) or, more optimistically, 'in four years.' (p. 19). Ash, *We The People: The Revolution of '89 Witnessed in Warsaw, Budapest, Berlin and Prague* (London: Penguin, 1999).

<sup>10</sup> *The Vogue of Revolution in Poor Countries* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994)

fashionable.<sup>11</sup> That the revolutions of 1989 thus longed for 'freedom' was not necessarily a result of its actors or its dynamic (nor of a 'natural' inclination which 'end of history'-proponents seem to suggest) but could be seen as a result of a fashionable ideology (just as, although still a regional vogue, religion has resurfaced as an attractive idea).

One of the revolutions of 1989 also offers a reflection on the culturalists centralizing of 'revolutionary actors' which determine the direction and speed of the revolution. Timothy Garton Ash writes that the 'traditional' East German opposition, a mixture of left-wing protestantism, Marxist revisionism and green and peace movements, which had led the October revolution, were disconcerted with the outcome of this revolution. Rather than reunification, which they regarded as a 'sell out', they had wanted to create a genuinely democratic but decidedly socialist German Democratic Republic.<sup>12</sup>

I am not arguing that there are no links between the event of revolution on the one side and its historical context and the agents in this context on the other, but I am saying that these relations are not always as direct as has been proposed. Thinking about revolutions in the light of their relation with its historical context is not necessarily the most productive way to look at the phenomenon. It can structure the event according to a 'logic' that was retroactively given to it, can organize or translate it by its correspondence to the teleology of a preceding (chain of) event(s), or, alternatively deny any relation with other events because of its 'unique' historical conditions, etcetera. In all these cases, even the last one, it can drown out the element that is most important for Deleuze, that is its radical creative potential for the new.

In historical phenomena such as the revolution of 1789, the Commune, the revolution of 1917, there was always one part of the *event* that is irreducible to any social determinism, or to causal chains. Historians are not very fond of this aspect: they restore causality after the fact. Yet the event is itself a splitting off from, or a breaking with causality; it is a bifurcation, a deviation with respect to laws, an unstable condition which opens up a new field of the possible.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> I draw on two accounts of Colburn's theory, the first in Foran 'Discourse and Social Forces', p. 207, and the second in Paul Berman, 'The End of History and Its Discontent', *Dissent*, Spring 2003. <<http://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/?article=516>> [accessed 17 November 2006].

<sup>12</sup> Ash, p. 73.

<sup>13</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, 'May '68 Did Not Take Place', in *Two Regimes of Madness: Texts and Interviews 1975-1995* ed. by David Lapoujade, trans. by Amy Hodges and Mike Taormina (New York: Semiotext(e), 2006), p. 233-6 (p. 233).

For a self-proclaimed and celebrated theorist of the event<sup>14</sup> Deleuze has little to offer as to what an event actually is. His most direct approximations of the event can be found in his late works, with the chapter 'What is an Event?' in his *The Fold* (1988) and the chapter 'Prospects and Concepts' in *What is Philosophy?* (1991), although he has written on the concept in many earlier writings, notably in *The Logic of Sense* (1969).<sup>15</sup> These texts, however, do not offer a clear or consistent conceptualization of the concept of the event. In ordinary language an event denotes a 'happening' that has a certain duration during which something changes. The common sense idea of the kind of revolutionary event that we are looking at would be close to that definition but adds to it, I would provisionally offer, that it concerns a relatively short duration during which relatively many, we could say historic, changes, albeit of a limited nature, take place which are fueled by those who are not in authority. Can Deleuze's concept of the event be used to explore this kind of event? Let us first explore this rather less a 'common sense' concept.

In *What is Philosophy?* Deleuze and Guattari try to distinguish philosophy from science and art. This informs an attack on logic which is, they write 'reductionist not accidentally but essentially and necessarily'. (*WP*, 135) 'When logic ventures into the calculus of problems,' they continue, 'it does so by modeling it, isomorphically, on the calculus of propositions.' (*WP*, 139) But more interesting than a 'string of linked propositions' is what can be isolated from the flow of interior monologue, or from the 'strange forkings of the most ordinary conversation.' (*WP*, 139-140)

[This] would be able to show how thought as such produces something *interesting* when it accedes to the infinite movement that frees it from truth as supposed paradigm and reconquers an immanent power of creation. But to do this it would be necessary to return to the interior of scientific states of affairs or bodies in the process of being constituted, in order to penetrate into consistency, that is to say, into the sphere of the virtual, a sphere that is only actualized in them. *It would be necessary to go back up the path that science descends*, and at the very end of which logic

<sup>14</sup> Jussi Vähämäki and Akseli Virtanen note Deleuze's remark that in all his books he has been seeking the nature of event. 'Deleuze, Change History', in Martin Fuglsang and Bent Meier Sørensen (ed.) *Deleuze and the Social* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), p. 222. Also Derrida wrote 'Deleuze is, above all, the thinker of the event. (...) He remained the thinker of the event from beginning to end.' 'I'll Have to Wander All Alone' trans. by David Kammerman <<http://www.usc.edu/dept/comp-lit/tympanum/1/derrida1.html>> [accessed 20 November 2006.]

<sup>15</sup> *The Fold, Leibniz and the Baroque*, trans. by Tom Conley (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992). I have used the version on <<http://pratt.edu/~arch543p/readings/Deleuze.html>> [accessed 16 November 2006]. Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* trans. by Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchill (London: Verso, 1994), pp. 135-162. Further references to this book are given as 'WP' after quotations in the text. *The Logic of Sense* trans. by Mark Lester with Charles Stivale, ed. by Constantin Boundas (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990).

sets up its camp (the same goes for History, where we would have to arrive at the unhistorical vapor that goes beyond actual factors to the advantage of a creation of something new). (*WP*, 140)

It is in this virtual sphere that we find the event. The virtual could be thought of as chaos, a chaotic multiplicity, ‘the pure *Many*’, writes Deleuze in *The Fold*. The event, however, is not chaotic but rather a chaos that has become consistent. He explains this through the conceptualization of the screen:

Chaos does not exist; it is an abstraction because it is inseparable from a screen that makes something—something rather than nothing—emerge from it [...] *even though this something differs only slightly*. [...] Chaos would be [...] the sum of all possible perceptions being infinitesimal or infinitely minute; but the screen would extract differentials that could be integrated in ordered perceptions.<sup>16</sup>

States of affairs or bodies are actualized from this virtuality (the virtual chaos-become-consistent). The virtuality, however, is not an origin or a transcendental realm, nor are the states of affairs or bodies fully individuated particularities. The virtuality is ‘pure immanence’ and multiplicity; it is *potentiality* and the state of affairs nor the body can ‘be separated from the potential through which it takes effect’ (*WP*, 153). It is this potential that forms a field of activity and development, of bifurcations and transformations, an actual field that is not prone to unify itself in an ordered system because it is haunted by the virtual. ‘The event, is not what occurs (an accident),’ writes Deleuze in *The Logic of Sense*, ‘it is rather inside what occurs, the purely expressed. It signals and awaits us.’<sup>17</sup> The event ‘subsist’ in or ‘insists’ on the actualization (the state of affairs, the body etc.), but itself eludes or remains indifferent to actualization. It is what signals the actualized towards action. It is here that we can see the event as the metaphysical backdrop of Deleuze’s thought, for, as Ole Fogh Kirkeby observes, ‘the core of Being (*ousia*, essence) can never be Being (*einai*, ‘esse’) itself, in so far as this core is the event.’<sup>18</sup> Deleuze is thus not interested in being but rather in becoming.

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<sup>16</sup> Deleuze, *The Fold*. In *What is Philosophy?* this notion of the screen is replaced by what Deleuze called a ‘plane of consistency’.

<sup>17</sup> Quoted in Ole Fogh Kirkeby, ‘Eventum Tantum: To Make the World Worthy of What Could Happen To It’, *Ephemeris*, 4.3 (2004), 290-308; (p. 292) < <http://www.ephemeraweb.org/journal/4-3/4-3kirkeby.pdf> > [accessed 23 November 2006].

<sup>18</sup> Kirkeby, p. 291.

Before we can backtrack what this immanent metaphysics can produce in the context of revolutions, we need to explore one more crucial ‘characteristic’ of the concept, that is the element of time. The event, Deleuze says, has a ‘double structure’. On the one hand it is actualized in the ‘present’ of a state of affair or a body. On the other hand it eludes this actualization and hence sidesteps this present moment and is thus free of the limitations of the actualization. What it sidesteps is teleological progression. The event is never *present*. Deleuze has throughout his writing given many names to this ‘untimely’ halycon time, this ‘third synthesis of time’ which contracts the past and the future in the present, but always as an endurance in time ‘in which we see it as still to come and as having already happened’ (*WP*, 158). He has called it empty time, time out of joint, dead time, virtual time, and the time of the eternal return—the Nietzschean concept that Deleuze reworks to produce a return of the radically different.<sup>19</sup> This groundless temporal heterogeneity, which ‘founds’ the movement of the empirical time of common sense, is ultimately creative, writes Deleuze in *Bergsonism* (1966), because each moment of this time is itself a kind of creation.<sup>20</sup> As Robin Durie explains,

Each moment is creative in two ways. On the one hand, each present moment of time is itself twofold, ‘its very up-rush [jaillissement] being in two jets exactly symmetrical, one of which falls back [retombe] towards the past whilst the other springs forward [s’elance] towards the future.’ In this double movement, memory is recreated by the falling back of the present, while the future is created by the forward impetus of the present. On the other hand, in thus creating the future, each perception is itself created anew by the impetus of time since in each new present the perception is covered ‘with a cloak of recollections,’ memory thereby serving to ‘create anew the present perception.’<sup>21</sup>

So this untimely element of the event constitutes the event as creative and springing forward to a future which cannot be known. It thus creates difference, surplus, lines of flight, the absolute new, and change.

Is a revolution such an event, such springing forward to an unknown future? Let us return to the provisional outline of the common sense ‘historical’ revolutionary event that I have given: a

<sup>19</sup> Cf. *Difference and Repetition*, trans. by Paul Patton (London: Athlone Press, 1994).

<sup>20</sup> *Bergsonism* trans. by Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (New York: Zone Books, 1988).

<sup>21</sup> ‘Creativity and Life’, *The Review of Metaphysics*, 56 (2002) <<http://www.questia.com/PM.qst?jsessionid=FN8JLdqpBNdnLcVr2QJpWTmqPtLnD32WD5vbt1zXTSxnxnHnvG1h w!244758214?a=o&d=5000637265>> [accessed 21 November 2006] Quotation adapted.

relatively short ‘happening’, fueled by those who are not in authority, during which relatively many (historic) changes of a nevertheless limited nature take place. This definition contains several minimum qualifiers. (1) It takes place in a short term, which denotes the ‘momentum’, the rush forward, the acceleration of change. I inject the adverb ‘relatively’ because it can change in length from revolution to revolution, but what it does not denote is something that is retroactively identified as a revolution, such as metaphoric uses of the term in for instance the ‘industrial revolution’. (2) A revolution is a ‘bottom up’ process, not a ‘top down’ fueled enterprise. This excludes coup d’etats, wars, political reforms and similar phenomena which can have revolutionary effects, but which are not revolutions as such. (3) The injection of ‘historic’ means to qualify and quantify the ‘relatively many changes’ which should together at least be monumental, something which makes it stand out in time. (4) The limited nature refers to the fact that, domino effects excluded, a revolution generally remains within the limits of a nation state and often even leaves many of the state’s institutions intact to facilitate an easier reconstruction of the country’s infrastructure. It is often only in civil war situations that the territorial borders of the nation state start to blur.

With these four provisional qualifiers I believe to have described the minimum distinctive features which describe the common sense notion of a revolution. Let us see how these features link up with Deleuze’s theoretical conception of the event and his writings on revolutionary events. The first qualifier, the momentum, immediately runs into problems, although one could argue that Deleuze’s dead time and our common sense feeling of an acceleration of change might not be mutually exclusive in that the slowing down of speed allows for a large number of changes which might feel like an acceleration of time. The second qualifier, the ‘bottom up’, i.e. its immanence, is more straightforward. There should not be a transcendental element, like an emperor or even a revolutionary vanguard, in a true revolutionary event. Plain and simple.<sup>22</sup> The third qualifier, the monumentality, is again more difficult, but one could argue that Deleuze’s event escapes history. When an event comes to pass, Deleuze says, it even surpasses its coming to pass.<sup>23</sup> It, too, would thus stand out in time. The fourth and final qualifier, its limited nature, needs

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<sup>22</sup> Richard Barbrook argues that Deleuze and Guattari have not been able to escape a fundamental contradiction when it comes to their immanent theory and the tacit privileging of their own roles as intellectual. ‘The Holy Fools: Revolutionary Elitism in Cyberspace’ in *Micropolitics of Media Culture: Reading the Rhizomes of Deleuze and Guattari*, ed. by Patricia Pisters (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2001), pp. 159-176 (p. 165).

<sup>23</sup> Deleuze, ‘We Invented the Ritornello’, in *Two Regimes of Madness* (see Deleuze and Guattari, above), pp. 377-381 (p. 378).

even more creative reading to make a connection. One could try to point out that the revolution is effected by the actualizations of the event, which are, as Deleuze himself says, more limited than the event itself.

Deleuze's writings, especially of his joint work with Guattari, is so 'literary' and has created so many equivocal buzzwords that a superficial reading of bits and pieces is bound to underpin any worldview you might have, be it anarchism, Marxism or even neo-liberalism.<sup>24</sup> A little more rigorous reading however cannot help but notice the many contradictions in the different ideas on the revolutionary event. A Deleuzian revolutionary event is not necessarily a revolution as we know it. Bernard Yack wrote that 'in recent years the New Left's intoxication with Marxist theory has given way to a rather painful hangover. In the cold light of dawn, many radicals have begun to take a second, more critical look at the theories that once inspired them.'<sup>25</sup> Even though Deleuze and Guattari have always remained to call themselves Marxists<sup>26</sup> they too seem to have steered away from what Yack calls 'totalistic theories of human emancipation', or seem wary of what they themselves call the type of utopia that is revolution (WP, 100). They even seem disillusioned with revolutions asking why 'revolutions turn out so badly in reality when in spirit they promise so much?' (WP, 103) This disillusionment might raise some eyebrows as they were written in 1991, shortly after the euphoria of 1989. It prompts Didier Eribon in an interview that appeared in *Le Nouvel Observateur* shortly after the publication of *What is Philosophy?* to enquire how it links up with the current climate. Deleuze responds as follows:

The current political situation is very muddled. People tend to confuse the quest for freedom with the embrace of capitalism. It seems doubtful that the joys of capitalism are enough to liberate a people. The bloody failure of socialism is on everybody's lips, but no one sees capitalist globalization as a failure, in spite of the bloody inequalities that condition the market, and the populations who are excluded from it. The American Revolution failed long before the Soviet Revolution.

Revolutionary situations and experiments are engendered by capitalism itself and show no sigh of disappearing, unfortunately. Philosophy remains tied to a revolutionary becoming that has nothing to do with the history of revolutions.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Barbrook, p. 173.

<sup>25</sup> 'Toward a Free Marketplace of Social Institutions: Roberto Unger's "Super-Liberal" Theory of Emancipation', *Harvard Law Review*, 101.8 (June 1988), 1961-1977 (p. 1961).

<sup>26</sup> Derrida, 'I'll Have to Wander All Alone'.

<sup>27</sup> Deleuze, 'We Invented the Ritornello', p. 379.



What he seems to mean is that the ‘revolutions’ that we have seen in Eastern Europe are not so much revolutionary events but rather revolutionary *situations* engendered by capitalism itself. Revolutions, in other words, as spectacles, simulacra, Hollywood-style ‘liberations’, which lack creation, lack resistance to the present or criticism of its own time (WP, 108, 99). It looks like revolution, but it does certainly not qualify for a Deleuzian revolutionary event.

Evaluating the revolutions of 1989 as mere revolutionary spectacle, is that not derogatory for the experiences of all those people in the Eastern European streets, fed up with the ‘old regime’, craving for something new? Is that not an elitist, vanguardist position? Possibly, but to be sure, Deleuze does not mean that these revolutionary situations were not real. It certainly involved a real deterritorialization, only, however, to be reterritorialized—not on the universal democratic State, or human rights, but on a global market, because this ‘is the only thing that is universal in capitalism’ (WP 106). But the global market is not a transcendental concept. Capitalism, Deleuze and Guattari explain, ‘functions as an immanent axiomatic of decoded flows.’ (WP, 106) And nation states, no longer paradigms of overcoding, are realizations of this immanent axiomatic. Seen in this way, the qualifiers that we identified thus seem to sit well with capitalism. It too thrives on immanence, but where nation states still work on overcoding they need to be deterritorialized to be properly reterritorialized on a model of realization of this immanent axiomatic (hence the rupture with its concomitant momentum and the monumentality) while retaining the nation state itself (hence the limit). But instead of a springing forward, however, the modes of existence and thought that these ‘pseudo-events’ creates are not utopic or radically new, on the contrary. They reproduce modes of existence and ‘thought-for-the-market’ that we know all too well. The common sense notion of a revolution is in fact the opposite of the Deleuzian concept of the revolutionary event.

This does not mean, however, that the political and social theorists—whose conceptualization of revolutions were, as we saw, strangely at odds with the popular imagination—were right to focus on the structural causes and outcomes or on the revolutionary agents. Yes, again superficially, there are parallels. When Charles Tilly writes that he rejects the very notion of revolution as a singular event, this structuralist assertion paradoxically coincides with Deleuze’s concept of multiplicity.<sup>28</sup> When cultural theorists observe the politics of the self-

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<sup>28</sup> Cf. Richard Sakwa, ‘The Age of Paradox: The Anti-revolutionary Revolutions of 1989-91’, in *Reinterpreting Revolution in Twentieth-Century Europe* ed. by Moira Donald and Tim Rees (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2001), pp. 159-176 (p. 160).

organization of civil society, this reverberates Deleuze's writing on, for example, the body without organs.<sup>29</sup> However the Deleuzian revolutionary event is very different from these theories.

Deleuze acknowledges that there 'are all sorts of correlations and echoes between [history and becoming]. Becoming begins in history and returns to it, but it is', he maintains, 'the opposite of history'.<sup>30</sup> And in response to the culturalists Deleuze would point out that you cannot 'will' what occurs, that the event is without a cause and without a subject.<sup>31</sup> I would be curious, too, to hear Deleuze's reaction to the recent political-philosophical reformulations of his concept of multiplicity which via its Italian translation now has entered the English language as 'multitude'. Can they stand the rigorous immanence that Deleuze affirms? Would they be able to 'create vacuoles of non-communication, circumventors, to escape control.'<sup>32</sup>

For that is the intervention that Deleuze seeks to accomplish with the revolutionary event. That is how Deleuze responds when Negri, his friend and collaborator and the advocate of the multitude, proposes that the Marxist utopia of a transversal organization of free individuals might today be less utopian than before.<sup>33</sup> That Deleuze has remained a Marxist means for him that he doesn't 'believe in a political philosophy that would not be centered around the analysis of capitalism and its developments.'<sup>34</sup> It does not mean that he still shares a believe in large scale revolutionary action. But he does not give up on change, he is not content to accept capitalism as the end of history. That is what he means when he says that 'philosophy remains tied to a revolutionary becoming that has nothing to do with the history of revolutions.' He means that he will remain tied to the revolutionary event, but this is a veritable 'micropolitics': 'It may be that nothing changes or seems to change in history, but everything changes, and we change, in the event (WP, 111)

The event is the opposite of the monumental. An 'authentic' revolutionary event might in the common sense definition of a revolution not be successful, even ignoble or trivial, but, even when its material traces are recuperated by the capitalist axiomatic or covered up by a teleological progression, it has had the chance to create excess: 'An event can be turned around, repressed, co-opted, betrayed, but there is still something that cannot be outdated. [...] It is an opening onto the

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<sup>29</sup> Sakwa, p. 166.

<sup>30</sup> Deleuze, 'We Invented the Ritornello', p. 377.

<sup>31</sup> Derrida, 'I'll Have to Wander All Alone' and Jussi Vähämäki and Akseli Virtanen, p. 222.

<sup>32</sup> Deleuze, 'Contrôle et devenir', in *Pourparlers: 1972-1990* (Paris: Minuit, 1990), pp. 229-239 (p. 238).

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 236.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Derrida, 'I'll Have to Wander All Alone'.

possible.<sup>35</sup> And this revolutionary event extends by prehension, leaving excess, molecular residue. Subjects prehended by the event ‘keep it open, hang on to something possible.’—a ‘possible’ that did not pre-exist but was created by the event.<sup>36</sup> It is unlimited and untimely, it has no beginning nor end. It is always there, endures, as the other side of pseudo-events, and can relaunch, as if spontaneously, new struggles whenever the earlier ones are betrayed. (WP, 100) ‘It launches a people, an earth, like the arrow and discus of a new world that is neverending, that is always in the process of coming about—“acting counter to time, and therefore acting on our time and, let us hope, for the benefit of a time to come.”’ (WP, 112)

### Post Scriptum

*Concepts* are inseparable from *affects*, i.e. from the powerful effects they exert on our life, and *percepts*, i.e. the new ways of seeing or perceiving they provoke in us.  
—Gilles Deleuze<sup>37</sup>

I started this paper with the idea that revolutions were metamorphic phenomena and that especially this ‘sudden’, ‘unexpected’ element of revolutions was not addressed by ‘mainstream’ political theory. I thought Deleuze might shed some light on this element of revolutions. I think his thought does open up some thought on revolutions, but his conception of a revolutionary event, it turns out, is—despite its emphasis on the creative and sudden springing forward which it can bring about—rather the opposite of a metamorphosis. I would not want to conclude, however, that Deleuze’s thought cannot function as a catalyst for radical political and social change. As I think I have pointed out ‘real’ radical change is a complex process, but Deleuze’s method of small but rigorous incisions just might in the end still have some radical effects. So my answer to the ultimate question I asked at the onset of this paper would be: yes, I do believe Deleuze’s virtual metaphysics has a bearing on our present world. But we need to extend his theories, take them again further, find new openings, create new possibilities, new—radically new—futures.

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<sup>35</sup> Deleuze, ‘May ’68 Did Not Take Place’, p. 233.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., pp. 234-5.

<sup>37</sup> Deleuze, ‘Letter to Uno: How Félix and I Worked Together’, in *Two Regimes of Madness* (see Deleuze and Guattari, above), p. 238.