

Article

Becoming an Expression in Deleuze: Two Cases from Turkey (Fazil Say and Misirli Ahmet)

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Introduction: I may leave Turkey, my home country . . .

Fazil Say's declaration, outlined above, has appeared in Turkish newspapers as an important sign of Islamization of the society. Thinking that a liberal Islamist party, AKP, has won the general election for the second time with a greater percentage and strengthened its conservative voice more than ever in the country, the surprising impact of Say's declaration can be understood. Secular investments which have been carefully made since early twentieth century are thought to be weakened deliberately and principals of Kemalist enlightenment are believed equally be under threat. AKP's relative success in national economy and increasing popularity in foreign affairs have doubled the effect of fight or flight reaction. Though legally legitimate in all its attempts, AKP has increasingly begun to be perceived as a silent enemy that has been seeking to undermine the very foundation of modern democratic and secular society. The declaration of Fazil Say has arrived against such a background and many columnists argued that there is always a point if a declaration of this kind is coming from an artist, who is probably more sensitive and alert than all of us to gradual decadence in a society.

There is nothing interesting, of course, if we take this event as a simple case that needs to be considered within the context of freedom of expression. What is expressed here, in this sense, is that of an opinion. Say expresses his opinion about recent political events taking place in the country. And, as expected, all reactions that have followed from this declaration can also be understood as other opinions for or against Say's opinion. So far so good. However, there is something obviously peculiar about Say and his opinion (initial event) and others and their opinions (reactive events), and more importantly about their relevance to each other. Many of the reactive opinions were almost the same with a number of earlier opinions expressed at different occasions and for different purposes other than the present purpose. In other words, although Say's opinion has caused emergence of many different opinions (difference as a matter of form), these opinions were not exclusively responsive to the initial event (difference as a matter of content. The initial

event, in this sense, did not bring out any reactive opinion unique to this but only this event.

Let me simplify this peculiarity as follows:

Source of the opinion	Context of the opinion	Form of the opinion	Content of reactive opinions
Mr. Fazıl Say “I think”	Recent Turkish politics / Secular vs Islamist	Opinion 1	LOVE OR LEAVE TURKEY!
Mr. X “I think”	Recent Turkish politics / Secular vs Islamist	Opinion 2	
Mr. Y “I think”	Recent Turkish politics / Secular vs Islamist	Opinion 3	

Although the content of reactive opinions are almost the same regardless of what initial opinion has in fact expressed, the tension and aggression aggregates as number of reactive opinions increase. This is to say that initial opinions act like infertile eggs failing to differentiate reactions, and yet causing to increase ideological tension and aggression in the society.

Can this picture be changed by changing content of initial opinions? Or, should one think changing the source of initial opinions? Is it possible really to change content of reactive opinions? And, what happens even if this last aim is achieved?

Deleuze tells us that it is impossible to be optimistic about answers for the above questions and the impossibility implied in these questions derives neither from source nor from content of opinions. The problem lies in much deeper philosophical presuppositions which require reconsideration of the image of thought.

A Deleuzian Reading of the Declaration

What is wrong with expressing an opinion? Can it be that “I think I might leave my home country...” bears more presuppositions than it seems? What are these presuppositions and are they really not legitimate?

In many of his works but particularly in the third chapter of *Difference and Repetition* Deleuze presents a careful critique of the dogmatic image of thought, one which necessitates employment of certain presuppositions. Holding those presuppositions are in fact brought by the difficulty that philosophy has always urged to overcome, but failed. Failure, in this sense, means appealing to certain presuppositions inevitably. “Where to begin in philosophy has always –rightly- been regarded as a very delicate problem, for beginning means eliminating all presuppositions.”¹ Yet this is not an easy task in many cases. Descartes, for instance, as Deleuze rightly remembers in the third chapter of *Difference and Repetition*, is an example of the attempt to avoid from presuppositions of any kind, either objective (explicit) or subjective (implicit). Rationality is never taken for granted by Descartes. He rather attempts to clear at the outset all those possible controversies that might shadow the ground on which most of evidences are later to be constructed. “I think” in this sense is the least loaded assumption that Descartes thinks he can take as the legitimate point of departure. Deleuze, however, reminds that “I think” is in itself a bundle of “implicit presuppositions contained in opinions.”² He writes: “It is presumed that everyone knows, independently of concepts, what is meant by self, thinking, and being.”³

What is implied here, I suppose, is an attempt to question the very idea of identity. Much before the identity of things or terms external to “I”, the identity of “I” is in itself needs to be reconsidered. How can one articulate “I” two times one after another without subjective presupposition that what the two articulations of “I” signify is an identical self?

As Deleuze argues it will always be taking the risk of being labeled as “idiot” if one resists to ignore the questions of this kind. Taking the side of the idiot (Eudoxus), in this sense, might be the philosopher’s natural acclamation. This does not mean, however, that the philosopher can succeed being completely presupposition-free. Being an idiot, or taking the side of Eudoxus is not something one can easily choose and become, simply because presuppositions arrive much earlier than the conscious choice: “In fact, Eudoxus has no fewer presuppositions than Epistemon, he simply has them in another, implicit or subjective form, ‘private’ and not ‘public’...”⁴

Yet, Deleuze still asks us to think the possibility of being presupposition-free completely. This is not a simple invitation to the playground of imagination. This is rather a necessary effect of being familiar with the entire Deleuzian ontology, with difference-in-itself and repetition. He defines such an experience and the importance of this as follows:

Someone who neither allows himself to be represented
nor wishes to represent anything. Not an individual

¹ Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* (London: Continuum, 1994), 164.

² *Ibid.*, 164.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*, 165.

endowed with good will and a natural capacity for thought, but an individual full of ill will who does not manage to think, either naturally or conceptually. Only such an individual is without presuppositions. Only such an individual effectively begins and effectively repeats.⁵

Deleuze, in fact, does not want to limit his point with a straight critique of this or that type of image of thought. Rather, what is being criticized here is a necessary result of the two-sided failure, embedded both in our very common sense (habitual thinking) and contemplative faculty (philosophical thinking), the failure in thinking of difference and of repetition. Philosophers in general failed first to imagine that difference should not necessarily be thought in terms of a lack of resemblance between two or more things. They missed that the difference in this non-Deleuzian sense is just a delayed or already crystallized effect of difference-in-itself. Their second mistake was the idea that things might repeat and when we say that a thing repeats it must mean that one and the same thing appears and appears again. Repetition, in terms of this image of thought, is possible without difference, and in a similar vein an absolute difference, which is something more than variation, is also possible between two or more things.⁶

The first two chapters of *Difference and Repetition* present detailed objections to this kind of misconceptions as regards the concept of difference and repetition. these ideas. Here is not, of course, the right place to present a satisfactory account of Deleuzian objections to underlying sources of representative thinking. Yet, it is important to note that articulation of “I think” as in the form of expression of opinion denotes the necessary outputs of this two-sided failure. Say’s articulation is in this sense a clear demonstration of the false attempt to represent what cannot be represented. “I” remains as a static and frozen linguistic actualization while what it in fact aims to represent is no longer present, at least in the form that it is supposed to represent. This false attempt, according to Deleuze, is originated in the very act of recognition. Drawing on the famous Cartesian example, Deleuze urges to unfold one of our illegitimate presuppositions, i.e., when we recognize something (a wax) as the same, this will give us the necessary and sufficient condition to call that thing as the same. He writes:

...for the philosopher, the form of identity in objects relies upon a ground in the unity of a thinking subject, of which all the other faculties must be modalities. This is

⁵ *Ibid.*, 165-166.

⁶ The so-called ‘absolute difference’ leads us to think of difference between two beings (between two already actualized things); this tendency falls short to grasp what Deleuze understands from difference-in-itself. In order to approach to this particular Deleuzian notion of difference we should not think of it in terms of any pre-existing unity. Rather we need to think entire life within difference, which requires that there is no original position to rely on and then to talk about difference of something as a variation from that original state.

the meaning of the Cogito as a beginning: it expresses the unity of all the faculties in the subject; it thereby expresses the possibility that all the faculties will relate to a form of object which reflects the subjective identity... it is the common sense become philosophical.⁷

This is a sad story of thinking, in which thinking has been triggered and managed by common sense, and thinking in the end will be reduced to acts of recognition. For Deleuze, there is "... a costly double danger for philosophy. On the one hand, it is apparent that acts of recognition exist and occupy a large part of our daily life: this is a table, this is an apple, this the piece of wax... But who can believe that the destiny of thought is at stake in these acts, and that when we recognize, we are thinking?"⁸ Thinking, no doubt, cannot be limited to acts of recognition. Yet, if this seems like the only capability which is possible by thought it is because of the ignorance and illusion derived from the dominant image of thought flourished under the terms of representation.

Having a list of the basic elements of representation Deleuze keeps on clarifying the effects of this type of thinking. He argues that "The 'I think' is the most general principle of representation..."⁹ By means of the articulation or better to say our almost natural inclination to think of "I" as already self-identical and as also already a special thing different from rest of the world of things, we make our thinking impotent and unable to think difference-in-itself. Nor can we think of ourselves, our faculty of thinking as no more than a temporal actualization within the difference-in-itself.

Why is this Deleuzian insight important for our purpose? In Say's case, "I think I may leave my home country ..." appears as an expression of opinion which is fostered by representation. Say, obviously, wants to make his point clear and for this reason he employs the dominant image of thought, that is representative thinking, the only image accessible to him.¹⁰ Thus, he leaves the vital role, a mission of representing himself (his Cogito, his interests, or ideas) at the mercy of this particular articulation. He assigns a mission impossible to his articulation (I think I may ...). As expected, then, the articulation fall short in representing the Subject's presence, nor can it succeed to give rise dynamically new and creative reactions, at least as dynamic as the individual himself. In other words, Say's statement remains inert.

⁷ Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 169.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 170-171.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 174.

¹⁰ No doubt, I don't mean that Say is personally responsible for this dogmatic image of thought. Rather, what I am thinking is that his articulation can be read as a vivid example of a general symptom of political escapism without action, a symptom which is perhaps valid equally for any of us who cannot help representing and ignorant of the need to think otherwise.

Becoming Percussion

When Misirli Ahmet, another Turkish musician whose original percussion technique has been recognized world-wide for the last ten years, declared that he does not play percussion, he indeed wants to become percussion, this declaration produced no identifiable political results. But I want to argue that this utterance when read from a Deleuzian perspective bears more political implications than most of the other explicitly political utterances, one clear example of which was already discussed above. But, let me present first what makes Ahmet so useful for our purpose in this reading.

The musical life of Ahmet can in fact be thought as a bundle of experiences of diverse becomings. Most audiences of Ahmet do realize that what impresses them is not simply what they hear, but also what they see, think, and feel. Or perhaps it is better to say that Ahmet's musical performance makes a strange influence on audiences/perceivers, by means of which they experience a kind of transformation triggered by a body-in-becoming. This is something similar, but hopefully not as risky as, to what psychotherapists call "counter-transference", the situation where psychoanalyst unconsciously displaces of her own emotion or mood onto the patient/client. Ahmet's own experience of becoming while performing, in this sense, disseminates through perceptual interaction and makes influences on others' sense of themselves. Ethem Zeytinkaya, an audience of Ahmet, puts it as follows: "What is felt while hearing Ahmet is not just a technique which is indisputably superior. The felt is that of the chaotic expression of the rhythmic flow of life with all its uniqueness and infinity embodied through fingers."¹¹

In depicting his own musical biography for a documentary, Ahmet comments on his own attachment to the percussion instrument. He tells that the rhythm in general and the goblet drum (darbuka) in particular is for him much beyond the ordinary language, it is rather a special milieu for expression. "A milieu that helps me break my taboos, liberate myself. Thus, it is not that 'I play percussion', it is rather 'becoming percussion.'" Considered that "the word percussion as a noun in contemporary English is described as the *collision of two bodies* to produce a sound" (Wikipedia), Ahmet's becoming percussion can better be grasped. Paul Patton in *Deleuze and Political* draws on the implications of thinking bodies in terms of encounters and affects: "Defining bodies in terms of the affects of which they are capable is equivalent to defining them in terms of the relations into which they can enter with other bodies, or in terms of their capacities for engagement with the powers of other bodies. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, what Deleuze and Guattari call processes of 'becoming' are precisely such engagements with the powers of other bodies."¹²

Ahmet is not in this sense the Subject, who is supposed to make an asymmetrical or one-way impact on drum, but rather he at least while he is

¹¹ Ethem Zeytinkaya, *Gülşen Saru Mukaddes Mut, A Documentary for Misirli Ahmet* (TRT, 2007).

¹² Paul Patton, *Deleuze and the Political* (London: Routledge, 2000), 78.

with the drum enters to an experiment *as* (not through his) body. Now this encounter is no longer an encounter of two different bodies, each of which is self-identical, actualized and territorialized once for all. In some cases both bodies (think of the case for Ahab and Moby-Dick of Melville), but in this case at least Ahmet (if not both Ahmet and the Drum) undergoes what Adrian Parr calls “a non-linear dynamic process of change”. She writes:

‘Becoming’ points to a non-linear dynamic process of change and when used to assist us with problems of an aesthetic nature we are encouraged not just to reconfigure the apparent stability of the art object as ‘object’ defined in contradistinction to a fully coherent ‘subject’ or an extension of that ‘subject’ but rather the concept of arts’ becoming is a fourfold becoming-minor of the artist, viewer, art work and milieu. It is in this regard that performance prompts us to consider the production and appreciation of art away from the classical subject/object distinction that prevailed by and large up until the 1960s.¹³

Ahmet’s becoming-percussion may inspire new virtualities of thinking, thinking both of us and the rest, beyond dominant image of thought. This certainly is no less than taking the risk of losing oneself, leaving the silent comfort of solution for promising yet dangerous horizons of problem. As Ahmet himself remarks “If you like to discover or catch the rhythm you should first lose it...” Problems in this sense are only conditions for a creative open-ended future and can only be posed genuinely when one ceases to represent herself and the world.

A Deleuzian Reading of the Expression

For Deleuze, “The Conditions of a true critique and a true creation are the same: the destruction of an image of thought which presupposes itself and the genesis of the act of thinking in thought itself.”¹⁴ To create is to veer away from representation. You cannot represent something which has been in constant becoming! Creating new and undoing for newer and re-creating for infinite future, and so on is the true critical attitude. The true critique here is not in any sense a true formula written once and for all and to be employed in all programs for resistance. Its political power does not lie in what it tells us. Its power lies in the effect of disclosing itself when we experience what it is to be in constant becoming. Living with and in terms of infinite series of and(s) is the only possibility which will let us stay away from representation.

The very idea of becoming, therefore, is in itself political. Its political power is not of the reactive kind. Becoming is rather active, positive and

¹³ Adrian Parr, *The Deleuze Dictionary* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University, 2005), 25.

¹⁴ Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 176.

affirmative power that undermines the very possibility of representation at the outset. It invites bodies (players of forces) to encounter with each other within the plane of immanence, where non-representation becomes no less than a transcendental condition for becoming.

Appreciating what makes Ahmet's expression so political requires a two-fold realization: First, it inspires us a real sense of becoming other than ourselves. This inspiration in fact is closely related to a Deleuzian objection to the philosophical tradition which takes "being" as the point of departure. To compromise with this objection one needs to imagine what De Landa calls "a universe of becoming without being."¹⁵ He writes: "... a universe where individual beings do exist but only as the outcome of becomings, that is, of irreversible process of individuation."¹⁶ It invokes the times where our individuation is not yet at temporal rest. What I call "I am" is neither a beginning nor an end, it is just a relative slowing down of becoming, actualization or differentiation to be resolved for the new again. Art in general and Ahmet's case in particular shows us the paths for thinking through individuation, but at the same time reasons for the anxiety this thinking motivates. Hallward writes: "In the interest of order and security, people normally take shelter from the creative chaos that is forever raging 'over their heads' under a comforting conceptual 'umbrella, on the underside of which they draw a firmament and write their conventions and opinions."¹⁷ Artists, on the other hand, are those who are supposed to take this challenge and try (most of the time unintentionally) participating in the very realization of immanence. Loosing unity and finding back a new temporal residue is just another way of thinking bodies as machines. As Deleuze and Guattari write, "A machine may be defined as a system of interruptions or breaks (coupures)."¹⁸ This thinking is not in any sense a seductive call to abandon the reality. It is not a fantasy. Nor is it a sign of reliance on elusive metaphors. Quite the opposite, this is a call to be unmediated in reality. These breaks, according to Deleuze and Guattari, "should in no way be considered as a separation from reality; rather, they operate along lines that vary according to whatever aspect of them we are considering."¹⁹

In Ahmet's case, in other words, one can find all aspects of a Spinozist univocal ontology. Thinking of becoming percussion and becoming percussion turn in the end to be one and the same thing: Single substance expresses itself now as thinking and now as body. The expression here, in a sense, denotes a

¹⁵ Manuel De Landa, *Intensive Science and Virtual Philosophy* (London: Continuum, 2002), 106.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Peter Hallward, *Deleuze and the Philosophy of Creation* (London: Verso, 2006), 106.

¹⁸ Giles Deleuze & Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (London: Continuum, 1984), 38.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

delirium or in a more Deleuze-Guattarian fashion a Schizophrenizing, the positive tasks of which are revolutionary.²⁰

Second, transformative power of becoming percussion becomes apparent when we realize the implicit link between memory and representation, and recall Deleuze's emphasis that "becoming is anti-memory". For Deleuze, "Memories always have a reterritorialization function."²¹ Memories, in this sense, re-present and thereby reterritorialize what has already gone. The life that is driven purely by memories would not be creative. Cosmos, for this simple reason, could not have been memory-driven. Infinite creativity of cosmos requires being in a constant state of forgetting. Becoming, in this vein, is the only condition of staying in tune with the cosmic creativity. This is a matter of tango, a tango with life!²²

The emphasis here on becoming is not simply a romantic turn that can be held for political hopes of any kind. Political promise of becoming should not be understood in terms of emancipatory hopes. Deleuze writes: "Becoming-revolutionary remains indifferent to questions of a future and a past of the revolution; it passes between the two... And yet 'how to win the majority' is a totally secondary problem in relation to the advances of the imperceptible."²³ This is rather an epistemological insight, a claim to truth; however the truth which is not in any sense a-temporal state of mind corresponding reality. The truth here is just a pure novelty. And the elusive novelty that can be expressed only through becoming makes becoming and all its variants political, that is, becoming is revolutionary in so far as it does not lend itself to representation.

Conclusion or Preface

Before making my concluding remarks I should perhaps confess that I share exactly the same feeling with Deleuze and Guattari. Near to the end of the last chapter in *Anti-Oedipus* they disclose after a long-suffering argument for political bearings of Schizoanalysis that all what they have tried so far might still look like fantasy. They write:

Those who have read us this far will perhaps find many reasons for reproaching us: for believing too much in the pure potentialities of art and even of science; for denying or minimizing the role of classes and class struggle; for militating in favor of an irrationalism of desire; for

²⁰ See particularly the last section of *Anti-Oedipus* for elaboration of the political promise of Schizoanalysis.

²¹ Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 324.

²² Perhaps, the Spinozist concept of "adequate knowledge" would best be grasped through this metaphor.

²³ Giles Deleuze & Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* (London: Continuum, 1987), 324.

identifying the revolutionary with the schizo; for falling into familiar, all-too-familiar traps.²⁴

If this worry has really a point it must simply be indicating that we deliberately stand at the same side with *Eudoxus*.

Favoring Ahmet's expression-becoming percussive instead of Say's expression-opinion, and more importantly appreciating the former's political force despite the latter's apparently political message resonates with Deleuze's understanding of contemporary philosophy and politics. For Deleuze, the time of thinking in terms of "I" or "self" has already ended. Now, philosophy and much before it literature has started a novel thinking, one which rather attends to experimental possibilities of impersonal individuations. He writes:

Many things are happening in philosophy right now, it's a confused and rich period. No one believes any more in the I, the Self, in characters or persons. This is quite clear in literature. But it goes even deeper: what I mean is, many people have spontaneously stopped thinking in terms of I and Self... What we're uncovering right now, in my opinion, is a world packed with impersonal individuations, or even pre-individual singularities...²⁵

And he further adds: "The new novelists talk of nothing else: they give voice to these non-personal individuations, these non-individual singularities."²⁶ What these new novelists have realized is simply the way to elude control, a new intuition to develop unidentifiable means of resistance. Deleuze emphasizes that "This is really important, especially politically; it's like the 'fish dissolved in water'; it's the revolutionary struggle, the struggle for liberation."²⁷

All what is stressed here has nothing to do with traditional vehicles of resistance, nor can it be understood within the axioms of dogmatic image of thought. It is just about experiencing a new thinking, a nomadic insight or becoming-intense. Out of this experience it is the hope that repressive effects of representative thinking will lose its target-Subject. Simply because, "...the forces of repression always need a Self that can be assigned, they need determinate individuals on which to exercise their power."²⁸ Mısırlı Ahmet's articulation, in this sense, can be read as a fresh start for a creative body politics.

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²⁴ Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, 414.

²⁵ Gilles Deleuze, *Desert Islands* (New York: Semiotext(e) Foreign Agents Series, 2004),

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²⁶ *Ibid.*, 138.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*

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