



BOOK REVIEW

New materialist / Posthuman feminism

Thejaswini. J. C

Hannah Stark (2017). *Feminist theory after Deleuze*. Bloomsbury. New York.

Deleuzian concepts are not particularistic, therefore they present both challenges as well as possibilities. While their ability to operate on the plane of immanence is often seen as a potential lens for various situations, arranging the arguments systematically remains a challenge due to the rhizomatic nature of Deleuze's thoughts. *Feminist Theory After Deleuze* (Stark, 2017) attempts to address this challenge by providing explanations for his concepts from a feminist point of view.

In addition to the book's objective of elucidating Deleuzian philosophy through the lens of feminism, it also serves as a basic reader of Deleuzian concepts. The introductory chapter discusses the core idea of the book and provides a detailed overview of subsequent chapters. The chapter titles, which are also Deleuzian concepts, serve as points of departure to think through Deleuze. Each chapter clearly defines the applicability of the particular concept when used in feminist politics. The book adopts the Deleuzian perspective, which views problems in general and the issue of gender in particular, not as limitations or constraints, but as generative forces. Consequently, feminist struggles and issues are perceived as generative, producing new ways of thinking.

The first chapter, titled 'Thought', questions the traditional patriarchal attempts to perceive thinking as a non-feminine activity. It highlights the absence of feminist issues in intellectual discourse for a significant period and attributes this to the perception of thinking as a male act (Braidotti, 1991). The chapter uncovers the historical struggles that women have faced in participating in intellectual discourses and posits the necessity to use Deleuze in this regard, as thought to Deleuze is non-hierarchic. In addition, the chapter details Deleuzian call to move beyond Cartesian logic, which sees men as rational beings who think and discuss, while women are reduced to material bodies. Further, the author places celebrated liberal humanism in an antithetical stance, arguing that, like other philosophical positions of its time, liberal humanism has failed to attend the issues of women, as it stresses the essential human, which re-emphasises the hierarchies in thinking. Deleuzian rhizomatic thinking, in contrast to arborescent thinking follows no system or order. It liberates the act of thinking from the phallogocentric approach, and ensures an inclusive space for thinking.

The second chapter contains one of the most important concepts of Deleuze, which also appears in the chapter titled 'Becoming'. It delves into Deleuzian fascination with movement and ruptures, providing detailed explanations of related concepts such as molar, molecular, majoritarian and minoritarian. Deleuzian perception of molar identities is configured as stable, organised and territorialised identities that are adapted with normative conditioning. On the other hand molecular identities are the rupture towards the unstable. The chapter delineates why becoming-molecular or becoming-minoritarian operates differently within female and male bodies, as becoming minoritarian also involves undermining power. Deleuzian contributions to the concept of becoming are relevant for gender studies, in this regard, as they aid in the exploration of power relations. Becoming, in the context of gender, does not imply a transition from one molar entrance to the other, rather it is about the undoing of historical inscriptions. The author anticipates that the concept of becoming-woman, which has no connection with the historic category of women, will enable us to think beyond the static and to negate the idea of essentialism.

The third chapter departs from and revolves around the concept of 'desire'. It begins by highlighting an interesting yet paradoxical connection between women and desire. On one hand, women receive constant reminders about what they should desire, while on the other hand, they are perceived and treated as objects of desire. The chapter narrates the historical evolvement of the concept of desire in the field of psychology and negates the psychoanalysis approaches since it perceives desire as a lack. Deleuzian understanding of desire is rooted in socio-economic conditions rather than emerging solely from interiority. Such an understanding goes beyond the reproductive drive and liberates desire from patriarchy. Desire to Deleuze is neither about a lack nor an attempt to limit the body, instead is a generative force, thus the author argues, it aids women in the process of becoming-woman, and thereby becoming-minoritarian.

Chapter four is titled 'Bodies', which is one of the most significant concepts in feminist discourse. However, Deleuze's idea of the body differs from the one in a conventional view. His effort to rescue the body from the Cartesian logic itself negates the phallogentric approach towards the body. Revisiting the arguments in the first chapter, the author asserts that Cartesian logic tends to create binaries and hierarchies, associating mind and thereby rationality with men and body with women. Further, the sex-gender distinction in Anglo-American feminism, which is widely used to understand sexual differences, is challenged in the chapter. Instead lived experience is posited as the centre of the issue. Deleuzian rejection of the body as a site of social code inscription, and his reception of embodied experiences aligns with this argument. The chapter concludes with an argument that the understanding of the body in terms of differences and capacities, instead of what it is, helps not only feminism but disability studies as well (Shildrick, 2004). Quoting Shildrick and Hicky-Moody, the author establishes the necessity of understanding the body not merely as a field of sexual/reproductive desires, but as a site of production and potentials. The adoption of this position, the author argues, helps anyone to understand the process of becoming, becoming-minoritarian.

The organisation of chapters in the book is commendable, not for touching every key concept of Deleuze or explaining them, but for drawing an effective connection from one chapter to the other. The fifth chapter, 'Difference' in the same way connects to all four previous chapters and explains the significance of Deleuzian difference in feminist inquiries. In this chapter, the author clarifies that Deleuze cannot be used for identity politics, as he is often misunderstood. His notion of difference does not revolve around oppositional understanding or identity. This perspective diverges from the Anglo-American arguments of erasure of difference.

The sixth and final chapter of the book establishes the significance of politics for feminism. The author begins the chapter by arguing that when it comes to concerns related to sex, gender and sexuality, power cannot be overlooked and therefore politics becomes relevant. However, in this context, politics is not limited to ideology alone, rather it encompasses the power dynamics that spread over structures and people. Deleuzian notion of politics neither centres around human subject nor adheres to identity politics, instead, it offers alternative ways of thinking beyond the politics of recognition. Recognition is problematic in feminism as it covers plurality and difference (Stark, 2017). However, the author does not negate the feminist movements that strive for recognition and representation, but is concerned that the by-product will be macro categories such as 'women' and 'human'. Deleuzian ontology aligns with these arguments, as it does not completely negate the representation paradigm, but rather places it on a secondary level.

References

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Notes on the Contributor

Thejaswini. J. C, Ph.D. is presently Assistant Professor in the Department of Media & Communication at MIT-World Peace University, Pune, India. Her areas of research focus include digital art and affect studies, and affect and feminist materialism.