The Deleuzian Stereo: Stability in an Age of Endless Becoming

In the years following Brexit, the 2016 election of Donald Trump, and the dawning awareness that artificial intelligence was poised to unleash transformations as profound as any in living memory, I found myself struggling to make sense of a world that seemed to be shedding its old contours faster than language could keep up. Political norms were collapsing, technological systems were evolving beyond public or even expert comprehension, and the familiar coordinates of democratic life were dissolving into something more volatile and opaque. It was in the midst of this turbulence that I turned to French philosopher Gilles Deleuze (1925-1995), searching for a conceptual vocabulary capable of helping me grapple with these sudden mutations of power and, just as importantly, offering me tools for imagining alternative, radically generative and democratic arrangements. Deleuze became indispensable as a tool (precisely how he wanted himself to be seen and used) not because he solved the chaos, but because he provided concepts that helped me illuminate the forces moving beneath it.

Deleuze's philosophy offered me with a way to diagnose power not as a static structure but as something fluid, adaptive, and often invisible, precisely how one felt power was operating at a time where things were simply not as we were told they were by people who for too long we felt knew something we, the uninitiated didn't know. Assemblages, flows, deterritorializations, lines of flight — these concepts helped me understand how power seeps into institutions, technologies, and cultural habits in ways traditional political categories could no longer capture. Yet the more I used his tools, the more I began to sense an internal fault line in his metaphysics: A relentless celebration of change, of becoming, of pure, almost joyful flux, that treats stability almost as a failing, a temporary illusion, a false consciousness of sorts, a plateau to be passed through rather than cultivated. This vision is brilliant and intoxicating, but increasingly it felt

out of sync with the human need for coherence and agency and some sort of stability so that one may enjoy life rather than continually engage it and its endless stream of change and fluctuation.

Life, after all, is not lived in the abstract churn of becoming. It is lived in the fragile territories we construct where enough stability obtains and holds so that one can love, think, build, plan, resist. And as I wrestled with the Deleuzian metaphysics of ceaseless flux, I felt drawn toward a different, more grounded insight: That human beings do not simply drift in the currents of change but have both the capacity and the need to carve out arrangements that yield deep, lasting contentment.

The contrast becomes vivid when I think about something as mundane as the old stereo system I grew up with in the early 1980s . That system was a coherent world. You owned the LPs. You maintained the turntable. You cleaned the needle, adjusted the counterweight, replaced belts, and positioned speakers until you achieved the sound you wanted. The entire setup was an assemblage that yielded contentment precisely because it was stable, tangible, and under your direct control. I was not a passive consumer – worse, I was not a constellation of data constantly moving points: I was a participant in a system of my making, in my space, shaping that system piece by piece. When I made a mixtape, I was not training an algorithm or spilling the beans (or more aptly, continually leaking them) about how I felt at a given time and place — I was crafting something intentional, intimate, and mine.

Compare that to today's cloud-based streaming platforms. They present themselves as emancipations: Infinite choice, immediate availability, effortless access, instant sharing. Yet they represent a profound inversion of agency. I own *nothing*. I control nothing other than the setting on an app that I had no say in designing. The interface is opaque, its logic proprietary. There is an algorithm, I am told, but it's black box, and one that is far less penetrable than the black box of the inside of the stereop system that I could open and stare at and even tinker with if I knew a thing or two about electronics. A metaphor outdoing the concrete. The algorithm learns you more quickly than you can articulate yourself, guiding your moods, your

tastes, even your memories. Instead of a stable territory you inhabit, you are placed inside an endlessly modulating environment where change is constant, invisible, and imposed. This is the world of Deleuze's "societies of control" made real—continuous flows, flexible circuits, seamless modulation, all operating beneath your threshold of awareness.

And here is the irony: While Deleuze's metaphysics seems to sanctify this world of fluidity as the inevitable unfolding of becoming, his political tools are precisely what allow us to critique it. He gives us the vocabulary to see the cloud as a deterritorialized apparatus engineered for control, not liberation. He helps us understand what has been lost: The stable, graspable, user-shaped assemblage in which one could experience mastery, autonomy, and contentment. My desire for stability is not nostalgia; it is a political and ethical stance against the dissolution of agency in the name of convenience.

This is why I do not reject Deleuze. I repurpose him. His philosophy allows us to recognize that the old stereo system was not just a piece of technology but a democratic micro-territory, a space of self-determined order. And it helps us see that the cloud, for all its seductions, is an apparatus designed to dissolve such territories in favor of ongoing monetizable flows. Stability, in this light, becomes not a retreat but a form of resistance—the creation and defense of zones where human beings can shape the world rather than be shaped by it.

The more I reflect on this, the more convinced I become that the task is not to exalt change as a metaphysical absolute but to wrest control over which changes enter our lives. Permanence—crafted, nurtured, defended permanence—is not the enemy of freedom; it is one of its preconditions. To build a life, or a community, or a democratic order requires the courage to hold certain arrangements steady, to preserve what yields contentment, and to resist the forces that seek to sweep everything into the same stream of commodified flux.

In the end, the deepest homage I can pay to Deleuze is not to mindlessly echo his celebration of change and continuous becoming, but to deploy his

tools in a different key: To carve out *new assemblages that resist the dominant flows*, that prioritize stability without calcifying into rigidity, that cultivate contentment without retreating into nostalgia. If the world is indeed always in motion, then the most radical act is to build the islands — however temporary — where life can flourish on our own terms. Only then does change become something chosen rather than something that chooses us.