

# Gilles Deleuze & Felix Guattari and the *Rhuthmoi* of Politics and Economics - Part 2

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## Intermediate Forms of State - Royal State, Machinic Processes and Economic Flows

Because of this relation between city-State and decoding processes, capitalism could seem at first more likely to emerge in cities. But Deleuze and Guattari cited the French historian Fernand Braudel (1902-1985) who argued to the contrary. Towns usually remained, they noted, below this new threshold. “They anticipated capitalism” but they also “warded it off.”

Could it not be said that capitalism is the fruit of the towns, and arises when an urban recoding tends to replace State overcoding? This, however, was not the case. The towns did not create capitalism. The banking and commercial towns, being unproductive and indifferent to the backcountry, did not perform a recoding without also inhibiting the general conjunction of decoded flows. If it is true that they anticipated capitalism, they in turn did not anticipate it without also warding it off. They do not cross this new threshold. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 434)

Capitalism has triumphed through the royal State-form, at least in the West where the States triggered and developed “decoded flows,” and succeeded in “resubjugat[ing] the towns.”

Finally, it was through the State-form and not the town-form that capitalism triumphed; this occurred when the Western States became models of realization for an axiomatic of decoded flows, and in that way resubjugated the towns. As Braudel says, there were “*always two runners, the state and the town*”—two forms and two speeds of deterritorialization—and “the state usually won. . . . everywhere in Europe, it disciplined the towns with instinctive relentlessness, whether or not it used violence. . . . [The states] caught up with the forward gallop of the towns.” (F. Braudel, *Civilisation matérielle et capitalisme*, 1967, pp. 391-400 - *Capitalism and Material Life, 1400-1800*, trans. Miriam Kochan, 1973) (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 434)

The conclusion of the section was clearly aimed at Marxism. The central concept of “mode of

production,” which gave priority to economics over social and political forms, had to be abandoned in favor of the concept of “machinic processes.” The latter referred to complex social and political phenomena which gave the economy its framework and included primitive “mechanisms,” State “apparatuses,” urban “instruments,” nomad “machines,” as well as international “organizations.” Strikingly, each one of these forms of organization was characterized by a form or process, respectively: “prevention-anticipation” against the emergence of the State, “capture” and stratification of heterogeneous forces, “polarization” of the flows of good, ideas and people, “encompassment of heterogeneous social formations.”

We define social formations by *machinic processes* and not by modes of production (these on the contrary depend on the processes). Thus primitive societies are defined by mechanisms of prevention-anticipation; State societies are defined by apparatuses of capture; urban societies, by instruments of polarization; nomadic societies, by war machines; and finally international, or rather ecumenical, organizations are defined by the encompassment of heterogeneous social formations. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 435)

Instead of a unique causality coming from the bottom of the production-consumption process, Deleuze and Guattari suggested adopting a multi-causality based on a topological “coexistence” or “interaction” of “heterogeneous” formations resulting in an assemblage of “machinic processes.” As in any consistent biological and ethological perspective, this interactive coexistence could of course be described “extrinsically and intrinsically.”

But precisely because these processes are variables of coexistence that are the object of a social topology, the various corresponding formations are coexistent. And they coexist in two fashions, extrinsically and intrinsically. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 435)

Extrinsically, imperial States and primitive societies devoid of State have been in constant conflicting relations which have resulted either in the absorption of the former by the latter, or in the production of escaping “new forms, as towns or war machines” which in turn have sometimes been integrated in “international aggregates.”

Primitive societies cannot ward off the formation of an empire or State without anticipating it, and they cannot anticipate it without its already being there, forming part of their horizon. And States cannot effect a capture unless what is captured coexists, resists in primitive societies, or escapes under new forms, as towns or war machines. . . The numerical composition of the war machine is superposed upon the primitive lineal organization and simultaneously opposes the geometric organization of the State and the physical organization of the town. It is this extrinsic coexistence—interaction—that is brought to its own expression in international aggregates. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 435)

The same could naturally be said at the intrinsic level. Each type of social and political organization involved the “coexistence” and interplay of various machinic processes, which could firmly oppose and sometimes deflect the one overwhelming process to which they were subordinated. The State

“as apparatus of capture,” for instance, had a very strong “*power of appropriation*,” but at the same time, the nomad war machine, the urban instruments of polarization, and the primitive anticipation-prevention mechanisms had a high “*power of transference*,” which made them capable of disturbing and sometimes disrupting the State organization.

There is not only an external coexistence of formations but also an intrinsic coexistence of machinic processes. Each process can also function at a “power” other than its own; it can be taken up by a power corresponding to another process. The State as apparatus of capture has a *power of appropriation*; but this power does not consist solely in capturing all that it can, all that is possible, of a matter defined as *phylum*. The apparatus of capture also appropriates the war machine, the instruments of polarization, and the anticipation-prevention mechanisms. This is to say, conversely, that anticipation-prevention mechanisms have a high *power of transference* [*puissance de métamorphose*]: they are at work not only in primitive societies, but move into the towns that ward off the State-form, into the States that ward off capitalism, into capitalism itself, insofar as it wards off and repels its own limits. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 437)

This was not to say, however, that the State, by virtue of its extrinsically and inherently dynamic nature, was to dissolve entirely into the decoded flows of the capitalist economy, when the latter could fully develop. Against the superficial idea, common at that time among Marxists, that capitalism was rapidly homogenizing all social formations, Deleuze and Guattari finally argued that making “all States and all social formations tend to become *isomorphic*” in their capacity to attend “one centered world market,” even as a matter of fact “the so-called socialist countries,” was different from making them homogeneous. The collapse of the Soviet bloc in 1991, the integration of the new States into the international economic system, and finally China’s admission to the WTO in 2001 has proven they were entirely right on this matter.

It might be objected that, at least in the case of capitalism, international economic relations, and at the limit all international relations, tend toward the homogenization of social formations. One could cite not only the cold and concerted destruction of primitive societies but also the fall of the last despotic formations, for example, the Ottoman Empire, which met capitalist demands with too much resistance and inertia. This objection, however, is only partially accurate. To the extent that capitalism constitutes an axiomatic (production for the market), all States and all social formations tend to become *isomorphic* in their capacity as models of realization: there is but one centered world market, the capitalist one, in which even the so-called socialist countries participate. Worldwide organization thus ceases to pass “between” heterogeneous formations since it assures the isomorphy of those formations. But it would be wrong to confuse isomorphy with homogeneity. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 436)

First, there still was “great heterogeneity among States.” Second, they cited the Egyptian-French Marxian economist, political scientist and world-systems analyst Samir Amin (1931-2018) whose analyses converged with those of Braudel. From the time it emerged in the open air in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, capitalism had developed around one or a few centers and composed concentric zones. It constituted a single integrated global system, composed of “developed countries,” which constituted the Center, and of “underdeveloped countries,” which were the Peripheries of the system.

For one thing, isomorphy allows, and even incites, a great heterogeneity among States (democratic, totalitarian, and, especially, “socialist” States are not facades). For another thing, the international capitalist axiomatic effectively assures the isomorphy of the diverse formations only where the domestic market is developing and expanding, in other words, in “the center.” But it tolerates, in fact it requires, a certain peripheral polymorphy, to the extent that it is not saturated, to the extent that it actively repels its own limits; [footnote to Samir Amin’s *L’accumulation à l’échelle mondiale*, 1970 and *Le développement inégal*, 1973] this explains the existence, at the periphery, of heteromorphic social formations, *which certainly do not constitute vestiges or transitional forms.* (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 436)

## **Exchange Flows, Value Production and Apparatuses of Capture**

The next section was devoted to a discussion of the basics of political economy—Exchange; Value; Land, Rent and Landowner; Work, Profit and Entrepreneur; Money, Taxation and Banker. It also suggested a reinterpretation of Marx’s contribution, Land, Work and Money constituting “a three-headed apparatus of capture, a ‘trinity formula’ derived from that of Marx (although it distributes things differently)” (p. 444).

According to Deleuze and Guattari, primitive groups used to exchange goods according to rules which could be explained by “a modified marginalism.” Since there was no monetary equivalent, the collective evaluation of the objects exchanged in barter was based on both sides on “the *idea* of the last objects received,” or better yet, of the “penultimate *before* the exchange loses its appeal for the exchangers, or forces them to modify their respective assemblages, to enter another assemblage.” (p. 437). In other words, the value of exchanged objects depended on the anticipation by both groups of the “threshold” beyond which it would have to change its own way of life to get the desired objects and on the pragmatic “equalization” of these heterogeneous anticipations.

Exchange is only an appearance: each partner or group assesses the value of the last receivable object (limit-object), and the apparent equivalence derives from that. The equalization results from the two heterogeneous series, the exchange or communication results from two monologues (*palabre*). [...] The issue is one of *desirability* as an assemblage component: every group desires according to the value of the last receivable object beyond which it would be obliged to change assemblage. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 439)

Barter ends where stockpiling begins. “Primitive” groups usually used “depletion” to “ward off the stock and maintain their assemblage” (p. 440)—the famous “horror of pleonexia” of “primitive” groups noted by Mauss (1904-1905) and many other anthropologists after him—but when they began to switch to agriculture, they transformed their “territory” into “a “Land” and the circulating “objects” into “stock.”

The stock seems to us to have a necessary correlate: *either the coexistence of simultaneously exploited territories, or a succession of exploitations on one and the same territory.* It is at this point that the territories form a Land, are superseded by a Land. This is the assemblage that

necessarily includes stockpiling. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 440)

Whereas hunter-gatherers exploited a territory according to “a law of temporal succession” that tended “toward the last object as an “index,” in Neolithic societies which developed agriculture, life was based on “the simultaneous exploitation of different territories” and a “power of symmetry, reflection, and global comparison.”

Primitive assemblages of hunter-gatherers have an operation period defined by the exploitation of a territory; the law is one of temporal succession because the assemblage perseveres only by switching territories at the conclusion of each operation period (itinerancy, itineration); and within each operation period there is a repetition or temporal series that tends toward the last object as an “index,” as the marginal or limit- object of the territory (this iteration will govern the apparent exchange) . On the other hand, in the other assemblage, in the stock assemblage, the law is one of spatial coexistence and concerns the simultaneous exploitation of different territories; or, when the exploitation is successive, the succession of operation periods bears on one and the same territory; and in the framework of each operation period or exploitation the force of serial iteration is superseded by a power of symmetry, reflection, and global comparison. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 440)

This new “power of comparison” was applied to different exploited territories on the basis of the new index provided by “the stock.” This was the origin of the “ground rent” and, of course, of the “*land-owner*” that accompanies it.

Ground rent, in its abstract model, appears precisely when a comparison is drawn between different simultaneously exploited territories, or between the successive exploitations of the same territory. The worst land (or the poorest exploitation) bears no rent, but it makes it so that the other soils do bear rent, “produce” it in a comparative way. A stock is what permits the yields to be compared (the same planting on different soils, or various successive plantings on the same soil). [...] Ground rent homogenizes, equalizes different conditions of productivity by linking the excess of the highest conditions of productivity over the lowest to a *land-owner* (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, pp. 440-441)

As in the Marxist narrative, ground rent and land ownership were the very first “apparatus of capture.” But, in an innovative fashion, Deleuze and Guattari emphasized the fact that this emergence was “inseparable from a process of relative deterritorialization.” The primitive territory, the one that was to be reactualized later by nomad war machines, was transformed into a land whose pieces were “distributed among people according to a common quantitative criterion.”

This is the very model of an apparatus of capture, inseparable from a process of relative deterritorialization. The land as the object of agriculture in fact implies a deterritorialization, because instead of people being distributed [*se distribuent* – active case in French] in an itinerant territory, pieces of land are distributed [*se repartissent* – active case in French] among people according to a common quantitative criterion (the fertility of plots of equal surface area). That is

why the earth, unlike other elements, forms the basis of a striation, proceeding by geometry, symmetry, and comparison. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 441)

Linked to the ground rent, there was a second “apparatus of capture”: “work,” as both quantifiable and appropriable by the landowners in the form of “labor.”

Rent is not the only apparatus of capture. The stock has as its correlate not only the land, from the double point of view of the comparison of lands and the monopolistic appropriation of land; it has work as another correlate, from the double point of view of the comparison of activities and the monopolistic appropriation of labor (surplus labor). (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 441)

As in Marx, the “surplus labor” was appropriated by the dominant but Deleuze and Guattari insisted on its measure. Free action could become “a common and homogeneous quantity” only because it was appropriated and “stock-piled.”

Once again, it is by virtue of the stock that activities of the “free action” type come to be compared, linked, and subordinated to a common and homogeneous quantity called labor. Not only does labor concern the stock—either its constitution, conservation, reconstitution, or utilization—but labor itself is stock-piled activity, just as the worker is a stockpiled “actant.” (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, pp. 441-442)

There was therefore a homology between the two first capture apparatuses: “land” and “labor” captured on the same quantification basis respectively “territory” and “activity.”

Since it depends on surplus labor and surplus value, entrepreneurial profit is just as much an apparatus of capture as proprietary rent: [...] labor and surplus labor are the apparatus of capture of activity, just as the comparison of lands and the appropriation of land are the apparatus of capture of the territory. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 442)

Finally, there was a third apparatus of capture in addition to rent and profit: taxation. To explain its emergence, Deleuze and Guattari cited the French historian Édouard Will (1920-1997) who argued that money as a general equivalent derived not “from exchange, the commodity, or the demands of commerce,” as it was commonly believed on utilitarian grounds, “but from taxation,” that is, from the State itself. Contrary to what most economic historians have said, from a historicist perspective, “it is taxation that monetarizes the economy.”

Money is always distributed by an apparatus of power under conditions of conservation, circulation, and turnover, so that an equivalence goods-services-money can be established. We therefore do not believe in a succession according to which labor rent would come first, followed

by rent in kind, followed by money rent. It is directly in taxation that the equivalence and simultaneity of the three develop. As a general rule, it is taxation that monetarizes the economy; it is taxation that creates money, and it necessarily creates it in motion, in circulation, with turnover, and also in a correspondence with services and goods in the current of that circulation. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, pp. 442-443)

The State apparatus of capture entailed the emergence of a general system of “comparison, objective pricing, and monetary equalization” which made it possible to change “goods and services” into “commodities.”

We are no longer in the “primitive” situation where exchange is carried out indirectly, subjectively, through the respective equalization of the last receivable objects (the law of demand). Of course, exchange remains what it is in essence, that is to say, unequal, productive of an equalization resulting from inequality: but this time there is direct comparison, objective pricing, and monetary equalization (the law of supply). It is through taxation that goods and services come to be like commodities, and the commodity comes to be measured and equalized by money. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 443)

All three types of capture were based on the possibility of stock-piling either territory, or activity, or goods. But stock-piling itself derived from “the machinic processes” of the “archaic empire” which concentrated “rent, profit, taxation” and therefore set up the very first foundation of capitalist accumulation.

The three modes converge and coincide in it [the archaic empire], in an agency of overcoding (or signifiante): the despot, at once the eminent landowner, entrepreneur of large-scale projects, and master of taxes and prices. This is like three capitalizations of power, or three articulations of “capital.” (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 444)

Interestingly, Deleuze and Guattari noted that the State provided also the very first system of measurement which made it possible to overcome “the primitive semiotic systems” based on heterogeneous fluxes and replace it with one based on “an equalized, homogenized, compared content.” In rhythmological terms, the State was at the very origin of the regulation of flows by metrics.

What begins with the State or the apparatus of capture is a general semiology that overcodes the primitive semiotic systems. Instead of traits of expression that follow a machinic *phylum* and wed it in a distribution of singularities, the State constitutes a form of expression that subjugates the *phylum*: the *phylum* or matter is no longer anything more than an equalized, homogenized, compared content, while expression becomes a form of resonance or appropriation. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 445)

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