

GILLES DELEUZE AND FÉLIX GUATTARI'S  
POLITICAL VIEWS. THE LEFTY, HEGELIAN  
AND LACANIAN POLITICS OF DESIRE

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**Abstract.** The paradoxical politics of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's seem to be eclectically inter-relating views with left-wing liberal, Hegelian and Lacanian aspects, which are paradoxical enough, predicated upon the challenging unity and identity, interpreting desire as a productive force, the proposal of the rhizomatic mode of organization, or the intriguing idea of the "bodies without organs". In order to comprehend this paradox, the study starts from their views on power, desire and freedom, among others, and then approaches the interpretation of Deleuze not as much as to present the important criticism brought to the fore by Žižek, as to nuance and emphasize how and why *There is only desire and the social, and nothing else*, as a famous and famously provocative statement of these two philosophers goes. Is there a politics of desire as Gilles Deleuze and Guattari's views indicate? What does it really mean and what does it imply? The incursion ends with the place, or the lack of place for ethics Gilles Deleuze and Guattari's described by to a great extent by Lacanian and non-Marxian dimensions.

**Keywords:** Gilles Deleuze; Félix Guattari; Power; Freedom; Desire

*Introduction to the Concept of Deleuzian Politics*

Although there is a doubt around the idea of a Deleuzian politics, as early as *A Thousand Plateaus* one encounters the idea that "politics precedes being"<sup>1</sup>, in our view a pragmatist point of view emphasizing that there is no given structure of being, but being is constituted via relations and terms, that send to both realities and concepts. In G. Deleuze and F. Guattari's words "Practice does not come after the emplacement of the terms and their relations, but actively participates in the drawing of the lines."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, translation and Foreword by Brian Massumi, Minneapolis and London, University of Minnesota Press, 1987, p. 203.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*.

There is no predetermined structure to be indicated as defining. Richard Rorty<sup>3</sup> would have said that there is no given “essence” or “nature” of the world other than what we can constitute via experience, life, language and thought. But Rorty is even more radical in approaching this same idea in his text about “the priority of democracy to philosophy.”<sup>4</sup> Jeffrey Bell explains the expression “politics precedes being” in Deleuze and Guattari by the fact that we do not begin with “a set of terms or individuated entities over which we battle and negotiate where they are to be situated – that is, their ‘emplacement’; rather, the very terms and their relations are the result of a ‘politics’”, and a politics that is always taking place.<sup>5</sup>

Even the conception of philosophy in *What Is Philosophy?* is quite political. In what sense? In this work, philosophy is defined as creation of concepts, but in the whole of intellectual and philosophical history the concepts do not replace one another by default, nor entirely peacefully: like in the Aristotelian society of friends, the concepts are all free, confronting and fighting one another. This conception of philosophy and human society seems an ideation alter ego of Ernesto Laclau’s and Chantal Mouffe’s vision in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*<sup>6</sup>. There the political battle of the left implies a proliferation of antagonisms; it is transposed into discursive battles, more efficient in changing minds, adequate to the varied contexts significant nowadays and more up to date than fighting only with the means of the proletariat. But this implies the agon, “the athletics” of the Greek city, the Socratic dialogical confrontations between friends. Deleuze and Guattari find themselves close to the Greek city: philosophy’s endeavours are as well transposed into conceptual confrontations and into the “trial” of the plane of immanence.

Intriguingly, as in “discourse theory”, philosophical concepts are “fragmentary wholes” empty pieces whose “edges do not match up”, although they “resonate” within their “homeland” philosophy (our expression).<sup>7</sup> It is an original interpretation of the One-All old philosophical problem. The “powerful Whole” of this authored philosophy includes all its concepts in a totality that remains open, unlimited and articulated on the plane of immanence (an “Omnitudo”, Deleuze and Guattari say). While the concepts and plane are correlative, they do not overlap. If they were the concepts would become universals (which they are not in Deleuze) and the philosophy will become a philosophy of closeness along with the closing of the plane.

In Deleuze, “philosophy is a constructivism”, by creating concepts and by the constitution of the plane of immanence. While “the plane envelops infinite movements that pass back and forth through it”, “an abstract machine”, Deleuze and Guattari conceive concepts as the configurations of a machine concrete assemblages “the infinite speeds of finite movements” for “the problem of thought

<sup>3</sup> Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, Princeton University Press, 1979.

<sup>4</sup> *Idem*, “The Priority of Democracy over Philosophy”, chapter 11 in *Prospects for a Common Morality*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1993, pp. 254-278.

<sup>5</sup> Jeffrey A. Bell, *Deleuze and Guattari’s What is Philosophy? A Critical Introduction and Guide*, Edinburgh University Press Ltd, 2016.

<sup>6</sup> Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, Verso, 1985.

<sup>7</sup> Gilles Deleuze and F. Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*, translated by Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell, New York, Columbia University Press, 1994, p. 35 sqq.

is infinite speed". This speed needs "a milieu that moves infinitely in itself", a horizon that philosophy of constructed concepts also provides. The human beings, "the slow beings" that we are need concepts as a skeletal frame and the plane of immanence keeps the parts apart. The concepts are events and the plane is the horizon of events.

Philosophy, reflection, thought, or communication are leading the way to more social and political preoccupations of the "slow beings", such as opinions and truth pit stops for the human beings in their slow passing through existence. And human existence, we understand, cannot be separated from thought. Deleuze and Guattari wonder: "Are contemplating, reflecting, or communicating anything more than opinions held about thought at a particular time and in a particular civilization? The image of thought retains only what thought can claim by right. Thought demands 'only' movement that can be carried to infinity."<sup>8</sup>

Thus, opinions should change while the thought turns toward the (elusive) truth. "Infinite movement is defined by a coming and going, because it does not advance toward a destination without already turning back on itself, the needle also being the pole. If "turning toward" is the movement of thought toward truth, how could truth not also turn toward thought? And how could truth itself not turn away from thought when thought turns away from it?"<sup>9</sup> As a consequence, "truth", one of the perpetually missed political prizes, "can only be defined on the plane [of immanence] by a 'turning toward' or by 'that toward which thought turns'; but this does not provide us with a concept of truth. If error itself is an element that by right forms part of the plane, then it consists simply in taking the false for the true (falling); but it only receives a concept if we determine its components (according to Descartes, for example, the two components of a finite understanding and an infinite will)".

The Fregean<sup>10</sup>, scientific understanding of the concept is predicated upon *being* rather than *politics*, grounding that sort of stability that sustains identity. A renamed quote shows: "It is natural, now, to think of there being connected with a sign (name, combination of words, letter), besides that to which the sign refers, which may be called the referent of the sign, also what I would like to call the sense of the sign, wherein the mode of presentation is contained. In our example, accordingly, the referents of the expressions 'the point of intersection of a and b' and 'the point of intersection of b and c' would be the same, but not their senses. The referent of 'evening star' would be the same as that of 'morning star,' but not the sense."<sup>11</sup> In Fregean perspective, in order to have a scientific truth, every object should fall under a concept with the role of *Bedeutung* (reference). In the case of literature, the referent may be absent or imagined. Nevertheless, this is the case of politics, too. The referent may be a project, a hope, a common target, or, a misleading purpose disguised as a common project (a lie).

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 37.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>10</sup> Gottlob Frege, "Sense and Reference", *The Philosophical Review*, Volume 57, Issue 3, 1948, pp. 209-230.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem*.

In Deleuze and Guattari concepts are not limited nor static and they extend into their vicinities (*voisinage*<sup>12</sup>) intersecting with other extended conceptual spheres, which they may influence or transform. “Concepts, therefore, extend to infinity and, being created, are never created from nothing.”<sup>13</sup> This is a political view as much as it is philosophical. Creation retains the meanings of “ordering” and “organizing” previous “materials” (ideas, concepts, projects) into new conceptual personae, with novel functions and impact.

There is a most important relation among thought, language and concept creation and the ramifications and insinuations of power into an intentionally and suitably organized social. In *A Thousand Plateaus* and especially in the chapter titled “The Genealogy of Morals” we have a critique of the oversimplified analyses starting with the simplistic model “word and thing”. There are “signifier enthusiasts”, who extract from the word the signifier and “from the thing a signified in conformity with the word, and therefore subjugated to the signifier”<sup>14</sup>. To operate in a language interior sphere and with an image of “homogeneous language” does not take us anywhere. Following Foucault in his exemplary linguistics analysis, for example, “the prison is a form”, a form of content “on a stratum” correlated with other forms of content (school, barracks, hospital, factory), which are institutions of Statal organization and power. “This thing or form does not refer back to the word ‘prison’ but to entirely different words and concepts, such as ‘delinquent’ and ‘delinquency,’ which express a new way of classifying, stating, translating, and even committing criminal acts. (...) Delinquency is in no way a signifier, even a juridical signifier, the signified of which would be the prison. That would flatten the entire analysis. Moreover, the form of expression is reducible not to words but to a set of statements arising in the social field considered as a stratum (that is what a regime of signs is). The form of content is reducible not to a thing but to a complex state of things as a formation of power (architecture, regimentation, etc).”<sup>15</sup> Deleuze and Guattari’s reading of Foucault emphasizes two constantly intersecting ‘discursive multiplicities’: multiplicities of expression and content. Each has autonomous content and inter-relatable content to other multiplicities. We can notice that this analysis follows the logic of conceptual autonomy and influence affect deeply the thought into their extended *voisinage* and, implicitly, into their “multiplicities”. Each of the words (“prison” or “delinquency”) are based on concepts and thoughts (“conceivables”) that entertain forms of content with a relative expression which is entirely specific: “each has its own history, microhistory, segments. At most, along with other contents and expressions, they imply a shared state of the abstract Machine acting not at all as a signifier but as a kind of diagram (a single abstract machine for the prison and

<sup>12</sup> Gilles Deleuze and F. Guattari, *op. cit.*, p. 19

<sup>14</sup> *Idem*, *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, translation and Foreword by Brian Massumi, Minneapolis and London, University of Minnesota Press, 1987, p. 67.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*.

the school and the barracks and the hospital and the factory ...).<sup>16</sup> The segments of content and the segments of expression *are fit*<sup>17</sup> together via a concrete assemblage (“taking their real distinction into account”), benefitting from “a whole organization *articulating formations of power and regimes of signs* [our emphasis]”, called by Foucault “disciplinary power”, which is first of all an ordering and organizing power, an institutional power, emerging from the instituted regimes of signs that sustain the formations of power. Applying the analysis to school: “there is not just one writing lesson, that of the great redundant Signifier for any and all signifieds. There are two distinct formalizations in reciprocal presupposition and constituting a double-pincer: the formalization of expression in the reading and writing lesson (with its own relative contents), and the formalization of content in the lesson of things (with their own relative expressions). We are never signifier or signified. We are stratified.”<sup>18</sup>

Politics builds with senses and connotations, with the extended scope of irradiating senses and conceptually influence and transform the conceptual landscape to a certain extent and probably for a limited time. When one says that capitalism functions as an “axiomatic” in Deleuze and Guattari’s perspective, the organizing force of capitalist foundational assumptions which, like in mathematics, they are propositional and abstract and of crucial importance for all the structuring they instil and sustain. In their critique of Marx, Deleuze and Guattari replace the central interest for mode of production with a focus on structures, which are paramount in thought and society and they are also in connection, influencing each other in terms of organization. Capitalism is a foundational referential in this respect, a “axiomatic”, that is, a functional reference with authority.<sup>19</sup>

Similarly, to Laclau and Mouffe: “The conditions of existence of capitalist relations of production – for example, the legal conditions which secure private property – are logical conditions of existence, in so far as it would be contradictory to affirm the possibility of existence of those relations of production if such conditions were not fulfilled. It is also a *logical* conclusion that nothing in the concept of ‘capitalist relations of production’ implies that they should secure their own conditions of existence. Indeed, at the level of the same discourse which constitutes the former as an object, it follows that the latter would be *externally* secured. But, precisely because of this, it is inappropriate to say that it is not known how, in each case, these relations of production are to be secured, given that the distinction relations of production/conditions of existence is a logical distinction within a discourse about the abstract concept of relation of production, which does not diversify into a variety of concrete cases.”<sup>20</sup> Although Laclau

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 68.

<sup>17</sup> The segments of content and the segments of expression *are fit*, because they do not fit together “naturally”, entirely due to thought or experience, they only seem this way due to the regime of signs, signifiers and signifieds instituted by power.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>19</sup> G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *op. cit.*

\*\*\*, “Binding and Axiomatics: Deleuze and Guattari’s Transcendental Account of Capitalism”, preprint at [https://pure.royalholloway.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/51574371/Binding\\_and\\_Axiomatics.pdf](https://pure.royalholloway.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/51574371/Binding_and_Axiomatics.pdf).

<sup>20</sup> Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, Verso, 1985, pp. 100-101.

and Mouffe discuss a desirable radical democracy, and Deleuze and Guattari capitalism, the former have an implicit assumption that radical democracy is possible to take concrete shape and existence in capitalist times given that capitalism cannot avoid the spheres of discursivity that accompany, describe and shape all human existence.

In Deleuze and Guattari, conceptualization shapes existence and thought. As conceptual reform pertains to the current dynamics (not to the accidental event) of concept creation and functioning the similarity with discourse theory reveals itself, although it is a limited one; limited by their conception that rejects discursivity per se (and, thus, “conversationalism”) as an inferior activity, undignified when compared to the main activity in philosophy, conceptualization; and philosophical activity has political and transformative consequences and aims.

Despite this function of philosophy that can function in anti-State and anti-capitalist directions, capitalism manages to impose a political economy order which is rather anti-philosophical, taking people over, so to speak. As for sociality and social interactions, they fall under the impersonal and impersonalizing axiomatization is set up by capitalism. According to the logic of capitalism, in Deleuze and Guattari, a set of relations between undefined or unspecified elements, creating the conditions necessary for the system to operate, while the discursive antagonism that replaces the political struggle with capitalism functions (in Laclau and Mouffe and their derived “discourse theory”) pretty much in the same way. However, neither in Deleuze and Guattari, nor in Laclau and Mouffe, we do not have the image of a purely formal system, but a pragmatics of meanings and social relations generating their specific logical conditions for function and for their reproduction or transformation, too, accordingly to the case. Laclau and Mouffe’s analysing of capitalism and their exploration into a future and even a “hegemony” of a modernized left led them to “discourse theory” a pragmatic view on the social and on politics. In Laclau and Mouffe all social phenomena are “discursive” and this is interestingly related to other discursive views of the social in Michel Foucault, Richard Rorty, Jean Baudrillard, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. The context and the extended network of relational meanings is of paramount importance in this conception. In discourse theory (indebted to Saussurean linguistic, post-structuralism and post-Marxism<sup>21</sup>), there are “traditional” signifiers but also “empty” signifiers that accept connotations according to ordering, organizational, confrontational and hegemonic purpose, articulating discourse accordingly, functioning as “nodal points” that unite and disunite an intentional political meaning content. Thus, the realm of the discursivity is a realm of flow or storm, as the meanings are never “fixed” and they may very well confront (very similarly to Deleuze and Guattari’s view of the conceptual antagonisms) social struggle moving into discourse where it aims to secure hegemony. Discourse is seen as a social practice and social practice cannot be separated from the discursivity. Social reality is contingent; there is never a situation of stable and fix meaning but only a struggle to adjudicate this role (securing hegemony). These

<sup>21</sup> Mouffe and Laclau’s post-Marxism is manifest especially in their concept of “hegemony” undertaken from the post-Marxist thought.



never ending and open networks of meaning, images (emanations of the social and political relations) and illustrate mechanisms that sustain the conflicting powerful narratives of the day. Conflicts over discourse are the conflicts over power, identities, projects and hopes.

Capitalism is machine-like in Deleuze and Guattari, functioning repeatedly in a certain mechanic way with its own logic. The production, money, labour, goods all get into specific transformations of capitalist nature ensuring the functioning and reproduction of the capitalist mode of production. The foundational axiomatic of capitalism engages subjectivity, transforming the subjects into ones who can function within the capitalist contexts. We recognize here the Marxian concept of alienation, transformed and developed but also logically adjusted to an almost formal model of politics in capitalism. The abstract foundational axioms are also impersonal and the systems of rules they set up is as well impersonal. As a consequence, subjects become subjected to the system to its impersonal rules, to money, which institutes a context of impersonal sociality and impersonal enslavement. As the limits of the capitalist axiomatic are inherent to itself this system is not responsive to subjective needs and, at the same time, it creates crises meant to propel its functioning and reproduction.

This way, politics becomes the “un-natural” reason for beings that have to be organized according to a capitalist order: both the reasons for existence and the beings are instituted by the logic of capitalism. In fact, politics precedes being as means and forces of ordering and organization. A being is defined implicitly as one engaged in a system of relationships. Philosophy brings about a certain uncertainty associated to novelty, while politics an established order inducing certainty.

State is an “apparatus of capture” for Deleuze and Guattari. Their anti-Statism is a theme, but one should not label as anarchism their political view. In “Sauvages, Barbarians, and Civilized Men”<sup>22</sup> the understanding of capitalism is openly correlated with “the universal [that] comes at the end” giving way to both “the body without organs” and to “the desiring-production”. But, also explicitly, capitalism is only “apparently victorious” and the reader is allowed to wonder about the limits of the desiring-production and about managing these limits via philosophical endeavour. The precapitalist social machines are stipulated as “inherent in desire”, with the precise role of “coding the flows of desire” and the specific consequence of fear and anguish in decoding these flows. This coding and decoding of the flows of desire is also a description of the *socius* in Deleuze and Guattari. The gimmick of capitalism is that it came up with “the only social machine that is constructed on the basis of decoded flows”. The codes are already decoded: “This is what you have to understand”. Thoughts are already thought. In Deleuze and Guattari terms, capitalism operates a substitution: for “intrinsic codes”, there operates “an axiomatic of abstract quantities in the form of money” and this is how capitalism “liberates the flows of desire”.

<sup>22</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, translated from the French by Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane, Preface by Michel Foucault, University of Minnesota Press, 1983, especially, pp. 139-145.

Capitalism is artificial” enough and constantly menaced by dissolution, so, it is constantly opposing its dissipation with “exasperated strength”. Capitalism stays away from its limits for, in these areas, “the deterritorialized socius” creates “the body without organs” and, over there, desire gets out of the “axiomatics”, out of the machinery and becomes a menace.

In Deleuze and Guattari, retrospectively, especially if one deciphers history from capitalist hegemonic lenses, notices that the rules formulated by Marx are followed pretty closely: we have a history of contingencies and not one of necessity; we notice “ruptures and limits, and not continuity” (“great accidents” and “amazing encounters”).

As determinations of the “capitalist socius”, private property and commodity production coexist in tension, as distinct forms of decoding: the former described by privatization and the latter by abstraction. Two rather contradictory forms of deterritorialization meet, two types of capitalist “flows”: those flows of convertible wealth owned by capitalists and these of workers “possessing nothing more than their labor capacity”.

Artificially, capitalism answers to such tensions and alleviates them by determining the conditions and the possibility of a universal history. Incapable of self-criticism, capitalism mimics it. Criticism is a true simulacrum, representing a copy of critique, a particular critique deprived of meaning. Universal history becomes something else than a “retrospective”, but a contingent, singular, ironic and critical account of the past. Maurice Godelier’s comments are indeed illustrative: “The West’s line of development, far from being universal because it will recur everywhere, appears universal because it recurs nowhere else. ... It is typical therefore because, in its singular progress, it has obtained a universal result. It has furnished a practical base (industrial economy) and a theoretical conception (socialism) that permit it to leave behind, and to cause all other societies to leave behind, the most ancient and the most recent forms of exploitation of man by man (...). The authentic universality of the West’s line of development lies therefore in its singularity, in its difference, not in its resemblance to the other lines of evolution.”<sup>23</sup>

Deleuze and Guattari show the importance of the concept of “machine” for their perspective, a “territorial machine is therefore the first form of socius” and that is beyond any metaphorical intent a type of veritable machine, although the social machine “has men for its parts, even if we view them with their machines, and integrate them, internalize them in an institutional model at every stage of action, transmission, and motricity.”<sup>24</sup> There is a synergy of man and his technical machines, created by a memory, in turn, generated by the social machine. The artificiality and manipulatory scope of capitalism is significant. To dismantle capitalism would imply “to await capitalism to find a semiautonomous organization

<sup>23</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 140.

See also Maurice Godelier, *Sur le mode de production asiatique*, Paris, Editions Sociales, 1969, p. 92, but also pp. 92-96.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 141.



of technical production that tends to appropriate memory and reproduction” and dismantle the forms of exploitation *there*, although, this would also imply “dismantling of the great social machines that preceded it”. The philosophers recall Lewis Mumford’s term “megamachine” to express the sturdiness of the capitalist machine, “the combination of solid elements”, each operated by men and, as an entity, operating men.

Organizing is coding of everything (into the capitalist logic and algorithm). The flows do not invite as much exchange as the invite control (in Deleuze and Guattari, via coding): “society is not first of all a milieu for exchange where the essential would be to circulate or to cause to circulate, but rather a socius of inscription where the essential thing is to mark and to be marked. There is circulation only if inscription requires or permits it. The method of the primitive territorial machine is in this sense the collective investment of the organs; for flows are coded only to the extent that the organs capable respectively of producing and breaking them are themselves encircled, instituted as partial objects, distributed on the socius and attached to it. A mask is such an institution of organs.”<sup>25</sup>

Capitalism is the beneficiary of vast privatization processes. And here opens their psychoanalytic Freudian approach to capitalism and economy, indicating the coding and decoding flows that affected, mostly, the model of privatization, as “anal model”, and money, following the same model<sup>26</sup>. In Deleuze and Guattari, the psychoanalysis of capitalism indicates “the dialects” of predominant organs that came to create the organizing of the Oedipal triangle: on the one hand, penis has occupied dominant position distributing meaning and hierarchy between those who have it and those who lack it and, on the other hand the anus (the *Aufheben* penis, the phallus). In the dynamics of affirmation and sublimation the flow of libido is created and it creates “the daddy-mommy-me triangle” and the associated issues, the familial drama, instituting a repressive system favourable to capitalism. Opposite to this drama we have the quasi-liberating unconscious, its desiring machines, seen as a continuous process of production animated by desire, which is a pre-subjective producer of reality. Thus, the alternative to psychoanalysis is “schizoanalysis” that capitalize (for the individual, we understand) the desiring-machines.

In Deleuze and Guattari, we have a not-so-subtle game of repression and control. Capitalism induces a deterritorialization of identities, culture, values etc., while the State is a “reterritorializing” force, but not one acting as a counter-weight to the benefit of the individual; for the sake of organizing deterritorialized desires into more controllable elements. Within this equation, resistance gets an important role, interestingly termed as “schizophrenia”, most likely an ironic and quite Foucauldian reference to the State’s view of the uncontrollable as sick and mad. The meaning they associate to “schizophrenia” as rebellion is still a radical mental state the only that is ungraspable for the capitalist logic and machinery. It works as a liberating short-circuit in the mechanism.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 112.

<sup>26</sup> In capitalism, non-Deleuzian, and not necessarily philosophical people speak of “money which are this shit that we need” or speaking about their possessions, they might say “Let me gather my shit”.

Becoming imperceptible or becoming a minoritarian is another political theme in Deleuze and Guattari, involving a relative liberation from the “machine” by falling in-between the categories of the ordinary strictly regulated by the repression-controlling dynamic of authority.<sup>27</sup> *A Thousand Plateaus* approaches as well the topic of falling in-between categories by becoming “minor”, within the area of the so-called minor science (the knowledge which is not organized by State).

### *A Left-wing Politics and Ethics*

Deleuzian politics and Deleuzian ethics do not overlap, although they are in subtle articulation. In the argument that the emergence of philosophy is determined by a repositioning from Imperial State politics to City politics, within a process of deterritorialization/ reterritorialization which is both a political and ethical shift. The agora is functionally and symbolically at the centre of the city, and the city instituted a special mode of deterritorialization and reterritorialization that proceeds by immanence forming “a milieu of immanence”<sup>28</sup> Paul Patton shows that his work interrelates political and anti-political moments offering a philosophical vision that does not disregard political implications of thought. His “move into politics” was definitely stimulated by the students’ protests in the France of May 1968.<sup>29</sup> But in an interview with Negri, Deleuze presents a sort of chronology in the development of his political thought. If, at first, he was more interested in the creation and representation of new social relations this proves that he was “more interested in right than in politics”<sup>30</sup> and maybe that it was ethics that paved the way into political thought.

Paul Patton investigates Deleuze’s work (from *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, to *Anti-Oedipus*, *Difference and Repetition* and *What is Philosophy?*) and makes interesting correlations analysing difference, power, desire, multiplicities, nomadism and the war machine to constitute a solid case for the image of Deleuze as a poststructuralist political thinker. Patton discusses in Deleuze a theory of power based on Deleuze’s studies of Nietzsche and Spinoza. The concept of power in Deleuze does not insist on the conventional juridical and moral presuppositions usually taken as a starting point in the analyses of power in modern political thought and, in the perspective developed with Guattari, allows for ethical evaluation that has to play a central role in the discussion of the concept of power. Their concept engages the theory of desire; the critique of psychoanalysis explained in *Anti-Oedipus*; and the *theory of assemblages* from *A Thousand Plateaus*. Deleuze and Guattari come very close in their account of power to Foucault treating power as *pouvoir* (power over; power for dominance and power for capture), but also as *puissance* (power to). A sum of other concepts supports their conceptual

<sup>27</sup> This could open an interesting interpretative window into the proliferation of gender minorities LGBTQ++, so annoying for the “common sense” or into the interesting aura of negative heroes, or marginal, or misfit characters in the movies.

<sup>28</sup> G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *What Is Philosophy*, Columbia University Press, 1994, p. 87.

<sup>29</sup> Paul Patton, *Deleuze and the Political*, Routledge, 2000, p. 170.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibidem*, note 69.

construction of power, namely “territorialisation”, “striation”, “signifying regimes”, “order-words”, “control societies”.<sup>31</sup> Jean Hillier emphasizes that Deleuze and Guattari (1987) show that power is internal to what it can do, which, in turn, depends on the spatial strategic and organisational forms: spatial planning systems, capitalist systems, political systems. To the extent that “interpretation and reinterpretation, translation and retranslation, negotiation, coercion and so on, are important, there should be locatable cracks in those configurations of power such that lines of flight of disruption, mutation and transformation are possible.”<sup>32</sup> Speculating these cracks might be the way to either fight or resist power. Hillier considers that “these cracks may be prised open by human and non-human agents.”<sup>33</sup> The author’s attention is captured by the agency of power in environmental matters. In this respect, he exemplifies: “In my wetland/lake example above, agents might include environmental professionals and/or activists, or non-humans, such as cyanobacteria, phragmites, cattails and mosquitoes. These actors may generate capacities for puissance, to deterritorialise and ‘rewild’ the waterbody. This would be an affirmative will to power, a puissance which actively destroys the human-coded structure.”<sup>34</sup>

Desire and freedom are an interesting couple in Deleuze and Guattari. *Anti-Oedipus* proposes a more subtle analysis on desire than those coming from Freudianism or Marxism. Their politics of desire is both a politics of freedom and subjugation. Desire is implied in all the social and political processes and the actors are all invested by this novel “will to power”. In our view, their concept of “body without organs” (BwO) is significantly related to an implicit concept of freedom. It is not exactly about a physical state. The concept engages the possibility of the unregulated potentiality of a body in the stage of pre-organizing structuring impositions. At the same time, Deleuze and Guattari, via this concept, are describing a practice of “reclaiming the body” from the (relational, discursive etc.) strings of organization, via “experimentation”, find the escape routes or the “lines of flight”.

Interpreting the film titled *Spring Breakers* (2012; directed by Harmony Korine), Jenny Gunn<sup>35</sup> addresses the topic of the bankruptcy of ethics in Deleuze’s affirmation of the subject through attention to affect and the virtual and in Slavoj Žižek’s psychoanalytically-inspired conception of the subject as radical lack (both conceptions sending to a radical reformulation of the Kantian moral law as an empty and tautological form with the concept of the categorical imperative). Korine’s allegory of the spring break as a time of adventure and experience offers the opportunity to examine enjoyment, on the one hand, and the late-stage “capitalism’s increasing encroachment on the absolute limit of deterritorialization”,

<sup>31</sup> See also Jean Hillier, “Deleuze, Guattari and Power”, in Michael Gunder, Kristina Grange and Tanja Winkler (editors), *Handbook on Planning and Power*, Cheltenham, Edward Elgar Publishing, 2023, pp. 74-89.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 84.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>35</sup> Jenny Gunn, “Deleuze, Žižek, Spring Breakers and the Question of Ethics in Late Capitalism”, *Film-Philosophy*, Volume 22, Issue 1, 2018, pp. 95-113. <https://doi.org/10.3366/film.2018.0064>.

on the other. The emphasis is that neither Deleuze nor Žižek<sup>36</sup>, neither affirmation nor lack, discern the ethical principle for the subject in the face of the real of global capital. Slavoj Žižek's Hegelian and Lacanian inspired principle of negativity (subjectivity as lack) is coupled with Gilles Deleuze's theme concerning radically immanent desiring production. But are these necessarily opposing views for contemporary subjectivity? Their implications converge toward a non- "fixed" ethics, which rather lucidly contradict the traditional and humanist conception of the rational subject.

The hyper-realism of late capitalism and its associated subjectivity overbids experience<sup>37</sup> and desire of experience themselves, which emphasize the being's ontological lack. The non-"fixed" ethics we have chosen as a label for both perspectives does not necessarily fall under a dismantlement of the molar level of the social moral bankruptcy or the dare straits of possible Deleuzian or Žižekian interpretations. There is no set or easily predictable or simplistic outcome, this is the whole grounding of the *unpredictable* (possibly but not necessarily destructive) freedom implied by subjectivity as lack. Žižek fascinated by Deleuze without Guattari is fascinated by Deleuzian subjectivity seen as incompleteness and criticises the disguised Hegelianism in Deleuze, as well as a disguised apology for capitalism. However, the account of postmodern capitalism is a sort of deterritorialization, introduced both by Deleuze and Guattari in *Anti-Oedipus*. As the ontological incompleteness entails the perpetual drive towards creation, deterritorialization and reterritorialization are limited but powerful stages within a dialectics of critical reconstruction and redescription of both subjectivity and late-capitalism. Pure desire and pure sacrifice "hold hands" and mutually shadow each other. The dialectics is clear, the synthesis (the outcome) not so much. There is the potential dialectical self-overcoming not only in Deleuze's subjective affirmation, but also in Žižekian rupture along with an impossible perfect negativity neither in politics nor in ethics.

<sup>36</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *Organs without bodies: Deleuze and consequences*, New York, Routledge, 2004. Eric Santner noticed that in engagement Deleuze's project, Žižek addressed implicitly topics such as globalization, democratization, war on terror, we may add as they are rather unavoidable implications of a philosophy of deterritorialization. Eric Santner, *On the Psychopathology of Everyday Life. Reflections on Freud and Rosenzweig*, University of Chicago Press, 2001. Interestingly, Robert Sinnerbrink emphasized that Žižek also remarked and approved of Deleuze and Guattari's negative position towards dialogue and communication deemed foreign to philosophical activity which should be this way defended in its main purpose of thinking *the New*. In fact, history of philosophy, with its explicit and implicit dialogues is but a string of misreadings with unfortunate results. Amusingly, ironically, in Robert Sinnerbrink's opinion, neither Žižek nor Deleuze and Guattari are freed from the misreading plague for Žižek misinterprets Deleuze and Deleuze misread Hegel, whom no one understood. Žižek argues that Deleuze' anti-Hegelian thinking of difference is pretty much a form of Žižekian Hegelio-Lacanianism, where Deleuze's New proves but a perplexing dialectical repetition of the Same. Robert Sinnerbrink, "Nomadology or Ideology? Žižek's Critique of Deleuze", *Parrhesia*, No. 1, 2006, pp. 62-87.

<sup>37</sup> When Deleuze says in *The Logic of Sense* that "[e]ither ethics makes no sense at all" or it is "unworthy of what happens to us" he emphasizes the importance of experience and, philosophically, behind experience the Lacanian Real lingers. Ethically, individuals are to "become worthy of what happens" (to them), to "release the event", to 'become the offspring of one's own events', "to be reborn", "to break with one's carnal birth", so, not to have lived in vain, which is rather a classical ethical and mildly Kantian view. Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, reprint edition, New York, Columbia University Press, 1990.

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