Untimely Becoming
The Queer Time of the Political

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Abstract: Time is not the first concept that comes to mind when we think about democracy. Yet, every notion of the "political" is based on a specific perception of time. While institutionalized democracies are legitimized by a time that appears as objective and linear, more radical approaches to democracy rely on specific "political" times. Drawing on Claude Lefort, Gilles Deleuze, and Félix Guattari, I argue that there are two logics of time that lead to very different political potentials: With Lefort, constant struggles leading to the production of a linear time appear as the political; Deleuze and Guattari emphasize the political potential of queer times that escape any pregiven identity, subjectivity, and linearity. If we conceive of democracy as the structure that realizes the political, the question of time becomes crucial to understand its meanings.

Keywords: becoming minoritarian, Claude Lefort, Félix Guattari, Gilles Deleuze, philosophy of time, queer theory, radical democracy

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The Time of the Political

Time is certainly not among the first concepts that come to mind when we think about democracy. Yet time is clearly essential to any common understanding of democracy: democracy implies regular elections; after a certain period, the democratic subject – the sovereign – must be able to elect its government. Without such elections, and without the possibility to regularly legitimize or change the government, we would not claim to live in a democracy; rather, we would have to acknowledge that we are living in a totalitarian state. In other words, we cannot use the concept of democracy to describe the institutions we live in without implying a certain understanding of linear time. However, more radical approaches to democracy argue that defining democracy by the ability to vote regularly is insufficient. These approaches not only reject the hegemonic use of the concept of democracy as a description of a political system and its institutions but also dismiss the hegemonic connection

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between a linear time and democracy. If we follow these approaches, we must ask once again whether we can truly say that we are living in democratic times.

I will argue that in order to answer this question—and in order to understand how democracy and the potential for political change are understood in different approaches—it is crucial to ask about the *time of the political.* This question relates directly to the question of the meaning of democracy, because in this article, democracy is not understood as an institutionalized system, but rather as a structure that realizes the political.[1] I will focus on two different approaches that go beyond the conventional understanding of linear clock time. First, approaches to so-called radical democracy rely on a time that is both contingent *and* coherent: the political leads to the production of a linear history that appears pregiven, even though it is the result of political struggles. Beyond this, there is a second form of political change that escapes these theories. Drawing on Gilles Deleuze's concept of time, I argue for the existence of a queer time: the reason for political change are untimely encounters that cannot be understood within linear time frames. This concept of a queer time relates to a political potential that is often not recognized as such.

Neither of the two temporalities should be understood as naturally given. Neither of them is a clock time, meaning a linear, self-evident, and continuous flow of time that can be objectively measured (Barbehön 2022: 92, 94f). Instead, both logics of time are political: time is the result of political activities or development. The two political times are radically different. This does not mean that one is right and the other is wrong. On the contrary, both offer meaningful ways of interpreting specific forms of transformation. So, if we want to understand different forms of political change, we also need to consider their underlying temporal assumptions. I will therefore ask precisely about the time of the political.

In order to discuss the concept of time as it appears in various approaches to radical democracy, I will focus on the works of Claude Lefort. Although there are certainly differences between the theories within this tradition, many of them are based on the idea that the political should be understood as an infinite struggle for the empty locus of power—a concept first introduced by Lefort. His arguments have thus shaped the fundamental assumptions of radical democratic thought and can be regarded as a starting point or even a common ground of many of these theories (Marchart 2023: 115; Oppelt 2019: 348). In a second step, I will discuss Deleuze's concept of time. His approach is rarely discussed in political theory, but when compared with approaches to radical democracy, an entirely different concept of political change emerges.

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Claude Lefort: Democratic Struggles for Rights and Identity

According to Lefort, with the democratic revolution, the "locus of power" became irretrievably "*an empty place*" (Lefort 1988: 17, empahsis in original). In the Ancien Régime, the monarch was able to occupy the locus of power. His authority was assumed to be God-given, and thus he embodied the legitimate rule of society as a whole. The democratic revolution led not only to the loss of the king's head but also to the loss of the transcendental legitimization of rule. With the revolution, the seemingly pregiven order was replaced by a structural undecidability: the social order could no longer be accepted as given but was recognized as changeable.

Since in modern societies there is no longer a transcendentally legitimized order, every existing order is the result of struggles. These struggles are about creating a hegemonic meaning and an imaginary understanding of unity (idem: 48). This means that society is always already the result of the process through which it has given itself a specific and contingent form (idem: 11). And this form-giving is political: The political, as Lefort understands it, may not be confused with institutionalized politics exercised by the state apparatus or bureaucratic institutions. Instead, he understands the political as the mode in which society constitutes itself, as the force that creates a notion of a social unity and meaning (ibid.; cp. also Oppelt 2019: 349).

Although unity is created by claiming that this unity is absolute, this claim cannot be maintained indefinitely, because every "unity" is based on insurmountable divisions: to understand something as a unity, an inside must be created that is necessarily distinguished from a constitutive outside (Lefort 1988: 17). Defining unity and social meaning thus necessarily means negating the very unity by creating its outside. The realization of unity is structurally impossible. Consequently, social unity is both necessary and impossible. To constitute any social meaning and order, society has to appear as a unity; at the same time, every attempt to establish such unity fails. What appears problematic, however, is precisely the pre-condition for the existence of democratic change: the radical undecidability opens space for the political, for never-ending struggles (idem: 19).[2]

In short, Lefort argues for the radical contingency of society and of meaning in general. Society constitutes itself through democratic struggles and the production of symbolic meanings that temporarily disguise the constitutive lack. What is decisive for my argument is that this understanding of the political is based on a certain notion of time: to appear as necessary, a coherent and continuous story, a narrative about the past must be established. The struggles are about changing the history by telling a different story about who has always been part of the unity. Such a

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narration is not merely a fiction opposed to reality. On the contrary, it is the fictive story that structures society and reality. The struggles can be fought in various ways, ranging from more or less violent confrontations to more subtle forms of activism that change the existing hegemonic knowledge and meanings. Yet all of these struggles are attempts to appropriate history: against the existing narratives, new, supposedly preexisting stories are told until they appear as naturally given. The result of the struggles is that the established order appears as a necessary past that has led to the present and will also structure the future. The contingent order of time is inscribed in every present moment. Thus, the political is based on constant struggles to create a linear history: a history that appears as a natural sequence of consecutive moments, even though the linearity is the result of the struggles that conceal its contingency and the constitutive lack.

The task of democratic structures and institutions is to prevent the created meaning from becoming universally and permanently accepted; they must forestall any totalitarian closures and keep the locus of power empty. Elections in representational systems are one way to achieve this; regular elections ensure that no rule is permanent, and this way, the contingency is inscribed into the system itself (Oppelt 2019: 351f).[3] The existence of human rights is another way of ensuring that the locus of power cannot be permanently occupied. Every unity is created by producing an outside. But at the same time, human rights are meant to apply equally to all. Hence, the ones who are excluded can challenge the established order (Lefort 1988: 27). Therefore, human rights give the possibility to fight for an alternative unity by claiming equality and freedom (Lefort 1986: 241f). Human rights, Lefort argues, prevent any totalitarian closures.[4] These struggles are mainly about integration and recognition; different stories are told about who has always been equal and human. The aim is the recognition of excluded minorities who are trying to become part of the social unity and to define their own identity as part of the hegemonic identity.

This leads to the following assumptions regarding the relationship between Lefort's concept of the political and time. On the one hand, there are always struggles in the present that aim on creating a new social order by telling different stories about the past. These struggles are necessarily based on the claim that there is a universally valid history—time is framed as being continuous, linear, and coherent. On the other hand, democracy is supposed to institutionalize contingency; it is meant to prevent any universal closures by keeping the locus of power empty. So, the notion of democracy is also based on the assumption that any order is political and contingent. Following Lefort, democracies are based

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both on the assumption of the discontinuity of time and the necessity of establishing continuity. It is precisely in this tension that the political takes place; it is the process through which continuity is created by identifying unity and attempting to occupy the empty locus of power.

The concept of time inscribed in this theory thus goes far beyond the democratic right to vote. The political is the struggle to transform the unity and social meaning – and hence the existing time frame. This means that the democratic sovereign and the existing order change. Nevertheless, the struggles are mainly about inclusion; those who are excluded must become part of the unity. The political, in this sense, is the process of redefining society. What previously escaped the existing order is redefined as part of it; the result of the struggle is that anything "new" comes to appear as if it has been part of the unity all along. However, following Deleuze and Guattari, one could argue that the political is what escapes without being captured. According to them, the political is an untimely becoming[5] – "untimely" because it escapes any notion of a linear time.

Why Another Understanding of the Political Is Necessary

Throughout their work, Deleuze and Guattari criticize two major motifs that structure modern philosophy. The first is that negativity is presupposed as a necessary component of critical thinking; the second is that philosophy subordinates thinking to preexisting identities. Both can be used to argue that Lefort misses a certain political potential.

Regarding the first point, Deleuze argues that presupposing a negativity means merely reproducing what already exists; the same persists in negative terms. Through negation, one might be able to reject something, but nothing genuinely new is created (Deleuze 2010: 62–64, 66). This rather abstract argument can be applied to Lefort; although he argues that in modern societies there is no essential ground, he introduces a new kind of foundation – namely, the absence of a ground itself. Society constantly produces itself in struggles that are the result of the constitutive lack. The reason for the struggles is precisely that there is *no* transcendent reason, *no* preexisting structure that could present itself as a universal truth (cp. also Marchart 2005). Thus, the essential ground is the absence of any ground, or, in other words, the negativity itself. Deleuze would criticize that by presupposing the negative this way, the political and productive becoming is repressed and only the same can be reproduced (cp. also Krause and Rölli 2010: 47f).

This leads to the second point Deleuze and Guattari problematize: the sedimented logic of identity. They criticize approaches that assume

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that political transformation must be based on some form of identity – the subject, institutionalized structures, identity categories, or, in short, an order that appears to be self-identical because it presupposes the existence of a continuous time. If we read Lefort from this perspective, his approach becomes problematic. Even if the existing order is contingent, it remains based on the logic of identity. The unity of society and its order are constituted by *identifying* who is part of the society. This means that both the democratic subject and the meaning of society are identified in constant struggles. Identity always exists and leads to the struggles about demarcations, exclusions, and meanings. Those who are excluded are struggling to change the order so that they can be recognized as an equal part of society. Hence, the struggles are about occupying the empty locus of power by identifying who is part of the society; they are about inclusion and recognition, or, in other words, about who and what is the subject of the social order. Deleuze and Guattari, however, would argue that political transformation becomes possible only if we stop presupposing the necessity of identity (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 110f).

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari: The Political Return of the Untimely Time

In *Difference and Repetition,* Deleuze introduces his three syntheses of time. Following Deleuze, I argue in this article that the untimely time is the reason why everything is constituted – it is the ontological movement of a constant becoming.[6] With his ontology, Deleuze sets the time in a specific way. Any order of time that appears linear and continuous is actually imaginary (though nonetheless real) and covers the ontological nonlinear time. But only the untimely time is the reason for any kind of change and hence the basis of the political.

Deleuze describes the three syntheses as repetitions. With repetitions, everything (significance, being, time, the subject, etc.) is constituted, and every repetition produces a singularity (Deleuze 2010: 1). This means that according to Deleuze, factual identity does not exist. Even if we try to produce (or rather repeat) something identically, we always produce singularities, and these singularities do not remain the same over time and space (idem: 22). However, these singularities cannot be perceived by the subject. To be able to grasp them, the subject has to determinate them as identities. It repeats the object of perception mentally and, through this mental repetition, introduces an imaginary copy, an identity. So, whenever we encounter a difference, we repeat it and create an identical representation (idem: xix). This also means that according

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to Deleuze, there are two very different repetitions: one that is a mental repetition that produces an imaginary identity, which he calls "bare repetition," and one that is the real repetition that produces a singularity to which he refers to as "covered repetition" (idem: 25–31). The bare repetition is not a factual repetition; it does not really produce identical content. However, even if it is imaginary, it is nonetheless real; everything that materially appears *for* the subject is the result of a subjective repetition that subsumes difference under an identical concept. Nevertheless, every attempt to produce the "same" fails. Under the notion of the same, the subject produces singularities (idem: 22). So, there is simultaneously the complex or covered repetition. It is covered precisely because the bare repetition conceals it with the imaginary identity. This covered repetition is productive, different, and differentiating. It produces "something effectively new in history" (idem: 11). Whenever the covered repetition produces something, the bare repetition covers it. For this reason, the covered repetition is the "interiority," the "heart" of the bare repetition (idem: 27).

These two repetitions are the foundation of Deleuze's "three syntheses of time" (2010: 90–156). Deleuze argues that with the repetitions, not only subjectivity and the perception of reality but also different times are produced: subjective times that are the product of imaginary and identical repetitions and appear as being continuous; and the productive time, the untimely, which exceeds any continuity, subjectivity, and identity. However, only the untimely time is the reason for transformation and political change. Deleuze describes three dimensions of time production: in the first synthesis, the living present is produced; in the second synthesis, the past; and in the third synthesis, the untimely time returns, which gives way to the creation of a new future.

With the first synthesis, Deleuze describes how encountering a singularity leads to the constitution of a "living present" and a "larval subject" (2010: 91, 100). Deleuze calls it a *living present* because it is the lived experience of an instant now; it is the present moment in which a first notion of a past and a future are established; and it is alive because it is the encounter itself that leads to the creation of something new.

The subject cannot perceive the singularities. When confronted with something new, a mental process renders this moment perceivable; the passive mind repeats the moment and assumes that the same already happened before and will also happen in the future. This means that the underlying real repetition is covered with a bare repetition by the creation of an imaginary temporal and linear identity (idem: 90). With this imaginary, the mind creates a notion of the past and the future in the very moment of the encounter; in this very moment "[t]he past and the

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future do not designate instants distinct from a supposed present instant, but rather the dimensions of the present itself" (ibid.).

Although the first synthesis is based on a repetition that subsumes the singularity under an identity, it is crucial that it depends completely on the singularity. The very moment is repeated, so the assumed identity relies completely on the moment that is encountered. It is not a subjective reflection but completely passive and does not rely on any pregiven knowledge (idem: 91, 94; Diefenbach 2018: 167). It is the "living present" (Deleuze 2010: 91) because it is the experienced moment without depending on a history. Even though the singularity is determined as an identity, it is analogous to the singularity. Hence, with it, "something new [is drawn] from repetition—namely, difference" (idem: 94).

The living present is also the first step of the subject constitution. Deleuze argues that in the passive state, the organism is what is perceived; the constituted self relies on the experience. The subject in this state is neither stable nor reflective. It is a temporary self that exists only in relation to the present. As soon as the moment passes, the self dissolves, as does the perceived present. Hence, the selves of the first synthesis are unstable, and they fall apart; they are only "larval subjects"; the first synthesis "is the system of the dissolved self" (idem: 100). It can be concluded that with his first synthesis, Deleuze rejects the notion that there is a preexisting and stable essence of a subject. Instead, the subject is constituted in relation to the moments and impressions it experiences.

According to Deleuze, the second synthesis is both the reason for the passing of the time and the reason why the subject does not continue to fall apart. While with the first synthesis, the present was constituted, this second synthesis constitutes the past (idem: 100f), and it consists of two different contractions. One part is an active contraction in which a reflecting subject produces its own history, for example, its own past in form of a memory. The other part is also passive (as was the first synthesis), which means that it happens without any active involvement of a subject (idem: 100–104). Deleuze's introduction of the latter, the passive synthesis, remains rather cryptic, but it can be read as a description of the main force of time, namely that there is always something that insists, that repeats. Something is happening because something new is constantly produced. This force is ontological, unchangeable, a force that has to be there because, without it, nothing would exist and change at all. Deleuze argues that this passive synthesis leads to a multiplication and layering of possible and virtual pasts. It is the possibility of having a past; it is the virtual horizon of the passing time (idem: 101f).

With the active synthesis instead, the subject constitutes its memory: The subject creates its own history and thus a stable identity by assuming

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a necessary, continuous succession of past moments. This means that the subject repeats moments, assumes these moments have happened in the past, and arranges them in a stable order (idem: 105). The creation of the memory is based on bare repetitions; the subject creates representations of the past and inscribes these imaginary pasts in every present moment (idem: 91). While the bare repetition of the first synthesis was an immediate repetition of the encountered moment, this second bare repetition is active and reflective. The actively constituted past is "superimposed" on every present moment (idem: 92), and the presupposed identity influences the perception of the subject. Instead of being open to the encounter, which would lead to the constitution of something new (and a new self), the memorized and preexisting identity is reproduced and inscribed in every present moment. This means that to preserve one's own subjective identity and prevent oneself from dissolving, the subject introduces a memory that negates the occurring singularity. Instead of creating something new, the second synthesis leads to repetitions that merely reproduce pregiven identities.

Now, we seem to have ended at the same point as Lefort did. The subject creates a contingent history and assumes that it is a natural and continuous story. The contingency and non-linear time are covered by the story of an identity. Important for my argument, however, is that Deleuze does not argue that this continuity is political. On the contrary, only the returning and untimely difference may be understood as a political.

This is why the third synthesis is crucial for any political transformation. Deleuze argues that the third synthesis prevents the creation of a stable and fixed order. The reason why every identity necessary fails is that in the heart of the bare repetition (with which the identity is produced) remains the covered repetition. Every repetition produces a singularity—even the one with which the subject produces its own history. At the heart of the active synthesis (the creation of a stable and continuous order of time) remains the passive creation of multiple possibilities that always exceed the actualized history. There is always the repetition that produces something new. The subject fails to reduce the difference to the determined identity, and the identity is destroyed. With the returning difference, the process of constitution is initiated again. Something new is first established and then memorized. The eternal return, as Deleuze calls it, leaning on Nietzsche, is the reason for every process of constitution, the basis for the contingent reality, meaning, and subjectivity, but at the same time, leads to the destruction of the accepted identities and the dissolution of subjects (2010: 107–114). What returns, though, is the untimely that cannot be integrated into the preexisting order: It escapes the subjective histories; it escapes the memory and cannot be captured within the existing time frame (idem: 51f).

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If we follow this argument, the reason for something new to emerge is no longer a subject fighting for recognition. In contrast, the subject creates identities; it reproduces the existing order. Only the untimely time leads to a radical transformation of the existing order and history. Any continuous order is always already contrary to political change. It is an identification, while Deleuze would argue that only what exceeds identity is actually political. It is the untimely, a-subjective time that is the ontological reason why subjects and reality are constituted. The subject with its memory *is* itself an identity and cannot grasp singularities or initiate change. Neither struggles about recognition nor attempts to consciously keep the locus of power empty could be understood as political. Following Deleuze, we can argue for an understanding of change that is a-subjective and always connected to the destruction of the existing order of time and the dissolution of the self. It is the force of the returning untimely that transforms totalized structures.

Political Implications of the Untimely Time: Becoming Minoritarian

One might now object that, with his concept of time, Deleuze merely offers an ontological argument about the production of reality, providing little insight about the nature of the political. However, with his ontology, he argues for a constant change that is directed against existing orders of domination and exclusions—the untimely return challenges the existing majoritarian order of time. The political character of his ontology becomes a little more tangible when we read it together with Deleuze and Guattari's concept of becoming minoritarian. In *Thousand Plateaus* they distinguish between *being* a majority or a minority and *becoming* minoritarian (Deleuze and Guattari 2004: 105f). The majoritarian logic leads to the extraction of constants, meaning that a stable history is identified. Struggles for an identity or inclusion always follow the majoritarian logic. Therefore, the logic of the majority is contrary to the process of becoming, and there is no such thing as becoming majoritarian.

With the difference between *being* a majority and *becoming* minoritarian, Deleuze and Guattari do not refer to a numerous superiority or inferiority but emphasize two different ways of engaging with the world:

> The opposition between minority and majority is not simply quantitative. Majority implies a constant, of expression or content, serving as a standard measure by which to evaluate it. Let us suppose that the constant or standard is the average adult-white-heterosexual-European-male

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> speaking a standard language. . . . It is obvious that "man" holds the majority, even if he is less numerous than mosquitoes, children, women, blacks, peasants, homosexuals, etc. . . . Majority assumes a state of power and domination, not the other way around. (idem: 195)

The majority is the part that dominates and exercises power by setting a standard. It determines a certain understanding of how to behave and sets an ideal of how things or people should be. Moreover, the standard is presented as the natural order. With the majority, a seemingly objective time frame is established and this frame is used to judge subjects constantly. The subjects internalize the standard as being the objective ideal and are constituted in accordance to the accepted majoritarian frame. Thus, the majority is not only a numerous part of the society but a logic that structures the social order, and the logic that identifies subjects.

With their reference to the European, white, adult, heterosexual, and I would add able-bodied, employed, and a cis "man" as "the majority," Deleuze and Guattari describe the majoritarian standard which structures today's society by sexuality, gender, race, class, age, and ability. By setting a majoritarian standard, not only is the ideal subject (the majority) produced but also everything that is excluded. It constitutes both the majority and the minority. The minority does not escape the majoritarian standard but is produced by its very logic. This means that the struggles of the minority do not necessarily exceed the majoritarian logic. If the struggles are about establishing an identity and about becoming part of the majority, if the struggles are about being included or about setting a new standard, then the struggles remain within the majoritarian logic. Such struggles are about extracting constants which produces a linear time and this is precisely the majoritarian way to engage with the world.

Becoming minoritarian, in contrast, is a way of passing through identities and time (idem: 276). It neither aims on new identifications nor on restructuring time, nor does it originate from identified subjects (idem: 272). Instead of presupposing an identity, becoming minoritarian denotes the way bodies and moments relate to each other when they encounter each other. Following Deleuze and Guattari, such a relating does not imply that the bodies remain the same. Rather, both "emit particles that take on certain relations of movement and rest because they enter a particular zone of proximity" (idem: 273). The body, which is a multiplicity of particles, relates some of the particles that were part of the former self with some of the new particles. This way, all involved bodies (and moments) are substantially changed and become something entirely new. Within such a becoming, there are no subjects that relate to each other. Instead, all relations are changed, and with every new encounter, the

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former identity and subjectivity dissolve. In the encounter, the bodies do not fight to achieve or to maintain a certain position but transform themselves within the other. Following Spinoza, Deleuze and Guattari argue that bodies are affective multiplicities of uncountable and changeable relations. This means that these relations are not external to the self and the body but that the body *is* its relations. With every encounter, with every new relation – or with every new moment – a new and changing self is created that affects other bodies and is constantly affected (idem: 253–256; Deleuze 1988). This pre-individual, non-subjective becoming undermines and changes the majoritarian standard (Deleuze and Guattari 2004: 106). Even though it does not aim or pre-suppose the hegemonic ideals, the majoritarian standards are destroyed if something radically new is created. Looking back on Deleuze's syntheses of time, the minoritarian becoming can be understood as the becoming of a larval subject. The majority and the minority are *determined subjects* constituting themselves by memorizing majoritarian standards as their necessary history. They create a continuous order and, with it, sediment the hegemonic order and time by introducing identities with bare repetitions. In contrast, the becoming body is a *larval subject* that changes according to the singularities and moments it connects itself with. It creates living presents.

I argue that such a becoming is queer. I use the term *queer* not to describe a sexual identity, but in opposition to identity itself; to "queer" something means to subvert hegemonic identity categories that are the result of existing power structures. In this article, to become queer means to escape the majoritarian logic; it is an endless process, not a category that could be used to describe various sexual identities.[7] Both the majority and the minority are identified subjects – they are men or women, heterosexuals or homosexuals, they are members of white hegemony or of racialized minorities. The larval subject, the body that is becoming minoritarian, defies all identity categories by becoming something entirely different and by exceeding the existing time frame. Queer bodies escape the majoritarian standards and constantly create something new and untimely with every new relation. With such a queer becoming it is no longer possible to speak of *being* heterosexual, or of *being* a man, woman, or child. The notion of a stable identity loses its meaning altogether.

It is not only bodies with queer sexualities that escape and are, in this sense, "queer": theorists of the Black Radical Tradition argue convincingly that blackness also remains unidentifiable. Blackness, in contrast to the identified and racialized Black subject, means to escape the majoritarian standards and subjectivations (Harney and Moten 2013: 44–57; Hartman 2020; Moten 2003; cp. also Musser 2024). Robert McRuer (2006, 2018) demonstrates that disabled people (crip bodies) are queer because they

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escape both the normalized subjectivity and time. These bodies are not only queer because their sexuality is perceived as not "normal" (although this may be the case as well), but because they queer identifications – and with it, the existing linear concept of time.

Although Deleuze and Guattari do not refer to it as a "queer becoming,"[8] they illustrate the radically queer potential of minoritarian becomings with regard to the transformation of gender and sexuality. In *Thousand Plateaus* they argue that bodies encountering each other while having sex have the potential to undermine identities: They produce uncountable sexes and sexualities (Deleuze and Guattari 2004: 278). If bodies desire, they exceed the confines of the majoritarian logic. While the majoritarian standard identifies subjects by setting a standard of what sex is supposed to look like, in a real encounter, these bodies affect each other and, with it, produce singular forms of sex and sexualities. This "is the production of thousand sexes, which are so many uncontrollable becomings" (ibid.).

In his article *Preface to Hocquenghem's L'Après-Mai des faunes* (2004c), Deleuze focuses on homosexual sex to describe such a sexual becoming. Initially, the persons who are having sex might be identified by the existing majoritarian standards: they are the minority meaning the identified excluded subject (in this case a male homosexual). However, they fail to realize the majoritarian ideal – their sexuality is already somehow detached. This is why it is more likely that they defy the identifications altogether and desire and produce something entirely different. They develop a "polyvocal desire" (Deleuze 2004c: 287) and, with it, produce new relations that are not the result of the preexisting categories, identities, and time. The interacting bodies cannot know in advance what kind of pleasure their relationship will produce and what new forms of sex will be lived. Every encounter produces new relations:

> Far from closing itself on "the same," homosexuality is going to open itself up to all sorts of possible new relations . . . with as many sexes as there are assemblages, not even excluding new relations between men and women: the mobility of particular S&M relations, the potency of cross-dressing . . . , or the n-sexes (neither one nor two sexes). It is no longer about being a man or woman, but inventing sexes. (ibid.)

None of the bodies can be identified as being a woman or man anymore. So, the question is not any longer how the participants can be identified but rather what new relations are created. Preexisting identity categories become untenable. The subversive potential is not the result of struggles for inclusion or recognition in the existing majoritarian frame. "[T]he homosexual is no longer demanding to be recognized, no longer takes

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himself to be a subject deprived of his rights" (ibid.). Instead, with the bodies relating to each other and with their lack of a stable identity, majoritarian standards are questioned altogether:

> The new homosexual is about being in such a way that he can finally say: nobody is homosexual, it doesn't exist. You treat us like homosexuals, OK, but we're already elsewhere. There is no more homosexual subject, but homosexual productions of desire and homosexual assemblages that produce utterances, proliferating everywhere . . . in sexual relations as well as in political struggles. (idem.: 287f)

It is not a subject that introduces change but the bodies that relate to each other. The majoritarian standard relies on a specific continuous history that tells us the story that being homo- or heterosexual is natural and normal. This story can only be changed by producing untimely relations. Bodies who are becoming minoritarian escape and destroy these identities and histories. These bodies are queer in the most radical way: They defy any identification with their untimely relations. And the untimely, in this case, is something as ordinary as having sex – ordinary but different.

No Time for Democracy?: Toward an Untimely Society

If we understand the "political" as the realization of the potential to transform social structures, two very different understandings of the political emerge. Following Lefort, the political appears as the production of a new linear history through constant struggles about the empty locus of power; democracy is the institutionalized frame that facilitates these struggles. The becoming described by Deleuze and Guattari escapes this understanding. Neither the "identification" of the democratic subject as a unity nor the struggles of excluded minorities would lead to political change. In contrast, minoritarian becoming is political only when it is not captured within a linear timeframe: only untimely relations lead to political transformations.

Even if Deleuze and Guattari might offer a certain understanding of a political change, does it still make sense to talk about democracy? After all, Deleuze and Guattari seem to reject everything that is conventionally considered necessary for a society; they criticize institutionalization, claim that the (political) subject must dissolve, and question representation, identity, and any stable order. Must we therefore dismiss their thought because a democratic society becomes impossible? Would there simply be no time left for democracy?

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In *What Is Philosophy?,* Deleuze and Guattari seem to suggest that "democracy" can be saved by introducing the notion of "becoming democratic" (1994: 113).[9] However, in this concept they do not describe a process that leads to the creation of a democracy in a stable form. Rather than becoming a specific state, becoming democratic is the creation of social and new relations through untimely encounters (idem: 110). Such an encounter is "born in History, and falls back into it, but it is not of it" (ibid.). It is born in history because any form of becoming is immanent to the existing structure – it emerges from the relations one has (or, more precisely, is) – and yet it creates something new. It may fall back into history because it is eventually identified by the syntheses of time, but it is not history itself. Rather, it is difference; it is what escapes the existing historical order. Thus, the main democratic task is "not to contemplate the eternal or to reflect history but to diagnose our actual becomings" (idem: 113). In short, becoming-democratic is nothing other than a specific form of becoming minoritarian. It is neither the creation of stable institutions nor a utopian state. Rather, it is the process of relating to one another; and every relation transforms the existing social order. Democracy is an untimely becoming.

But why should such a becoming still be called "democratic," as Oliver Marchart asks? He argues that theories which criticize institutionalized states in general also dismiss the core of the notion of democracy (Marchart 2023: 120f). "Why not speak of anarchy then?" (idem: 121; own translation) While this question leads him to reject such approaches, I would suggest an alternative response – or rather two possible responses. First, one could radicalize Lefort's notion of democracy: If democracy is understood as the structure that realizes the political, then the question becomes how a "democracy" might look that facilitates untimely encounters instead of capturing them. Such a democracy would require a reconfiguration of the democratic time: democracy would neither be defined by a clock time (e.g., regular elections) nor by the contingent production of a linear history, but by creative, untimely social relations.

The second possible answer is to agree with Marchart to some extent: perhaps "democracy" is indeed not the adequate notion; maybe "anarchy" would be more suitable. While Deleuze and Guattari mention a form of becoming-democratic, they also problematize "democracy" as being a majoritarian standard (1994: 108); it is used to judge (identify) states and to establish hierarchies. Moreover, Deleuze argues in various of his works that difference and becoming are anarchic (Deleuze 2004b: 137; 2004a: 143). Yet to read their thinking as anarchic does not necessarily mean we should dismiss it. On the contrary, letting go of the conventional notion

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of democracy might open up a new potential—the potential to ask about the actual time of becoming.

What would it mean to think of society in terms of an anarchic becoming? To address this question, we need to abandon the idea that anarchy is synonymous with chaos and violence. Anarchic becoming would denote something radically different: bodies encountering and relating to each other without pregiven hierarchies or domination.[10] If we use the notion of "anarchy" to describe open and social relations of desiring bodies, there is nothing chaotic about it. Anarchic would be the untimely yet social production of relations.

Conclusion

I have argued that two radically different concepts of the political emerge based on their respective understandings of time. According to Lefort, political movements are never-ending struggles aimed at establishing new coherent orders of time. By contrast, Deleuze and Guattari argue that nothing genuinely new can emerge as long as we struggle for a coherent time. Forms of life that escape the existing order and their queer untimely encounters are essential for any form of change.

If we follow radical democratic theory, "democracy" is less an institutionalized system than the form in which the political is realized. Consequently, different understandings of the political also transform the meaning of "democracy" itself. Given Deleuze and Guattari's fundamental critique of institutionalized orders, one might ask whether "democracy" is still the appropriate concept to describe the political transformations they envision. Nonetheless, it is important to recognize the specific political potential expressed in their concept.

Minority struggles remain within the majoritarian logic if they ask for inclusion or equal rights by telling another story about who has always been equal. The result of these struggles is that majoritarian standards and a coherent history are produced. Such struggles are certainly necessary to challenge the existing demarcations between the majority and the minority. Thus, I do not argue that Lefort's notion of the political cannot lead to a meaningful change. However, such struggles do not question the majoritarian logic. Deleuze and Guattari suggest that there is a way of living that is political precisely because it cannot be captured within existing time frames. With the untimely time, the existing standards are abolished altogether. Therefore, it is important to also look for the political, where it actually falls out of time—both out of clock time and also the contingently established order of time.

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NOTES

1. For prominent discussions of the relationship between democracy and the "political," cf. for example Claude Lefort (1986, 1988) or Jacques Rancière (1999, 2006); and for further interpretations, see Flügel et al. (2004); Heil and Hetzel (2006); and Marchart (2023).
2. For detailed interpretations of Lefort's works cf. also Flynn (2006) and Oppelt (2017).
3. This argument leads to a tension between two different interpretations: On the one hand, there are the ones who read Lefort's arguments as an affirmation of contemporary representational democracies because elections and democratic institutions are affirmed as being democratic. Oppelt argues, for instance, that it is a permanent struggle that is supposed to change the existing order of the state within the state. On the other hand, there are the more "radical: interpretations of Lefort that argue that he rejects the existing institutionalized forms of democracies in general. For a detailed discussion of this tension cf. Oppelt (2017: 265–269) and Geenens (2008).
4. While Lefort focuses on human rights, other theorists use different concepts that serve a similar purpose: Jacques Rancière (1999) argues with the concept of "equality" and Etienne Balibar (2014) with his neologism "équaliberty." These concepts are described as (empty) "universals" that open space for never-ending struggles.
5. Even though they do not ask for the political as explicitly as Lefort, Deleuze, and Guattari establish their own notion of the political in connection to a certain understanding of time. But since Deleuze and Guattari do not discuss the political implications of their arguments themselves, there are diverse interpretations regarding the "political" character of their work; While Isabelle Garo (2008) argues that they negate any form of political activity, various other theorists emphasize the political dimension. Cp. Buchanan and Thoburn (2008), Colebrook (2008), Krause and Rölli (2010), Patton (2000, 2010) or Tampio (2015).
6. Deleuze's philosophy of time is much less received than other parts of his Œuvre. The reason might be that this concept is very complex and at times even cryptic. Also, the literature and interpretations are very diverse and also not always easily accessible. Therefore, I will propose my own interpretation of the syntheses. For other interpretations, cp. for instance Colebrook (2008), Diefenbach (2018), Hughes (2009), Röttgers (2015), Schaub (2003), and Williams (2003, 2012).
7. "Queer" is not used as an umbrella term for different identities (LGBTQIA+). Such an understanding is common, but it has also been criticized by various

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queer theorists because it loses the meaning of "queer" as a criticism of identity categories (cp. for instance Berlant and Warner 1995: 344).

8. For a connection between Deleuze's theory of time and a queer potential, cf. Loewen Walker (2021); for various queer readings of Deleuze, compare the anthology *Deleuze and Queer Theory* (Nigianni and Storr 2009).
9. Compare for such an interpretation, Patton (2008) and Krause and Rölli (2010: 140f).
10. For approaches to the connection between Deleuze and anarchy, cf. Eloff (2019) and Jun (2019).

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