

Chapter 7

Against Social Evolution: Deleuze and Guattari's Social Topology

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Complex states did not and could not have evolved out of more 'primitive' hunter-gatherer societies. This is the profound thesis that lies at the heart of Deleuze and Guattari's critique of traditional theories of social evolution. The widespread presumption that human societies evolved progressively from the simple to the complex, from the 'primitive' to the 'civilised', from hunter-gatherer groups to large state formations, received perhaps its paradigmatic formulation in Lewis Henry Morgan's 1877 book, *Ancient Society; Or: Researches in the Lines of Human Progress from Savagery through Barbarism to Civilization*, a work that had a profound influence on numerous nineteenth-century thinkers, most notably Marx and Engels (Morgan 1877; Carneiro 2003). The title of the third chapter of Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus* ('Savages, Barbarians, Civilized Men') is derived from Morgan's work, even though Morgan's name is never mentioned (Deleuze and Guattari 2009: 139). But the reference to Morgan's linear and progressive concept of social evolution is clearly meant to be provocative, since the universal history developed in the two volumes of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* is not only explicitly directed *against* conceptions of social progress, but is grounded in what Deleuze calls a 'non-chronological' conception of time (Deleuze 1989: 79). Time as *succession* gives way to time as *coexistence*: time does not move from one actual moment to another (chronology), but rather from the virtual to the actual (actualisation).¹ Deleuze and Guattari are not denying social change, but they are arguing that we cannot understand social change unless we see it as taking place within a *field of coexistence*.

Deleuze frequently noted that his concept of time was initially derived from biology, and especially embryology (Ruyer): the apparent chronology of a life in terms of a past, a present and a future is in fact the unfolding of the potential of an egg (a body *without* organs), an unceasing genetic movement from the virtual to the actual.² Deleuze's

metaphysics of time is in a sense a generalisation of this biological fact: time is no longer a measure of movement, as it was for the Greeks; rather, all movement – whether cosmic, biological or social – must be understood to be unfolding synthetically within a topological field. *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* thus not only contains one of Deleuze and Guattari's most sustained engagements with evolutionary theory, but it also provides one of the most concrete examples of how to analyse the 'evolution' of a domain (in this case, the socio-political domain) from the viewpoint of a temporal field of coexistence.

The State Had No 'Origin'

Deleuze and Guattari's critique of social evolution begins with the theory of the State, and a consideration of the nature of ancient despotic States such as Sumer, Babylon or Egypt. What was the origin of such States, and how did they acquire their astonishing dominance? Marx suggested a famous answer to such questions: the archaic State was a milieu of interiority that managed to stockpile the surplus production of the surrounding agricultural communities ('primitive accumulation'), thereby constituting a transcendent public power that converged on the person of the despot (Marx 1965: 69–70; cf. Deleuze and Guattari 2009: 194). Following Marx, the great archaeologist V. Gordon Childe proposed a theory of the origins of prehistoric states that has become canonical (Childe 1951; 2009; cf. Lull and Mico 2011: 180–9): at some point in prehistory, hunter-gatherer groups learned to cultivate grain and raise livestock (the Neolithic revolution), and it was the surplus of agricultural food that is supposed to have made the State possible, with its complex divisions of labour, large economic projects and intricate social organisation (the Urban revolution) (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 428). In other words, primitive societies eventually reached a threshold in their 'mode of production' that allowed them to pass from an economy of *subsistence* to an economy of *surplus*. Using two complementary arguments, Deleuze and Guattari contend that the evidence from archaeology, ethnography and even history does not support this theory.

The first argument comes from the analysis of primitive societies. Pierre Clastres, in his 1974 book *Society Against the State* (Clastres 1989; cf. Clastres 1994) had shown that the absence of a State in primitive societies is not a sign that they were 'backward' societies that had not yet evolved or developed enough. On the contrary, primitive societies are constituted by mechanisms that deliberately *ward off* the apparatus of the State, and actively prevent it from appearing. Clastres emphasised

two such mechanisms: the role of *chiefs*, whose status constantly waxes and wanes, thereby preventing the resonance of power in a single despot; and the function of *war*, which maintained polemical relations of antagonism between segmentary lineages, preventing their convergence in a state apparatus. Clastres had been influenced, in part, by Marshal Sahlins' *Stone Age Economics*, which argued that hunter-gatherers, far from living at a subsistence level requiring constant toil, were in fact the first affluent society, where the quest for food was intermittent and leisure was abundant (Sahlins 1972; see Clastres 1994). The absence of a surplus did not indicate an inability to develop technical means or overcome environmental obstacles, but was a positive goal, socially valorised. Even the innovations imported by colonialists were utilised, not to increase production but to reduce work time. The work of both Clastres and Sahlins, in turn, had been anticipated by Marcel Mauss, whose 1925 essay *The Gift* had already shown that the giving of gifts and counter-gifts (potlatch) in primitive societies was a mechanism for warding off the accumulation of wealth (Mauss 1954: 3). In short, numerous anthropologists have identified positive mechanisms in primitive societies that actively *prevent* the formation of a State apparatus: there is a refusal of the State's apparatus of power as much as a refusal of markets and the economy. Primitive societies, in this sense, are 'self-validating' (Deleuze and Guattari 2009: 203). If this claim is correct, it makes the appearance of the State difficult to explain: How could the State have evolved out of primitive hunter-gatherer societies if these are societies whose very organisation is directed *against* the formation of the State (Silbertin-Blanc 2013: 22)?

The second argument comes from the analysis of the State. The urbanist Jane Jacobs, in the first chapter of her 1969 book *The Economy of Cities*, entitled 'Cities First –Rural Development Later', launched an attack on what she called 'the dogma of agricultural primacy' (1970: 3), the idea that an agricultural surplus was the condition for the appearance of the State. Jacobs, contentiously, attempted to invert this schema: it is the State that creates agriculture, she argued, and not the converse. She based her conclusions in part on James Mellaart's discovery of Çatalhöyük, a 'proto-town' in Turkey that dates back to Neolithic times (7000 BC – the date given to the thirteenth plateau), and perhaps even further, and which would thus have been in direct contact with hunter-gatherers. Jacobs suggests that it is in such States that seeds were first gathered, hybridised and finally planted, initially in the soil around the city, and then expanding into the countryside. To explain (and exorcise) the prevalence of the 'agriculture first' dogma, Jacobs draws an analogy with the technologies of electricity (46). Electricity was invented in

cities, yet it is primarily in rural areas that we find the massive installations needed for generating and transmitting electricity: dams, power plants, grids. If human memory did not extend back to a time when the world had cities but no electricity, the archaeological evidence could be interpreted to imply that, initially, there were rural people with no electricity; who then developed dams and power plants, eventually producing a large enough surplus of electricity to make cities possible. We are doing something similar when we claim that an agricultural surplus made the State possible, but the error is clear: we turn the *results* of State activity into a *precondition* for the State.

The French historian Fernand Braudel, in his *Civilization and Capitalism*, took up a modified version of Jacobs's thesis, although he was writing in a different context, analysing the relation between the urban and the rural in fifteenth- to eighteenth-century Europe. Braudel likewise contested the dogma that the countryside 'necessarily preceded the town in time' but argued, not that cities preceded the countryside, but that the two were *reciprocally determined*. 'Jane Jacobs, in a persuasive book, argues that the town appears at least simultaneously with rural settlement, if not before it . . . Town and countryside obeyed the rule of "reciprocity of perspectives": mutual creation, mutual domination, mutual exploitation according to *the unchanging rules of co-existence*' (Braudel 1992: 484, 486: cf. Smith et al. 2014: 1532: 'Agriculture and urbanism . . . developed in tandem'). Although Jacobs and Braudel focused their analyses on cities, Deleuze and Guattari (who distinguish between the State and Cities) will adopt a variant of Braudel's thesis with regard to the State: not that the State preceded agriculture, but that agriculture and the State were *co-determined*. 'It is the State that creates agriculture, animal raising, and metallurgy; it does so first on its own soil, then imposes them on the surrounding world . . . It is not the State that presupposes a mode of production, it is the State that makes production a "mode." The last reasons for presuming a progressive development are invalidated' (1987: 429). If the State does not appropriate an already-existing surplus, it is because *the State itself creates the conditions that make a surplus possible*.

Deleuze draws on this second argument when he assesses Friedrich Engels' famous 1884 book on the *Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State* (Engels 1972). In addition to an agricultural surplus, Engels appealed to several additional sets of factors to explain the origin of the State: *exogenous* factors such as the need to organise wars; *endogenous* factors such as the rise of private property and money; and *specific* factors, such as the emergence of 'public functions'

(Deleuze 1979a; cf. Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 427). But Deleuze shows how each of these factors, far from explaining the emergence of the State, in fact *presuppose* an already-existing State. States can and often do appropriate a war-machine for themselves, but such an appropriation presupposes that the State already exists. Similarly, no one has ever indicated a mechanism through which one could move from a communal tribal property to private property, as if one day, some exceptional person decided to proclaim, 'This is mine'. On the contrary, archaeology has been able to provide a precise mechanism, assignable if variable, showing how private property was constituted out of a system of imperial public property through *freed slaves* – but this means that the privatisation of property could become a characteristic of the State only if the public property of the archaic State were *already given* (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 449, 451). The same is true for the origin of money, which was created not to promote commerce, but for the purposes of taxation, which likewise presupposed an already-existing State. Finally, public functions also presuppose a State: irrigation, for instance, was an agricultural problem that went beyond the capacities of most agricultural communities.

These analyses all point to the same antinomy: on the one hand, the State could not have emerged from the soil of primitive societies, since they are directed *against* the State; on the other hand, the factors typically put forward to explain the emergence of the State (not only a prior agricultural surplus, but also the military, private property, money, public works and so on) in fact presuppose *an already-existing State*. Every explanation of the origin of the State is tautological, presuming what it seeks to explain. How then can we explain the appearance of the State, if it was not the result of a progressive evolutionary process, and if it 'leads back to no *distinct* assignable cause' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 427)? Deleuze and Guattari draw the only possible conclusion: the State appeared in the world fully formed and fully armed, as if it were born an adult, 'a master stroke executed all at once' [*coup de maître en une fois*] (Deleuze and Guattari 2009: 217; cf. 1987: 427). But what, then, does it mean to say that the State appeared in the world 'fully formed'?

The State is Self-Presupposing (The Apparatus of Capture)

Deleuze and Guattari's second thesis is a correlate of the first: if the State does not evolve from other social formations, it is because *the State creates the conditions of its own existence* (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 446). Although *Anti-Oedipus* had proposed the term 'overcoding'

to describe the basic mechanism of the archaic State, the concept of ‘capture’ introduced in *A Thousand Plateaus* is meant to provide a more detailed account of the way in which overcoding works. The archaic State, as a self-conditioning entity, is a transcendent *apparatus of capture* that incorporates everything into its form of interiority through three primary abstractions – rent, labour and money – which are a variant of the ‘trinity formula’ analysed by Marx in the third volume of *Capital* (1981: 953), and operate through two interrelated operations: *direct comparison* in the form of abstract quantities, and *monopolistic appropriation* in the form of stock. A brief review of these abstractions is enough to bring to light their self-presupposing nature.

Ground Rent. Rent is a mechanism of capture that allows land, or the ‘earth’, to be incorporated into the State apparatus. But if we understand the earth as an abstract general space – the *geo* in geometry – we must say that this abstract space was *created* by the apparatus of capture. ‘Before’ the earth, the land was occupied or territorialised without being measured or divided: there were only the shifting territories of primitive societies, or the smooth spaces occupied by nomadic societies. But the State can claim that these territories and their occupation *already* coexist in a general and abstract space, which is a space that belongs to the despot. Moreover, the constitution of the earth (*geo*) is coexistent with its measurement and striation (*metron*). Every year in Egypt, after the Nile floods, land surveyors or ‘rope-stretchers’ (*hardenonaptai*) would re-striate the land; the Greeks called them, precisely, the ‘measurers of the earth’ (*geo-meters*) (Serres 1993). The striation of the earth – its division and portioning out in plots – was the condition for the extraction of rent and tribute, since rent requires a *direct and quantitative comparison* of yields to be drawn between qualitatively different lands. States are often seen as territories centred on the palace-temple complex of a capital city, but more properly one must say that the State ‘deterritorialises’ the surrounding territories and subordinates them to an imperial centre of convergence located outside and beyond them (the despot as the owner of all the earth).

Labour. Similarly, human activity is appropriated by the State in the form of surplus labour, which is stockpiled in large-scale public works projects (pyramids, irrigation projects). The State thus implies a specific mode of human activity that does not exist elsewhere: labour. In primitive societies, strictly speaking, people do not ‘labour’, even if their activities are highly constrained and regulated. Deleuze and Guattari

call this non-labour mode of activity *free action*, which is in continuous variation: one passes from speech to action, from a given action to another, from action to song, from song to speech, from speech to enterprise, ‘all in a strange chromaticism with intense but rare peak moments, or moments of effort that the outside observer can only “translate” in terms of work’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 491; cf. Gueroult 1934: 119ff). For labour to exist, there must be a *capture* of such human activity by the State apparatus: it is only in the State that activity comes to be compared, linked and subordinated to a common, homogeneous and abstract quantity called ‘labour’. The Egyptian pyramids were not constructed by slaves but by conscripted Egyptian labour, and as such they constitute a form of stockpiled activity. There is no labour outside of the State apparatus, and human activity is transformed into labour only in relation to the State.

Money. Finally, just as labour does not exist outside the State, neither does money. Money was not introduced in order to serve the needs of commerce, as if there were first an autonomous domain of ‘markets’, into which money was introduced to facilitate exchange (Graeber 2011: 44–5). Rather, the converse is the case: money was created by the State to make taxation possible. Money, as an abstract equivalent or unit of account, is an instrument of measure (*metron*) that makes possible a direct comparison between goods and services, which the State can then appropriate in the form of taxes or tribute (Will 1955; Foucault 2013: 133–48; Deleuze and Guattari 2009: 197; 1987: 442–3). For this reason, it is money that creates markets, and not vice versa: the ‘economy’ presupposes the State. As Litaker observes, money striates space-time through the emergence of markets, which are spaces of commercial exchange that determine the times of production, circulation and consumption (2014: 121).

In short, ground rent, labour and money, in the archaic State, are abstract mechanisms of capture and stockpiling – ground rent captures the land, labour captures human activity, and money captures economic transactions – and each of these mechanisms converges on the person of the despot, who is at once ‘the eminent landowner, the entrepreneur of large-scale projects, and the master of taxes and prices’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 444). From the viewpoint of Deleuze and Guattari’s critique of social evolution, the State’s apparatus of capture has several distinct characteristics.

First, and most importantly, *the apparatus of capture creates what it captures*. The earth, labour and money are the conditions that make

possible rent, surplus labour (profit) and taxes, but these conditions are themselves created by the State. This is why ‘capture’ does not simply mean an ‘appropriation’ of what already exists; both in fact and in principle, the State is only able to capture what it itself creates, or at least what it contributes to creating (446). The State plays the role of a foundation, but it cannot play this role if it captures what already exists: if something exists before the State, it can exist without the State. For the State to be foundational, *the State must be self-presupposing* (427), and it is the self-presupposing nature of the State that grounds its monopoly power, its triple possession *in principle* of the totality of the earth, the totality of labour and the totality of money. The monopoly power of the State can be expressed philosophically in several ways: in the language of sufficient reason, *the State is its own ground*; in the language of causality, the State is *causa sui* (Lampert 2011: 157); in the language of Kant, *the State produces its own conditions of possibility* (and thus is in itself unconditioned).

Second, the apparatus of capture is primarily a *semiological* process of abstraction (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 445). For Deleuze, every social formation is both a physical system (a manner of occupying space and time) and a semiological system (a ‘regime of signs’). In the codes of primitive societies, these signs were inscribed directly on the body in the form of markings (tattoos, circumcisions, incisions, scars, mutilations, and so on) that indicated one’s position in the social formation – an entire system of ‘mnemotechnics’ (Deleuze and Guattari 2009: 144–5). If the ancient despotic State was able to overcode these existing codes, it was because it operated with an abstract and externalised semiotics based on numeracy, literacy and money: the development of geometry and arithmetic, the invention of phonetic writing, the issuing of currency. Money is an abstraction that functions as an abstract equivalent for all goods and services. Geometry treats the earth as an abstract space in which all places are equivalent. Labour allows for a quantitative and abstract comparison of all human activities. Taken together, these three heads of the apparatus of capture creates an abstract locus of comparison in which land, goods, services, transactions and human activities are equalised, homogenised, compared, appropriated and stockpiled – all in a single process. In other words, the State operates by abstraction and *is itself an abstraction* (Sibertin-Blanc 2013: 50).

Third, the self-presupposing and abstract nature of the State entails a particular type of *violence*, one that is itself posited as preestablished and preaccomplished, even if it must be reactivated every day. It is often said that the State has a monopoly on legitimate violence – violence

against ‘criminals’, violence against those who capture something they have no ‘right’ to capture – which the State self-regulates through the institution of law. But this juridical coding of violence *within* the State takes place within the structural violence *of* the State itself, whose apparatus of capture simultaneously constitutes and presupposes a *right* to capture (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 448). The State, as self-presupposing, is itself a kind of originary or primary violence that is always-already present, even if it never actually ‘took place’ (see Derrida 2002). As such, it is first and foremost in *myth* that the primary violence of the State finds expression, retrojected in an original violence against chaos that, at the limit, never actually occurred, even if it is omnipresent in every mechanism of the State. Hence the appeal to Dumézil’s classic analyses of the two poles of sovereignty found in Indo-European myths: the jurist-kings who operate through law and a respect for obligations, but also the terrifying magico-religious sovereign who operates through a *magical capture* that ‘binds without combat’ (Dumézil 1988: 152; Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 424–5). The originary and self-presupposing violence of the State makes resistance almost impossible, and it is what gives the State its ultimate power (*puissance*): territorial power (monopoly of the earth), economic power (monopoly of labour), monetary power (monopoly of currency) and, ultimately, political power (monopoly of violence).

There Has Only Ever Been One State

If the various social formations analysed in *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* do not represent the *evolutionary stages* of social development, neither can they simply be identified as the *ideal types* of a comparative sociology, despite appearances, since each type functions in a different manner (Sibertin-Blanc 2010: 114). The concept of the ‘primitive’, for instance, can be seen as a type whose unity is the *unity of reason*, theoretically subsuming under a single concept a plurality of heterogeneous societies. By contrast, the capitalist type has a unity that is not only theoretical but also historical: it is a *singular universal*, in the sense that it is the result of a historically contingent process that has resulted in the universalisation of its singularity (Deleuze and Guattari 2009: 140n). But Deleuze and Guattari ascribe to the State a unity of a completely different nature: a *real unity* that, whether actualised or virtual, is omnipresent throughout the entire social field, not only in archaic States or modern nation-States, but even in primitive societies ‘without a State’.

This brings us to a third challenging thesis proposed by Deleuze and Guattari: *there has only ever been but one State*. This thesis is repeated throughout *Anti-Oedipus* (2009: 214, 220, 261) and taken up again in *A Thousand Plateaus*, and initially seems rather untenable. To understand the thesis, we must again distinguish between its *de facto* and *de jure* aspects. Deleuze and Guattari readily admit that *in fact* there is an extraordinary plurality and diversity of existing States, and that modern nation-States, for instance, are very different from the archaic imperial State. But these *de facto* differences between concrete States find their *de jure* ground in the ideality of a single State (pluralism = monism), which Deleuze and Guattari call the *Urstaat* (*ur-* [proto] + *staat* [state]). The *Urstaat* does not refer to a supposed first state, but rather functions as an Idea (in the Deleuzian sense) that is present, throughout the social field, as a virtuality or problem. For Deleuze and Guattari, ‘the general theory of society is a generalized theory of flows’ or fluxes (262), and the function of social formations is to *code* these fluxes. The Idea of the *Urstaat*, in turn, lies at the opposite pole to the Idea of a pure flux (schizophrenia): it is *the Idea of a completely captured and coded flow*, which is ‘the eternal model of everything the State wants to be and desires’ (217). As such, however, the pure Idea of the *Urstaat* as such has never been fulfilled in any actually existing State, including the archaic imperial state, which simply managed to actualise the *Urstaat* in its ‘purest conditions’ (198). In Deleuze’s terminology, the *Urstaat* is an *immemorial* Idea, that is, *a past that has never been given as such* (second synthesis). For this reason, the *Urstaat* itself ‘appears to be set back at a remove from what it transects and from what it resects, as though it were giving evidence of another dimension, *a cerebral ideality* [in the Platonic sense] that is superimposed on the material evolution of societies, *a regulating idea* [in the Kantian sense] or principle of reflection (terror) that organizes the fluxes into a whole’ (219).

But this is also why the *Urstaat* necessarily functions as a principle of *difference*: every existing (*de facto*) State actualises the (*de jure*) Idea, or resolves the problem of capture, in a different manner. There is thus an internal ‘becoming’ or mutation of the State-form, but this is a mutation that does *not* constitute a progressive evolution. Rather, the principle of this mutation comes from the same process of capture that defines the archaic State, but functions as its supplementary double: the archaic State cannot overcode and capture without at the same time freeing up a large quantity of decoded flows that escape from it. It cannot create large-scale public works without a flow of independent *labour* escaping from its hierarchised bureaucracy of functionaries, notably in the mines

and in metallurgy. It cannot create coinage without flows of *money* escaping, and nourishing or giving birth to other powers (notably in commerce and banking). It cannot create a system of public property without a flow of *private* appropriation growing up beside it, and then starting to slip through its fingers. Finally, it is with the rise of private property that *classes* appear, since the dominant classes are no longer part of the State apparatus, but become distinct determinations that make use of a now-transformed apparatus.

In a multitude of forms, in other words, *the apparatus of capture inevitably gives rise to decoded flows that escape the apparatus of capture* – flows of money, flows of labour, flows of property, flows of population (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 449; 2009: 223). If the first great movement of deterritorialisation appears in the overcoding performed by the despotic State, the second movement appears in the decoding of the flows that are set in motion by the despotic State's own apparatus of capture. This is the 'paranoid' vector that is inherent in the State-form (Deleuze and Guattari 2009: 193): the State is at once capture and the impossibility of complete capture, since the State can only overcode by decoding (abstraction). The State cannot presuppose itself without *also* presupposing what escapes its form of interiority, namely, *decoded flows*, which are the figure of the 'outside' (*dehors*) of the State, the inverse of its Idea. Just as the State creates what it captures, it creates what *escapes* its apparatus of capture: it is the State's form of interiority (capture) that at the same time creates the State's absolute outside (decoded flows).

It is this situation, internal to the Idea of the *Urstaat*, that gives rise to an incredible diversity of State-forms – 'evolved empires, autonomous cities, feudal systems, monarchies' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 459) – all of which will have as their aim the *recoding*, by means of regular or exceptional topical operations, of the products of these decoded flows. Such states have apparatuses of capture quite different from those found in archaic states. Greek city-states, for instance, are phenomena of 'trans-consistency' defined by immanent networks of maritime and commercial circuits, and they mark a new threshold of deterritorialisation in that the flows (of matter, money, labour) that enter and exit the cities (polarisation) must be deterritorialised enough to be captured in the circuits (432). Moreover, as Marx showed, capitalism appeared when the *generalised* decoding of flows set loose by the State reached a threshold of consistency that allowed two of these flows – abstract capital and naked labour – to conjugate in a differential relation. Capitalism would thus require a new 'regime of signs', a new form of abstraction,

that would be able to deal with unqualified flows that have no specifiable content, and Deleuze and Guattari argue, famously, that it was only *axiomatics* that could play the role of a new apparatus of capture adequate to the capitalist formation. In all these cases, the thesis that there has never been but one State has as it correlate the extraordinary plurality of existing States (monism = pluralism).

The Urstaat Was Active ‘Before’ its Existence.

But this theory of the *Urstaat* raises a complex question regarding the status of the socio-political field of coexistence. If States did not evolve out of more ‘primitive’ societies, what exactly is the relation between these two types of coeval formation? More precisely, how can Deleuze and Guattari argue that the *Urstaat* is present *throughout* the social field, even in primitive societies, if such societies actively ward off the State? Deleuze and Guattari’s response to this question can be summarised in another provocative thesis: *the Urstaat was active ‘before’ its existence*. If primitive societies ward off the State, they must nonetheless have a ‘presentiment’ of the State as a limit they are avoiding – a limit they could not reach without self-destructing. The way the *Urstaat* is actualised in historical States is quite different from the way the *Urstaat* pre-exists as a warded off limit in primitive societies. Objectively, Deleuze and Guattari initially explain this phenomenon from a model drawn from physics. If one considers the social field as a field of vectors, one could say that primitive societies are traversed by a centripetal wave that converges on a point x – a point where the wave would cancel itself out and be inverted into a divergent and centrifugal wave, which is a reality of another order (the State) (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 565 n14). The point of convergence marks a *potential* or a *threshold of consistency*, and the convergent wave has the double property of both anticipating it and warding it off. The State is thus ‘beyond’ primitive groups, but ‘beyond’ does not mean ‘after’. The threshold of consistency has always existed, but primitive societies are content to keep that threshold at a distance. We must thus conceptualise the *contemporaneousness* of these two inverse movements on the field of coexistence, ‘as if the two waves that seem to us to exclude or succeed each other unfolded *simultaneously* in an “archaeological,” micropolitical, micrological, molecular field’ (431).

But there is a second issue that comes to the fore here, which is more subjective. Since every exchange of objects requires a way one can *compare* the objects of exchange, no political economist can avoid the question: How should one evaluate the criteria of exchange? Responding

to this question requires a theory of *collective evaluations*, or what one might call, in a Kantian vein, ‘anticipations of social perception’ (Deleuze 1979b). In the Marxist theory of labour value, the way to compare exchanged objects – for instance, an iron axe and a steel axe – is to compare the labour time that is socially necessary for their production, which requires a collective evaluation of both the worker and the entrepreneur using a scientific (or pseudo-scientific) form of quantification. In primitive societies, however, this route is closed off in advance, not because a measure is lacking, but because there is no ‘labour time’ to be measured. Human activity is in constant variation, and there is nothing that corresponds to labour, much less to labour time.

On this score, Deleuze and Guattari appeal to the nineteenth-century neo-classical theory of *marginalism* which was originally invented to account for the equilibrium of prices within the capitalist regime. If Marx held to the classical theory in which the value of commodities is derived from the quantity of labour required to produce them, marginalists like Stanley Jevons argued that value should instead be analysed in terms of the utility of the ‘last’ or ‘marginal’ object (Clarke 1982: 147–50). Business owners know that, beyond a certain limit, the structure of their business will have to change: there are thresholds beyond which an ‘assemblage’ [*agencement*] cannot maintain its current consistency. For example, how many cows can a dairy farmer purchase without making any changes in his business, such as adding acreage or procuring more equipment? The last cow he could currently buy is the ‘marginal object’, since if he purchases more, he will have to fundamentally alter the size and structure of his business. More importantly, it is his *anticipation* of the last or marginal cow that determines the price he is willing to pay for the cows he currently needs. If his business can only sustain twenty additional cows, he will not buy fifty, even if their price is substantially discounted. In marginalism, it is the evaluation of the *idea* of the last or ‘marginal’ object that determines the value of the entire series of real terms.

Though Deleuze and Guattari find marginalism weak as a general economic theory, they find a new field of application for a modified marginalism in non-capitalist formations (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 437). In primitive societies, they argue, the object of collective evaluation is not labour time, but rather the idea of the last object or marginal object that governs the series of exchanges, and *agriculture is incapable of entering into these serial schemas*. We can thus conceptualise a difference between the ‘limit’ and the ‘threshold’: in a collective evaluation, what is anticipated is the *limit* (the penultimate exchange, which allows one to remain in the same assemblage) but what is warded off is

the *threshold* (which would force one to change assemblage). ‘It is the evaluation of the last as limit that constitutes an anticipation and simultaneously wards off the last as threshold or ultimate (a new *agencement*)’ (439). The threshold marks the point where stockpiling would begin, and the temporal succession of territories would be replaced by the spatial coexistence and exploitation of different territories: the apparatus of capture.

In both these analyses – objective and subjective – we can see how the State has a positive status in primitive societies as both a limit and threshold, even if the State does not ‘yet’ have an actual existence.

The Field of Coexistence: Types, Powers and Becomings

The principle behind Deleuze and Guattari’s critique of traditional (chronological) theories of social evolution can be summarised in a final thesis: ‘*All history does is to translate a coexistence of becomings into a succession*’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 430; cf. Lundy 2012). But what exactly is the nature of the *field of coexistence* presumed by Deleuze and Guattari’s socio-political philosophy? We can perhaps distinguish three levels in their analyses of the field of coexistence, which begins with *types*, then evaluates their *powers*, and finally maps out their *becomings*.

At the first level, *Anti-Oedipus* initially presents us with a typology of social formations, and these ‘types’ can be understood in a Bergsonian manner. In *Matter and Memory*, Bergson created his well-known concepts of ‘pure memory’ and ‘pure perception’: although perception and memory are always mixed together in experience (*de facto*), these concepts allowed him to distinguish the differences in nature (*de jure*) between the two lines or ‘tendencies’ of pure memory and pure perception. The same is true for Deleuze and Guattari’s typology of social formations. Although each type *in fact* coexists with the others within a single field of coexistence – in our contemporary situation, States, war-machines and archaic territorialities all coexist within the capitalist axiomatic – each concept is a tool that allows one to demarcate distinctions or differences in kind within the social multiplicity (Bogue 2004: 172–3).

At a second level, however, *A Thousand Plateaus* characterises each of these types in terms of a specific ‘machinic process’: primitive societies are characterised by mechanisms of anticipation/prevention; States are characterised by apparatuses of capture; nomadic war-machines by the occupation of smooth space; cities by instruments of polarisation; ecumenical organisations by the encompassment of heterogeneous

formations; capitalism by decoding/axiomatisation. This is no longer a question of types; rather, each of these processes is a *power* [*puissance*] that indicates a certain *capacity* or *capability* of a social formation. Primitive societies *anticipate* and *ward off*, archaic States *capture*: this is what they ‘can do’, what they are capable of. In a Spinozistic manner, each of these powers or processes must be grasped *positively* as a determinate quantity of reality (see Sibertin-Blanc 2013: 41–6). One problem with evolutionary schemas is that they tend to view social formations through the prism of the State-form, which leads to the litany of ‘societies without’ – ‘without a State’, ‘without history’ ‘without writing’. But this focus on the State-form winds up assigning privation and lack to other formations, severing them from the forms of power that each of them affirms positively. The second level thus takes us from Bergson to Spinoza: beneath the categorial typology of social formations, one finds an ethological map of their constitutive powers, ‘a logic of coessential positivities and coexisting affirmations’ (Deleuze 1988: 95).

But the third level is uniquely Deleuzo-Guattarian. Far from being governed by a single form of power, every social formation, both in fact and in principle, is composed of a *plurality* of processes that are in ‘perpetual interaction’ with each other (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 430), and each process can function at a ‘power’ other than its own. Anticipation-prevention mechanisms, for instance, ‘are at work not only in primitive societies, but are transferred into Cities that ward off the State-form, into the State that wards off capitalism, and into capitalism itself, which wards off and repels its own limits’ (437). Similarly, the State is able to capture, not only land, activity and exchange, but also the anticipation-prevention mechanisms themselves, as well as the war-machine and the instruments of polarisation that characterise cities. And the powers ‘become’ something other when they enter into relations with each other: the power of the war-machine changes nature when it is ‘appropriated’ by the State, just as the State’s apparatus of capture changes nature when it is subordinated to the worldwide capitalist market. This is the sense of the term ‘becoming’: it is what takes place *between* two multiplicities, changing their nature. What appears in evolutionary theories as a chronological succession is, for Deleuze and Guattari, a phenomenon of transfer or transport between becomings. In each case, one must ask: What is a social formation capable of? What can it tolerate or support? What are the processes that exceed its capacities for reproduction, and put it in question? When does it pass its limit and enter into a new threshold of consistency? How does it *become*?

Thus, we have to say that the term ‘field of coexistence’ does not simply refer to an external and *de facto* coexistence of social formations in a historical space-time, but more profoundly to an intrinsic and *de jure* coexistence of powers and processes in a non-historical space-time, a continuum in which divergent temporalities coexist. This is what Deleuze calls the ‘plane of immanence’, a field where all the powers of THE social machine coexist virtually, in constant becoming, enveloped and implicated in each other in ‘a topological space and a stratigraphic time’ (Lapoujade 2014: 218).

Notes

1. Both the second chapter of *Difference and Repetition*, entitled ‘Repetition-for-Itself’ (Deleuze 1994: 70–128), and *Cinema II: The Time-Image* (Deleuze 1989) develop in detail Deleuze’s metaphysics of time.
2. Deleuze’s concept of actualisation is deeply indebted to the work of Raymond Ruyer, most notably his 1946 book *Éléments de Psycho-biologie*. See in particular chapter 6 (‘The Problems of Actualization’), and the important section on ‘Actualization and Time’ (109–14): ‘In the bio-psychological order, the real fact is the passage to the actual . . . of a potential which is not itself in time, although it is progressively modified by its own actualizations’ (110).

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