

A Deleuzian Reading of the EDSA Revolutions and the Possibility of Becoming-Revolutionary Today

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Abstract: This paper presents a Deleuzian re-thinking of the three EDSA Revolutions in the Philippines. Its frame is limited to contemporary and critical studies found in books, journals, and newspapers. Initially, I elucidate the nature of 1986 EDSA I Revolution, to be followed by an articulation of the concepts of *assemblage* and *difference* for a re-configuration of the 1986 revolution. I highlight and explain how the Epifanio Delos Santos Avenue (EDSA) transfigured into an arena of collective and dynamic action of various assemblagic relations. The rhizomic interaction of heterogeneous forces in the said highway undeniably exterminated the privileging of numerous traditional representations in the Philippine society. Furthermore, I explain the transition from the EDSA I revolution going to the EDSA II with a principal thrust on the principle of the *eternal return as the return of the different*, and the paradoxical ever-recurrence of political tyranny. Lastly, I explicate the narrative on how the Filipino assemblage is always caught in the web of *ressentiment* and identity, based from the EDSA I, II, and III. Due to these degenerate consequences, this essay recommends the conception of a new brand of revolution that is critical of molar and fascist political representations—the possibility of becoming-revolutionary today.

Keywords: Deleuze, EDSA revolution, despotism, assemblage, difference, eternal return, becoming-revolutionary

A revolution is something of the nature of a process, a change that makes it impossible to go back to the same point . . . a repetition that changes something, a repetition that brings about the irreversible . . . a process that produces history, taking us away from a repetition of the same attitudes and the same significances. Therefore, by definition, a revolution cannot be programmed, because what is programmed is always the déjà-là. Revolutions, like history, always bring surprises. By nature they are always unpredictable. That doesn't prevent one from working for revolution, as long as one understands 'working for revolution' as working for the unpredictable.

— Guattari, (1986/2008, p. 258)

The Despotic Leviathan and EDSA I

The declaration of Martial law on September 21, 1972 by Ferdinand Marcos was shaped by the burgeoning societal entropies plaguing the Philippines during his presidential reign. His vision of the so-called “New Philippine Society” conceptualized for the overcoming of the moribund status quo, was satirically prefaced by variegated forms of human rights violations, media blackouts, and constitution modification. Foremost circumstances include standardization of male haircuts, prohibition of peer-gatherings, strict enforcement of curfews, and the banning of Voltes V and liberating art expressions. This aforementioned utopic dream was nonetheless a narcissistic ploy to safeguard his delusion of infallibility. When the Filipinos were compelled to accept the political legitimacy of the country-wide ferocity for the ambiguous promotion of peace and security, a monumental revolutionary struggle was initiated accordingly by the people from February 22 to 25, 1986, at EDSA called the 1986 People Power Revolution (Mercado & Tatad, 1986).

The blistering enmity within the people’s hearts during President Marcos’ rule was aggravated when his leading critic Benigno “Ninoy” Aquino was assassinated upon his airport arrival—subsequent from a three-year exile in the U.S. (Elwood, 1986). Senator Aquino’s assassination on August 21, 1983 obliterated the frozen silence of the Filipinos, expressed via manifold anti-government mass demonstrations. Marcos then started to lose the support of the local and international community. This organizational quicksand prompted him to call for a snap election in 1986. However, despite his ingenuous intellectual imagination, this election that is supposed to protect his presidential stint became the very means of his removal, due to two major political contingencies besetting the nation in the late part of the 1960s: “Firstly, the Communist crisis entered into the Philippine land via student-led protests against the Vietnam War, and the founding of a new Communist party in

December 1968; secondly, soon after Marcos’ re-election in 1969, accusations of corruption and the possibility of a tyranny started to be whispered about the country” (Azada & Hermida, 2001, p. 105).

Consequently, due to extensive systemic irregularities, such as widespread vote-buying, election return tampering, murders, and so forth, Ninoy’s wife Cory Aquino fought for the presidency fuelled with the battle cry for social transformation. But, despite her passionate longing for change, Marcos was still announced as president by the Batasang Pambansa (National Assembly). In opposition to this, Cory called for a countrywide boycott to different government-appropriated establishments and services. Although her directive is categorizable as a form of civil disobedience, this action gained its justification under a presidency whose moral foundation has already eroded (Elwood, 1986). Significantly, even though Cory lost the electoral battle, contagions and ignominy in various kinds and gradations, adulterated Pres. Marcos’ victory, thereby leading to his perdition.

The plenitude of revolutionary dices already casted in the body politic was succeeded by Defense Minister Juan Ponce Enrile and Philippine Constabulary General Fidel Ramos’ resignation from the Marcos’s government (Arillo, 2011). It was followed by Manila Archbishop Jaime Cardinal Sin’s integral participation to the military coup catalyzed by Enrile and Ramos. Subsequently, a mammoth of protesters proceeded to EDSA and embattled Marcos’ troop, which at that time was under the leadership of Armed Forces Chief General Fabian Ver. This radical force embattled the administration’s soldiers whose goal was actually to disband the critical multitude and the coup leaders gathering in front of the Camp Aguinaldo. Unfortunately, the president’s egological citadel turned into a beaten Goliath in front of the Filipino people with innermost desire for freedom and thriving. When almost everything turned adversarial to the dictator, Marcos was only left with the option of leaving the country going to Hawaii along with his family.

True enough, the gravity of abominable violence and massive military power during this event became *nil* in the face of weaponries characterized by ethical and spiritual vigor. The global eyes saw the unarmed civilians kneeling and praying in front of armored tanks. What appeared to be the start of an inevitable civil turbulence was converted into a nonviolent revolution (Gonzaga, 2009). Writ large, the revolution was not premised on class antagonisms like the past Marxist or Marxist-influenced revolutions across the world. Douglas Elwood (1986), in his book, *Philippine Revolution 1986: Model of Nonviolent Change*, contended that the revolution was neither about the narrative of the proletariat seizing the bourgeoisie's fortress through a communist revolution, nor the Leninist vision of vanguardism towards socialism and communism (p. 14). Paradoxically, the Left's integral presence and contribution in EDSA I were unfortunately stolen from them by the elite's popular social institutions like the mass media, political system, and even the Church. On the contrary, for him the revolution was rather spearheaded by the socio-liberal democrats, as well as the middle class, and not the political Left who merely observed from the sidelines from wonderment, participating only after they were quite sure the reformist had the upper hand (Elwood, 1986). The previously sporadic middle class, religious persons from different affiliations, many ordinary citizens, and surrounding historical factors were the vital participants in the struggle. Their metamorphosis into a robust and glorified buffer enabled the dismantling of a politico-transcendental center using means beyond the codification of banality. Deriving a comprehensive perspective from one Filipino actor during the struggle, George Lorredo (1986) opined:

There are moments in the lives of men and nations when everything is held dear and sacred is put to the test . . . The period February 22-25 was one such moment in the glorious history of our people. And though some Filipinos failed the test, a great many others passed . . . The years will come and go. But as long as we live

we shall always cherish the memory of those days of February 1986—when some among us looked eternity in the face and savored it; when the guns and tanks of a dictator melted before the flowers held out by priests and nuns, by millionaires' sons and squatters' daughters, by ordinary men and women and by young and old alike; when . . . a new day was ushered in by ordinary Filipino common *tao* who rose to heroic heights that won the admiration of the whole world. (as cited in Elwood, 1986, p. 3)

Meaningfully, the four-day revolution shattered the dictatorial system that wreaked chaos on the country for many years. It is comparable to how Deleuze conceived the May 1968 event in Paris as a moment of “becoming breaking through into history” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987). Undeniably, this remarkable 1986 event creatively opened Filipinos towards the state of re-evaluation about many virtuous principles and practices integral for the dynamic nation-building of the Philippine society.

In the years that followed, the people in other parts of the world also antagonized the supremacy of tyranny in their respective countries. We have enormous rallies instigated by the South Koreans against the strongman Chun Doo-hwa, the uprising *contra* Chilean head Antonio Pinochet, the Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia, and the Orange Revolution in Ukraine (Tiglaio, 2014). Likewise, we have Poland's Singing Revolution that installed Lech Walesa—the Polish leader who was so thankful of the inspiration rendered to them by the 1986 EDSA revolution.

Deleuze, Immanent Revolution, and the Dice-Throwing Principle

Towards a Deleuzian Poststructuralist Framework

This research is a genealogical analysis and critique of the EDSA Revolutions using the poststructuralist political framework of the contemporary French philosopher Gilles Deleuze. Operationally, this perspective is not anymore

a mere critique of representation structurally manifested in social, political, economic, and so forth aspects of contemporary societies, like centralized political government, hierarchical social systems, and subtle homogenization of culture. It is rather a radical theory that illuminates its field of struggle, the kinds of political subjectivities it fashion, along with the perils of these pathways (Nail, 2012). It is also a diagnosis and assembly of heterogeneous elements into new kinds of philosophical consistencies, which differentially plays between the axes of unity and multiplicity, and between representation and difference. Hence, a Deleuzian theoretical paradigm is a novel political theory that would be contributory in the mapping of the relation between various consistencies and revolutionary deterritorialization.

In one of Deleuze's post-1968 revolution books, written in collaboration with the maverick psychoanalyst Felix Guattari entitled, *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980/1987), they opined that "the intellectual sensations of Post-War France with its spirited polemics against the State-happy or pro-party versions of Marxism and school-building strains of psychoanalysis, which separately represented the dominant intellectual currents of the time, in spite of the fundamentally anarchist nature of the spontaneous popular uprisings that had shaken the world in 1968" (p. xi). This irony, according to them, engendered a mid-seventies slump, a return to religion and political conservatism, and the State deification, which epistemologically reverts back to representationalist thinking (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987). In this vein, albeit Deleuze's project and the EDSA Revolution phenomenon are relatively distanced by their geographic territoriality and discursive materiality, his experience and critical evaluation of the May 1968 Revolution can give us integral historico-philosophical imports for a better understanding why from the high-spirited experience of the first EDSA Revolution, where immanence and difference affirmatively materialized, it transformed into a vicious

Filipino incarceration to identity, decadence, and violence—concretely expressed in the Philippine society via the continuing ascendancy of economic narcissism, political dynasties, social opportunism, and so forth. Ultimately, it is of prodigious emancipatory hope that through a Deleuzian re-configuration of the EDSA revolutions, new types of political imaginations and materialities (desiring-machines), socio-economic organizations (consistencies), multi-centered political strategies, as well as a molecular revolution would be fashioned.

Assemblage of Bodies and Forces

In the context of Deleuzian philosophy, an assemblage is a principle always in-the-making and is evasive to the governance of any transcendental *eidos*. Its creative dynamics comprises of collection of matter-flows, like bodies and affects, regulated by web-like processes of historical configuration. For Deleuze and Guattari (1980/1987), "Every constellation of singularities and traits deducted from the flow—selected, organized, and stratified—in such a way as to converge artificially and naturally" (p. 406).

Moreover, assemblage opens our epistemological horizon to various life registers like human, discursive, psychological, and geological. Any singular force in the assemblage is conceived in relational terms. In other words, it is conceivable as a desiring-machine enmeshed in the logic of enlacement with other machines. In this vein, nothing is already perfect or absolute, since machines' association with others is ceaselessly multiplicitous, as life is perceived as a huge assemblage not simply portraying a blind conformity to linear history or temporality. When machines are interfaced with each other in variegated intensities, new terrains of thinking are made, either in ascending or descending mode. Albeit life is not a mere actualization of an individuated a priori *eidos*, what remain certain are the internal expansions of its potentialities (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987). In connection to this, assemblage is an entity whose protean

anatomy contains both stable and vague borders. A political assemblage such as the state has some parallelism in its utterances and actions, but it continually morphs into something new and charts novel topographies when linked with various radical machines. In any type of assemblage, its participant-machines may change any moment when understanding turns into conflicts, or when harmony turns into dissension (Slack, 2003). For example, when deranged leaders succeed the exceptional ones in a well-developed state, there is a big possibility that the state will convert into a bastion of deception and everydayness. In another case, organization leaders belonging to a common party can inexorably transform into blatant adversaries in the long run—a reality very typical in Philippine political practice. Thus, there is no assurance that assemblages will congregate into a convergent receptacle of ideals, aims, and tactics always. In short, a political assemblage displays a tragic dice-throw politics where teleology is masterfully estranged. Who would have known that the ubiquitous rage of the people during EDSA I would exhibit a non-violent revolution, in the same vein that the EDSA II was fuelled akin to the opening of a brown envelope? Having uttered this question, it is now ripe to concretize the assemblage concept in the 1986 people power uprising.

During the EDSA I uprising, the quantity of the Filipino bodies as days passed escalated. Coming from varying religious orientations, social status, and materialities, the machinic bodies assembled to valiantly face the military machinery under the tutelage of the dictator Marcos. The Filipino assemblage flooded the EDSA road to exhilarate and experience difference, which at time was understood under the term *democracy*. In relation to this, Hannah Arendt's (1976) theorization of power analogously parallels with Deleuze's notion of assemblage. Power in the said revolution was depicted via the array of bodies in dynamic movements, and it cultivated into a sturdy string merging these mobile bodies with the tendons of becoming. According to her, "Power is never the property of an individual; it belongs to a group

and remains in existence only so long as the group keeps together" (Arendt, 1976, p. 44). What then relates the assemblage with Arendt's notion of power is that the collective force fashioned in the event was "rooted in a people that had bound itself by mutual promises and lived in bodies constituted by compact . . . enough to establish a perpetual union" (Arendt, 1963, p. 182)—personifying into *bodies without organs*.

Fundamentally, Bodies-without-Organs (BwO) refers to a non-formed plane of immanence and consistency (Parr, 2005). As a communicative nomadic principle, it catalyzes the systematic world picture regulated by a metaphysical guarantor or an organized stratification. Notwithstanding, it cannot entirely liberate itself from the tyrant war-machine or despotic system that it is confronting; otherwise, there is a high propensity of it to be an object of reification of the very foundational system that it aspires to escape from. In other words, BwO will always be an immanent becoming, resistance, and self-criticism. Moreover, it is faced with an affirmative paradox since "desiring-machines make us an organism; but at the very heart of this production the body suffers from being organized in this way, not having some sort of an organization or no organization at all" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1972/1977, p. 8). Therefore, amidst the process of experience production, a relative kind of ineluctable suffering is experienced by BwO, because even its nomadic movement must involve the actuality of becoming-an-organism. Additionally, BwO is a composite of various configurations and materialities. As a proposed antithesis to the identitarian concept of power (organism), BwO are pondered as "plateaus in communication with other plateaus on the plane of consistency" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1972/1977, p. 175).

The 1986 revolution deconstructs the territory (deterritorialized) of the organized architecturality of the Epifanio Delos Santos Avenue. It then subsequently transformed (reterritorialized) into an arena for the will to power's expression—a stage for the aesthetic relation of forces and

performance of heterogeneous assemblages (human, discursive, and non-human like the very architecturality of the EDSA highway itself). In the Deleuzian parlance, Nietzsche's concept of the will to power is configured as the principle of the synthesis of forces. Besides, it identifies the lines of flight of forces according to quantity and quality, as well as evaluates by genealogically identifying hierarchy of values between different life-forms. The antagonism between reactive (life-denigrating) and active (life-affirming) forces around the EDSA highway characterized the typology of Deleuzian BwO amassing the public space. In relation to this, Deleuze (1962/1983) opined in *Nietzsche and Philosophy* that a body is defined by the relationship between discordant forces, "whether it is chemical, biological, or political . . . Being composed of a plurality of irreducible forces, the body is a multiple phenomenon; its unity is that of a multiple phenomenon. In a body, the superior or dominant are known as active and the inferior or dominated are known as reactive" (p. 40).

Although the EDSA assemblage's BwO antagonized the representationalist power in the guise of Martial Law's uncouth cruelty, we must be incessantly heedful regarding the inevitable later necessity of stratified institutions such as the State, and the inherent dogmatic tendency of political power as a despotically-stratified body. Going further, when power is viewed using the assemblage lens, it will always act as a supple admonition to protect or distantiate cautiously a concept, event, or a person, from being alienated to the putrefied significations surrounding it. In this manner, looking for a particular individual or principle behind the EDSA revolution would be a futile venture. When a particular concept such as "individual" or "power" is de-centered, the possibility of identitarian domination—be it cognitive, metaphysical, or political—can be controlled, albeit not necessarily annihilated. This is differential power at its best, emanating not from a transcendental center, but from a congregation of various life-forces—the Filipino assemblage. In fact, when a visiting political

analyst suggested to Defense Minister Enrile and Constabulary General Ramos for a government to be regulated by a military *junta* posterior to the dictatorship's downfall, they confessed its unfeasibility, since the power mobilizing in the body politic was indispensably premised on the people power assemblage. According to one of the Filipino participants: "Watching them, listening to them, feeling them, I suddenly realize that these millions have already transcended Cory, Enrile-Ramos, and Marcos. Cory, Enrile-Ramos and Marcos have, in fact, become incidental to the situation" (as cited in Mercado & Tatad, 1986, p. 238).

A Differential Rejoinder to an Identitarian Tyranny

Along with other poststructuralist thinkers, Deleuze is pondered as a proponent of a politics of difference—an "anti-Hegelian ontology and ethics, at the heart of which lies difference" (Patton, 2000, p. 30), whose fundamental thrust is the voice of the molecular and becoming found within the margins of the entire history of western thought. Specifically, he is concerned in overturning the primacy given to identity circulating in western rationality's entire corpus.

In trying to concretize the principle of difference in the EDSA I struggle, we must not put into oblivion that during Pres. Marcos' totalitarian regime, emancipatory spaces for life's flourishing were drastically repressed. His government typified the deficiency of a metaphysical guarantor to regulate the Filipinos' passage towards ascending life, and articulated the inability of its system to highlight the provisional and material features of life. When the Filipino condition and the social milieu's condition were feebly administered by the autocratic machinery, effervescent landscapes of thriving gradually, yet dynamically, become radiant potentialities.

The relatively omnipresent deterritorialization and reterritorialization of the various forces amid the societal landscape during the revolution were never totally eradicated. It is because they

were harmoniously re-attuned for the Filipino assemblage's higher glory—a sheer portrayal of the Nietzschean adage of experiencing chaos as a precondition in gaining exuberant force. Foregrounded in the exceptional character of the revolution, anonymous bodies became awed by the novelty of the event and to its consequential gravity (Gonzaga, 2009). An ethical test dawned in front of the collectivity on either to overcome decadence or to remain within the confines of herd morality. This is an extraordinary moment to choose either ascending or descending life typology amidst EDSA's chaotic canvass where “divergence is affirmed in such a way that the either . . . or itself becomes a pure affirmation . . . Thus, the ideational center of convergence is by nature perpetually de-centered, it serves only to affirm divergence” (Deleuze, 1969/1990, p. 174).

Beyond the ABC's of past revolutions and political change, assemblage of bodies, values, and language configurations were transformed throughout the event. Since various machinic bodies were not yet fully penetrated by political and reactive ideologies at that time, they outgunned the templates of determinism and became acquiescent to the macro-struggle, regardless of their neophyte body physiology. Indeed, the plangent arrival of difference devoured metaphysico-epistemological structures and relations. Consequently, the people and other forces converted into a concrete assemblage moving in concert, without the panoptical disciplinarity of a transcendental philosophy, such as the state, political system, and ideology. The vigorously protean force stemming from the collective's solemn yearning for liberty continuously pulled surrounding machines of the social milieu into its creative corpus. The garden of bodies unified into a resilient war-machinery geared to embattle a foundationalist center, towards freedom. In fact, as the non-violent radicalization of performances was construed by the moment's spontaneity, the revolutionaries gallantly went to the streets to amalgamate their bodies with other materialities under an immanently-configured justice principle, despite the government's pervading exhibition

of its iron hand. Astonishingly, a reversal of values occurred. Instead of equipping its hands with aggression, the wall created by the Filipinos offered the soldiers food, flowers, and rosaries, and a plea for the military to disarm themselves.

Dredging for this event's historical parallelism would easily give us the name of Mahatma Gandhi with his non-violent redemptive project. But as far as we know, “the Philippine February phenomenon is the first example in modern history where it has been used effectively to prevent one military force from attacking another. Even among nonviolent revolutions, it was unique in that unarmed civilians were defending the military” (Elwood, 1986, p. 16). In being pacified and anti-deterministic, the revolution's call for increased communal spirit was based on pragmatically differential grounds. Even the forefront of the dictatorial machinery (the soldiers) had a difficulty in evading the dice-playing ardor of the struggle, as they deterritorialized their military uniforms and became part of the revolutionary assemblage. Hence, the EDSA revolution indubitably engendered the transgression of violence, individuality, traditional historicism, and more importantly, mediocre values.

The assemblage of all these forces ruptured the territoriality of different social representations. This revolution, happening only in the immanent arena of life, brought us back to Nietzsche's theorization of the world as chaotic, and a-teleological, in characters (Deleuze, 1962/1983). Further, the experience of the non-thematizable creativity made the EDSA an artistic example of the affirmation of chance: “Uncertain of its outcome, the people vacillated between the different affective responses. On the one hand, the event was incomprehensible, because the series of episodes that transpired and the eventual outcome that it produced appeared to be accidental” (Gonzaga, 2009, p. 124). The assemblage of forces which converted into an immense potency necessitated still the presence of the will to power as “something which overcomes them, but is necessary for them for their own actuality” (Deleuze, 1962/1983, p. 54). The plentiful

molecular singularities occupying the public space like the political center's non-violent overthrow were cogently hauled in the logic of chance. The groundbreaking throw of the revolutionary dice portrays the fervid risk for the affirmation of chance that eventually spawned the opening of the Philippine society and its surrounding desiring-machines to difference or to multifold life possibilities.

Astonishingly, the assemblage of bodies (BwO) was characterized by the "dice-throw" principle with its dynamicity, immanence, and openness. The multiplicity of becomings inherent in the bodies' might depicted in EDSA was fashioned by the Deleuzio-Nietzschean moment of will to power and chance, as the machinic assemblages were spontaneously called forth to gather at the said highway to boldly bridge chaos and the world. According to Deleuze (1962/1983):

The will to power as a principle does not suppress chance, but implies it, because without chance it would be neither plastic nor changing. Chance is the bringing of forces into relation, the will to power is the determining principle of this relation. The will to power is a necessary addition to force but can only be added to forces brought into relation by chance. The will to power has chance as its heart for only the will to power is capable of affirming all chance. (p. 53)

The dice-playing world is the playground for the child and desiring-machines capable of producing both good and bad dice-players. In fact, the festivity of the EDSA I's success did not actualize from an immediate grand picture, for it was derived from formerly fragmented occurrences. Fascinatingly though, the assemblagic force and non-violent language of the revolution awakened the Filipinos towards undiscovered potentialities. You could see citizens wearing ordinary hats transfiguring into authentic participants in the aesthetic performance, women de-centering their gender-constitution by serving unwaveringly the participants, as well as food, rosaries, and flowers, among others, ennobling as animated vitalities. To some extent, even nature coalesced

with this differential rage. Take for instance, a tear gas which was supposed to aid scatter the mob during a grand military assault, was blown by the wind back in the direction of the troops (Elwood, 1986). Additionally, as the helicopters flew over the camps, the Filipinos were expecting rocket firings toward their direction, but they landed instead, their pilots defecting to the rebel forces. The rhizomic interaction of these heterogeneous forces (human and non-human) exterminates the privileged slate granted to the subject, for he/she became only one among the myriad of elements found in the whole immanent field of historical relations, thereby creating an assemblage of subjectivities. Thus, the democratization of these capacities educates us that we do not need to be a cultural icon, a male, or even an individual, in bestowing a voice in the struggle.

After injustice's permeating mutation in the Philippine soil, the disconsolate experiences of the people and adjacent forces have actualized into a giant desiring-machine seeking for Heraclitean "eternal justice" (Deleuze, 1962/1983). Even the ontological habitat of the word "justice" explodes, towards becoming. The will to power as a functionalist form of desire renders life into artistic transformations and a plethora of relational assemblages. The assemblage's will to power, which was manifested in the arrival of the unexpected, obliterated everything regimented and complete. In this wondrous moment, differential justice embraced material reality like dynamite fashioning the realization of novel values: "It really felt like a miracle was happening. Soldiers not firing even when ordered to, my own children and wife in EDSA were actually enjoying it, and the weather so nice and cool throughout the few days" (Mercado & Tatad, 1986, p. 250). Undoubtedly, the revolution radicalized the despotic center from being to becoming. The noise of dejected experiences, like frustrations and inequalities, turned into music; the formerly complex and risky movements of bodies became a joyful dance; and, life became a meaningful celebration.

The Return of the *Different* as the Recurrence of Depotism

The Philippine Assemblage under EDSA II and III

If the principle of difference is creatively infused within the body of a revolution or any plateaus, it would spawn the very possibility of groundbreaking events. In the EDSA I revolution, we saw a landscape of creative assemblage demolishing a totalitarian normativity. It was driven by the assemblage's will to power and dedication for noble values, as the gates for Filipinos in furthering an ascending life typology were opened.

Informed by the death of *God* (or any surrogate serving as a metaphysical guarantor), Nietzsche formulates the typologies of the ascending and the descending life, and introduces the metaphor of the Eternal Return in order to test us on what kind of life do we want to recur. For Deleuze (1968/1994), this kind of recurrence is a returning of "the being of becoming" (p. 41). In connection, Ronald Bogue (1989) in his book *Deleuze and Guattari* testified to this claim in opining that "Deleuze understands the eternal return not as a return of being and the *Same*, but of becoming and difference, the world of Heraclitus and chance" (p. 29). In this manner, a world of difference is a rhizomatic plateau of multiplicities, and not of identity: the "eternal return is the internal identity of the world and of chaos, the *Chaosmos*" (Deleuze, 1968/1994, p. 299). In addition, closely-related to the eternal return principle are the concepts of deterritorialization and reterritorialization. These nomadic Deleuzian principles are fraternal processes empowering and identifying assemblage's lines of flight. In addition, these concepts do not illustrate thought's retrogression to its previous territory, but rather refers to the ways in which deterritorialized elements traverse novel machinic relations.

During Corazon Aquino's leadership, she spearheaded the formulation of a new groundwork for political practice and stringently-regulated institutions *contra* the renaissance of another

authoritarian regime. Challenged by this predicament, a Constitutional Convention was commenced to replace the previously-existing constitution marred by avaricious intentions and denigrating principles (Azada & Hermida, 2001; Mercado & Tatad, 1986). This also includes an exhaustive revamp across the entire political structure of the Judiciary to eradicate even Marcos' acolytes. Unfortunately, the mutually dignified fervor inherent within the Filipino assemblage during Pres. Aquino's time deadened, that is why corruption in variegated types and locations had its agile resurgence.

Fifteen years after the 1986 EDSA Revolution, the Philippines experienced another event popularly called the EDSA II. It happened on January 2001, due to the downright wickedness of President Joseph Estrada. The action-star-turned-tyrant spent all his efforts in the movie screen to delude the people that effective acting is a potent requirement for the presidential election. Nonetheless, as a leader occupying the highest position in the land, his movie scripts personified into a rubbish *tabula rasa*, which became inept of helping him for the deterrence of his ruin in front of the Filipino audience. According to the *Transparency International* (2004), Estrada's previous landslide victory in the May 1998 election, was obscurely tarnished by colossal accounts of corruption in the likes of questionable deposits, unexplained wealth, and palatable abodes. As such, Philippine society returned into its old form, and rapacious venalities, malevolent or "trapo" politicians, and participatory politics repugnance, had found their way back. Consequently, an impeachment case was instigated against him from the Congress to the Senate, and down to the EDSA highway. Concomitant with the trial, Manila Archbishop Cardinal Sin declared him guilty of plunder and corruption, and sturdily sought for his removal. This was analogously strengthened when majority of the senators decided "NO" for the opening of one of the supposed envelopes that would intensify Estrada's anomaly during the legal proceeding. Consequently, huge quantity of

protesters flooded EDSA highway calling for his resignation. The Filipino assemblage fueled with animosity was bolstered by students from various schools and left-wing organizations, and so forth, followed by the Philippine National Police and the Armed Forces of the Philippines's withdrawal of support.

The remarkable triumph brought about by the EDSA I and II certainly depicts us the redemptive power of the Filipino assemblage:

The historical context of EDSA is that it is the court of last resort for the sovereign people to throw off the yoke of abusive and corrupt leaders after all institutional means to end abuses have failed. That has been the meaning embedded in EDSA by People Power I, which toppled Ferdinand Marcos, and People Power II, which deposed Joseph Estrada. The Filipino people endured 14 years of the Marcos dictatorship . . . before People Power took shape in February 1986. They endured two and a half years of Estrada's abuses and plunder before they moved to end his corrupt and incompetent regime ("Estrada Allies Mass," 2001).

After Estrada's eviction in EDSA II, he was succeeded by the then vice-president Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo. Albeit some critics swiftly claimed that their abhorrence to Estrada was incongruous to Arroyo's divinization. In the macro (molar), EDSA II peacefully overthrew President Estrada similar to the non-violent resistance that occurred 15 years ago. While in the micro (molecular), its stature in the annals of Philippine history is still filled with web-like discrepancies and skepticisms, especially with regard to its lawfulness and value (Gatmaytan, 2006).

Four months after, another struggle was occasioned by the Filipino assemblage, called EDSA III. A throng of Estrada's supporters buffered his house equipped with the goal of safeguarding their former president from police apprehension (Gatmaytan, 2006). This crowd was mostly composed of the marginalized sector and members of the *Iglesia ni Cristo* which is

another dominant religious bloc other than the Roman Catholic. This furious assemblage then choke Roman Catholic-governed EDSA highway, for the oscillating causes of their ire for the newly deposed President Estrada's arrest, and for reinstating a previous presidential monster in the Philippine land, namely, Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo.

Numerous broadcast station vans were burned by the ferocious herd, and the governments military machinery were assaulted with Molotov bombs, rocks and pipes, as the agitated supporters walked towards the Malacañang Palace. In turn, the police and the military responded with force after implementing a "maximum tolerance" policy, thus, hurting many protesters. On May 1, 2001, President Arroyo declared a State of Rebellion pursuant to Proclamation No. 38, and ordered for the seizure of the minds behind the struggle. On May 7, 2001, she lifted the *State of Rebellion*, as the EDSA III's fierce spirit ended futilely under her professionally-configured labyrinth (San Juan, 2007).

From a macro-perspective, the authenticity of the EDSA III is still disputable. The EDSA III's social substance was not able to escape critical diagnosis because its participants were rather driven by a problematically debauched reason—to bring back into seat the deposed President Joseph Estrada. Additionally, the ire of the crowd was aggravated by the specious exhortation made by some imprudent politicians as they romanticize the pre-existing distance between the rich and the poor in the country, and forge the idea that bringing back Estrada into the post would liberate them from economic poverty.

The legitimization question on EDSA III was coupled by the global condemnation of many democratic societies and the Western media regarding Philippine's decision in ejecting Estrada from office. For them, this is something illegally-processed, since it is only an offshoot of a conspiracy theory made by political and economic elites in the country, as well as, a manifestation of a weak state, which is detrimental to the democratic institutions restored during the

EDSA I (Cordingley & Lopez, 2001, as cited in Gatmaytan, 2006). Despite the aforementioned criticism, Arroyo inversely pondered the EDSA II as a profound concretization of direct democracy. This viewpoint gained considerable affirmations like from the former Philippine constabulary chief-turned Philippine president Fidel Ramos. He explained, “that Philippine-style democracy entitles the people to use both direct (extralegal means) and indirect (legal) forms of exercising popular sovereignty so that when the indirect mechanisms do not function” (Gatmaytan, 2006, p. 12).

On the other side of the coin, it is perceivable that Arroyo’s mind contains a galaxy of political tactics in shielding her whim of absolute dominion. She has cunningly used the banner of the EDSA II, as a pretext for enormous venalities and human rights violations. On February 21, 2007, Philip Alston, United Nation’s Human Rights Council Investigator discovered appalling quantity of extrajudicial executions in the country since she assumed the presidency in 2001. According to San Juan (2007), “Alston censured the regime’s officials and the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) for their ‘total denial’ of such an outrageous situation. Since 2001, Amnesty International, Asian Human Rights Commission, and other international monitors have condemned the Arroyo government for the systematic repression of dissenters from all sectors: workers, women, farmer activists, union leaders, students, lawyers, journalists, and indigenes” (pp. 203-204). Evidently, this political ploy was made possible with the aid of the Armed Forces of the Philippines and the Philippine National Police’s high-ranking members acting as political chess pawns to block any attempt of mass resistance. Her proto-dictatorial rule showed us a coarse illustration of the eternal return—a resurrection of a tyrant inside her minute body, or a recurrence of the *Same* (despotism) inside a new physiological container (Arroyo’s body).

As a master of sophistry, she proclaimed a state of “national emergency” in February 2006. Its main purpose was to deaden the ticking time

bomb amidst the Filipino bodies in order to avert a massive upheaval for her overthrow. Due to widespread extra-judicial killings, 2004 electoral sabotage, and plan to reformulate the 1987 Constitution for her egological ends, even social groups of varying creeds and classes of different orientations have conceivably congregated themselves into an anti-Arroyo war-machine. Unfortunately, two attempts have failed to actualize because of strategies, bribes, threats, and harassments.

On February 2008, parts of the Catholic Church, which was immensely contributory during the EDSA I event, released a peti-apology out of frustration to Arroyo upon the realization that her post-EDSA II’s installation as the president was not really worth-celebrating—for tainting the glory of Philippine democracy (San Juan, 2007). The extreme dismay of the Filipino assemblage to Estrada shaping the so-called EDSA II gave us Arroyo—another tyrant. But despite the non-fulfillment of these shared efforts, poetic justice arrived at the right moment. After her term as president, abundant cases were filed against her, foremost of which is the continuation of her electoral sabotage offense. Grippingly, a reversal of luck has occurred to them. Arroyo is now charged with plunder and incarcerated at the Veterans Memorial Hospital—the similar venue of Estrada’s detainment during the Arroyo administration.

Diverse Implications to the Philippine Body Politic

Based from the lessons given to us by history, when the provisional attribute of any concept is marginalized in favor of the principle of being or identity, then the life-celebrating values rendered to us by EDSA I can develop easily into several forms of quandaries. As cited above, the EDSA Revolution paradoxically returned under the labels of EDSA II and III Revolutions, because the people were not able to successfully maintain its ethico-emancipatory vigor and the assemblagic nature of the struggle. The spirit of EDSA I

was obliterated in favor of narcissistic political ends, decadent organizations, and dogmatic principles. These repetitions radiantly portray Deleuze assemblage analysis in terms of capture or reterritorialization of revolutionary forces by corrupt or reactionary elements (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987). Thus, these new EDSAs constituted a return founded on reactive view of life, originating from another dictatorial power with different machinic components.

After these aforesaid distorted pathways and despoiled machines in our political history's assemblage, it is not anymore an existential squabble as to who is the lesser evil helmsman of our Republic; but rather, as to what kind of leader, what quality of Philippine vision, or what type of life do we want to recur and experience. Since our country is presently imperialized by global hegemony, decayed politics, and disenchanting ethics, hoping for a return of something like the first EDSA would easily actualize as an anti-Deleuzian dream, for initially what returns is not the *Same*. Since the eternal return is a physico-ethical selection of being, it allows us to comprehend the world as characterized by becoming or the ritornello of difference (Deleuze, 1968/1994). This pedagogy must help us discern that the "venue" and the "mass of people" were not the only machines responsible in making the 1986 revolution a distinct reality in the Philippines, even in the case of wearing yellow t-shirts, while crying for democracy without the profound knowledge of the struggle's dynamicity and life's differential nature. For this matter, an affirmative devastation of memory can elicit profound creativity to our current historical situation. It is because when we exceedingly monumentalize this historical alterity and comprehend it via the yardstick of descending life, then our individual and collective memory will develop into a work of *ressentiment*. Therefore, a Dionysian forgetting must be within integral grasp, for this would require selection and affirmation of difference.

Indeed, many of Philippine society's assemblages and lines of flight have now developed belligerently. As argued earlier, an

assemblage's lines of flight does not guarantee a utopian movement that is why many fibers of the 1986 EDSA Revolution turned amiss. Sadly, many Filipinos have re-entered *Plato's Cave* to be restrained once more under slave morality's shackles. *Juan dela Cruz's* (the symbol for an ordinary Filipino) appreciation of the indispensable values fashioned by this struggle is already mediocritized by the descending life-typology. Due to the vicious practice of *democracy* concretized in the ensuing reform projects of the Philippine government in the post-EDSA periods, what is substantiated instead of the cultivation of a strong basis for enduring societal transformation is otherwise. Meaning to say, the supposed leaders of the rehabilitation efforts rather became progenitors of political dynasties, opportunism, and the like (San Juan, 2007). Juan de la Cruz must radically apprehend that for every exuberant moment that this revolution offers, there is a corresponding price to pay, when we do not grip it responsibly—dystopia.

If other world revolutions brought forth comprehensive economic and socio-political reforms to their societies due to EDSA I's inspiration, why did we (Filipinos) not gain something from it? In his web-essay entitled, "*Did EDSA Really Matter?*" Rigoberto Tiglao (2014, par. 5) summarized some of the various negative consequences of the EDSA I:

The EDSA Revolution restored the power of our oligarchs, and the country's oligarchic structure created by colonial powers, and of course, its ideological superstructure, Spanish Catholicism . . . No wonder we have been unable to undertake even the weakest program for population control, making us the Asian country with the fastest-growing population—of mostly poor people . . . The cronies and big-business supporters of the dictator, years after EDSA, regained their seats in politics, business, and even media.

From a more specific plane, the Meralco Corporation fell once again into the monopolizing hands of the Lopez family, and the Hacienda

Luisita issue once more favored the Aquino clan. Doubtless, the elites get what they want, at the expense of the changing our social structures so our country would be more productive (Tiglao, 2014).

Moreover, the aftermath scholarships relating to the EDSA I and II struggles are problematically filled with web-like contingencies as to whether all popular uprisings should be considered as parts of the people power tradition, and whether all antagonism to autocracy must be expressed through conventional procedures. As such, these suggest for a redefinition of our notions of power, governance, historical dialectics, and ethical practices. However, this can neither be concretized by degenerately reifying the past every time we are faced with a plethora of problems, nor by an immediate utopian leap towards the future. Albeit the future is yet-to-come for us through a more differential rumination of the various machinic experiences operating in our everyday, then EDSA can be comprehended as an Event not only of the past, and of the present, but also one still-in-the-making—embedded in a perpetual process of becoming.

At present, the concept of ascending life in our land is systemically bastardized by neocolonial paradigms and the culture industry, among others. In this manner, the question on what kind of life do we want to recur still remains elusive to us. EDSA I's pragmatics appear unsatisfactory to again invite surrounding protean effects and life-affirming forces to form another emancipatory assemblage or war machine for the Filipinos in the present epoch. Our new adversary has paradoxically self-evolved, that is, in gaining a human face and institutionalized coordinates. In this manner, a radically innovative kind of revolutionary awareness and vigilance must be formulated to undergird our critical vision.

The Possibility of Becoming Revolutionary Today

Writ large, the whole paper is an appropriation

of an array of Deleuzian principles in order to analyze and critique the EDSA revolutions. My drive behind this task is that the EDSA revolution(s) produced both noble and debased forces via kaleidoscopic machinic relations in the molecular and the molar level. Furthermore, this was inevitably complemented by the relentless recurrence of identitarian violence expressed in different assemblages of Filipino life. Perhaps, there is also another terrain of assemblage at which EDSA II and III can be viewed upon. Regardless of the inauthenticities experienced by the various actors and materialities occasioned in the EDSA highway, the former removed the tyrant Joseph Estrada, and our abjection under Gloria Arroyo bequeathed us many insightful lessons. Considerably, these phenomena have expanded our cognitive fields and generated praxiological discourses and effects for the people's *conscientization* regarding the indispensability of nation-building, law-enforcement, social activism, and ethical responsibility. It has also raised many questions as to what kind of political governance, cultural understanding, and historical dialectics do we want in the future. But once again, we must be ruthlessly critical regarding our perennial pursuit for a collective Filipino identity as a foundation for anti-authoritarian machinery because it will always be susceptible to the homogenizing trap laid down by the despotic system itself (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987). In the global scene, the Egyptians are now casted under this political spell in the midst of their simmering indignation against the Morsi government. Speciously, this so-called Middle Eastern naiveté is what aggravates the Egyptian government's problem that is why as of the moment, disarray forcefully plagues the society, while redemptive hope is still nebulous to the people.

Differential thinking should first and foremost deterritorialize thinking (traditional) itself. In addition, differentiability will render repetition always as the *ritornello* of the different. Specifically, one instance of this principle's misreading in the Philippine domain pertains to the Filipinos perennial desire for the EDSA

I to occur once again. Problematically, the more we push ourselves with this reactive aspiration, the more we allow the generation of innumerable fascist organisms (like Estrada and Arroyo) and oppressive forces, rather than cultivate upright values and opportunities. Albeit reterritorialization is not retrogression to the past, we can still gather and be inspired by the various machines deterritorialized in the 1986 EDSA revolution to serve as high-spirited typologies for the creation of a new and untimely concept of revolution in the present scheme of things.

In the dice-playing world of chance, the next EDSA can originate either from a reactive or active plane. The Promethean hope remains that it would originate from a differential ethics whose internal fuel is the will to ascending life. If the EDSA singularity returns, it will be of another life-force(s). If a distinct event recurs, the perennial crucial question is whether we, as contemporary Filipino assemblage, are ready to embrace *chaosmos* (a world of chaos). No matter how many EDSAs will come along our way, if we Filipinos will not learn active life 101, our lives will simply be a ceaseless addition of nihilistic zeroes. The recurrence of the different will be a phenomenon carrying a new name(s), coming from a new place(s), and only feasible with a different magnitude(s).

The rhizomic estuary between the EDSA I singularity and Deleuze's differential project is the intrepid effort via diverse intensities to demystify the very configuration of the concepts of "nation", "revolution", and more importantly, "life." However, EDSA I's aftermath negligently fell into the hands of traditional revolutionary rubric. On the macro-level, history is a witness to different wretched revolutions in the course of civilization like the Bolshevik Revolution bolstering Stalin, the Cambodian Socialism midwifing Pol Pot, and the EDSA Revolution II solidifying Gloria Arroyo. These kinds of historical actualities in the Deleuzian plateau almost always end up in mayhem (Deleuze & Guattari, 1991/1994). For this reason, Deleuze formulated a brand of clement activism, tasked to "gently tip the

assemblage" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987), which intimates that revolution, understood in the molar framework, is a rather fragile tactic for achieving high-spirited ends.

Becoming-revolutionary must still assume a molar appearance in thought-transformation, while constantly being accompanied by molecular becomings. Deleuze and Guattari characterized this view as a radical politics of desire irreducible to any foundational stratification. According to them, this politics "dissolves the mystifications of power through the kindling, on all levels, of anti-oedipal forces—the schizzes-flows—forces that escape coding, scramble the codes, and flee in all directions" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1972/1977, p. xxii). Multiple becomings can only occur at the micro-level (molecular). In essence, the current role of Deleuzian molecular politics is to generate new-desiring machines, to create a new earth to be inhabited by the people-to-come—"a possibility of life" (Deleuze & Parnet, 1987/2002, p. 4). The people-to-come is an Event, a resistance crafting group becoming towards a faceless future. The fashioning of the Filipinos-to-come and the revolution-to-come imply an aesthetic engagement with *chaosmos* and the gaseous embrace of anarchism. The fabulation of a people to come "is directed toward something that is not absolutely chaotic and anarchic, towards some form of collectivity that is simultaneously metastable and temporarily stable, always engaged in process of negotiation, dissolutions, and reformation" (Bogue, 1989, p. 87).

In the chapter, "People Power and the Legal System: A Sociological Note" of the book, *Reflections on Sociology and Philippine Society*, it is interesting to ponder how the sociologist Randolph David (2001) provided a lucid description of a revolutionary struggle parallel with Deleuze's notion of becoming-revolutionary that opens itself to the future:

People power is amorphous; it follows no definite timetable, has no definable organization or leadership, and follows no predetermined direction. Its main concern is to increase its numbers from day to day. It knows when it

has attained its peak; the collective excitement reaches a crescendo, and the crowd eagerly awaits its moment of final discharge and triumph. (pp. 241-242)

Moreover, in another book of David (2002) entitled, *Nation, Self, and Citizenship: an Invitation to Sociology*, he argued:

Real people power is autonomous, self-willed, and well informed. It draws its courage and determination from the power of its convictions. It is inventive and free, and not constrained by dogma, political correctness or any party line. It is a moral protest elevated to an art. It is not awed by power. It stands up to power, but it disdains power. That is why it has no leaders, only symbols . . . It is non-violent and highly disciplined. It is militant but never sad. Indeed it is festive and celebratory. It is angry at times, but never aggressive. It does not only claim the high moral ground, but it also regards itself as the force of the new, the vanguard of a hopeful future. (pp. 302-303)

Assemblage as a war-machine affirms the possibilities and perils of sovereignty (state). Although this may have novel effects to cross the threshold of identity, the state (as a regulative mechanism) is still necessary to guard it in the long run. In fact, the state is not intrinsically a bastion of wickedness that is why its structural foundation can be maintained, as long as ascending and rhizomic machines and lines of flight are still derivable from it. Unquestionably, this does not discount that deterritorialization can be pulled anytime from life's immanent field when this political assemblage converts into a fascist machine. Since for Deleuze, states and radical machines relate in perpetual dynamism, the challenge then is how to ingeniously discern and distantiate the two in the pendulum of life, that is, between chaos and order, so as to take advantage of the life-affirming forces of metamorphosis without risking one's individual or collective life (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987).

In the eyes of Deleuze, becoming-

revolutionary renders us the possibility of hope. It is a praxiological nomadism and a becoming-minortarian, composed of critical evaluation of various landscapes, sustaining a certain degree of political power without and within the state apparatus, and charting new navigations in various parlances (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987). A Deleuzian revolutionary struggle is a micro-political war-machine that aspires for the transfiguration of the material world via the violent encounter between heterogeneous forces and the construction of creative spaces for life's potentialities, as well as, virtualities to embrace the immanent plane. It is because "molecular escapes and movements would be nothing if they did not return to the molar organizations to reshuffle their segments, their binary distributions of sexes, classes, and parties" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987, pp. 216-217).

Deleuze devised several conceptual and practical strategies pragmatic for the further construction of a new revolutionary *ethos* proficient in deterritorializing the seemingly impermeable citadel of political representation and repetition. In the words of Deleuze & Parnet (1987/2002) in their book *Dialogues*:

Instead of gambling on the eternal impossibility of the revolution and on the fascist return of a war-machine in general, why not think that *a new type of revolution is in the course of becoming possible*, and that all kinds of mutating, living machines conduct wars, are combined and trace out a plane of consistence which undermines the plane of organization of the World and the States?" (p. 147)

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