

Late Capitalism in Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus*

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“We will muster all our strength so as to believe in these images, from the depths of a structure that governs our relationships with them and our identification as so many effects of a symbolic signifier” (*Anti-Oedipus* 308)

“Oedipus, castration, the signifier, etc., exist at the crossroads of two operations of capture: one where repressive social production becomes replaced by beliefs, the other where repressed desiring-production finds itself replaced by representations. To be sure, it is not psychoanalysis that makes us believe . . . But psychoanalysis did find the following means, and fills the following function: causing beliefs to survive even after repudiation; causing those who no longer believe in anything to continue believing; reconstituting a *private* territory for them, a *private* Urstaat, a *private* capital (dreams as capital, said Freud)” (*Anti-Oedipus* 313-314; my emphasis)

“Not only do the oppressors need this political unconscious but so do the oppressed who would find their existence unbearable if “revolution” were not repressed” (*Contemporary Literary Theory* 97)

In *Anti-Oedipus* Deleuze and Guattari try to undo the Oedipal shadow of the Father figure that has been cast upon Western Civilization and upon which it has constructed its sense of subjectivity. Much like Michel Foucault's concept of the panopticon, where a person forces himself/herself to work for fear of the always existent possibility that one is being watched through the windows of the panopticon, Deleuze and Guattari's Oedipal figure functions in defining our sense of subjectivity as a paradoxically whole and unwhole state. In this sense, Deleuze and Guattari illustrate the ways in which capitalism has imbued us with this elusive figure which causes us to connect to, in the words of Michel Foucault, “the fascism that is ingrained in our behavior” (“Preface” *Anti-Oedipus* xiii).

As a result, psychoanalysis, in its emphasis on the Oedipal, has created what Deleuze and Guattari call “an ideology of lack” in that it constantly seeks to emphasize a unified human subjectivity and objectivity in a world of only partial (in the sense of being biased, but also incomplete) subjectivities and objectivities (*Anti Oedipus* 309). Therefore, psychoanalysis becomes the super-glue of Late Capitalist ideology and production: all dissenting ideas, neuroses, psychoses, paranoia can be explained only through the elusive lacunae of the Oedipal complex. This creates a situation which has a tautological ring to it: because someone appears mad because they do not conform, it must be so. However, taken into extremes, existence in the production process itself is madness: no one goes to work in a factory for fun, but because they have to. In order to exist, we must repress. If we can see this, we can also see the fact that Oedipus, the powerful figure of the father, is an ideological corollary of the nation-state. Because psychoanalysis emphasizes the Oedipal complex, in which a successful dealing with this conflict ensures one's sanity, we are left with a situation that paradoxically points to its own insanity: we need to learn how to repress our desires, for fear of the Oedipal, and in this sublimation of our desires, we need to learn the art of displacement, of taking what's given to us. Therefore, as a product of this displacement, we seek to fulfill our desires

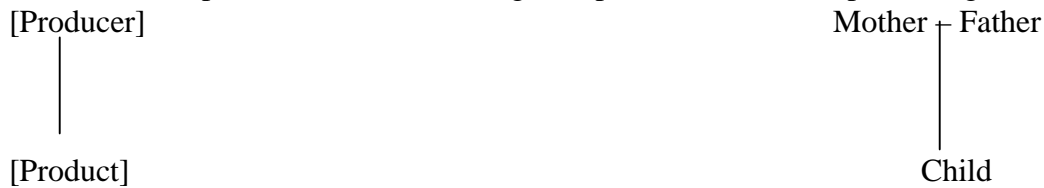
elsewhere, forever trying to fulfill it in an endless production and reproduction of this displacement in order to overcome the Oedipal complex: in work we seek to justify our existence and the necessary monetary means to satisfy our desires, in relationships we seek completion and in vacuous consumption we seek to temporarily quell our desire. All of these necessary and reinforcing the Oedipal complex.

However, as Foucault in his *Madness and Civilization* (1961) had already pointed out, the shifting paradigms of madness over time demonstrate that madness in civilization is not an absolute condition, but merely a socially emplaced stigma by which society demarcates sane (read: conformist) behavior (for example, in earlier 18th century civilization a sexually voracious appetite for a woman was seen as a definite sign of madness). In this sense, the Oedipal complex can be seen as an episteme that functions as a way of enforcing social conformity, but which, in contradistinction to psychoanalytical claims, in no way can be seen as an absolute condition. According to Deleuze and Guattari the following thus happens:

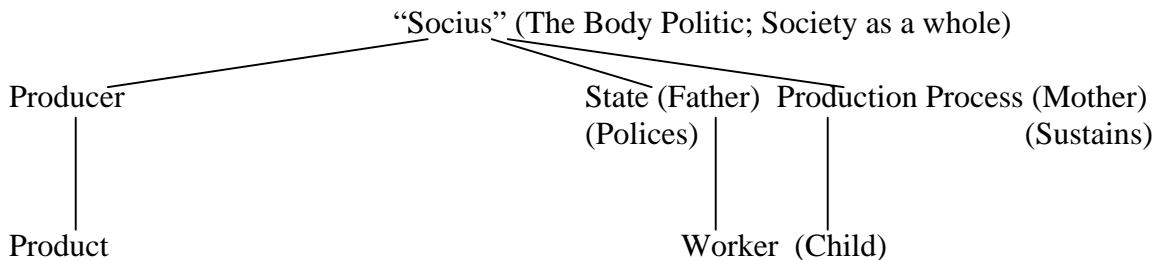
The schemata of Deleuze and Guattari's conception of the triad of Late Capitalism/ psychoanalysis/ individuals/

1. Deleuze and Guattari combine Marxist Dialectics of the Modalities of Production with Freudian psychoanalytical concept of the Oedipal Triangle. Thus:

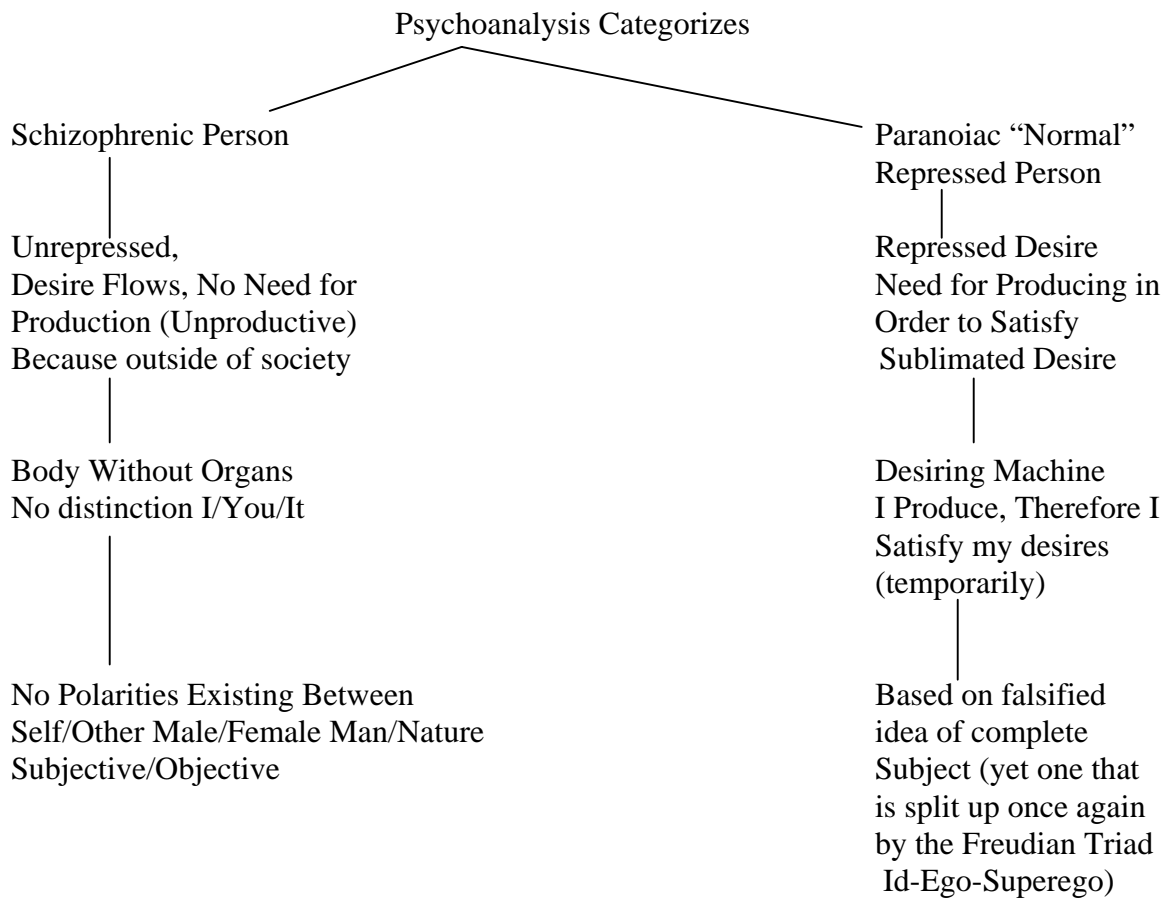
The relationship of Producer - Product gets replicated in the Oedipal Triangle:



2. This Oedipal Triangle becomes the modality of existence for us, as we derive from this pattern, and we inherently end up in relationships (in the widest sense of the word) within society that necessarily replicate the Oedipal Triangle.

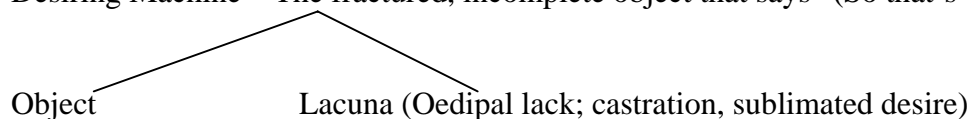


3. Psychoanalysis becomes the stronghold of civilization by defining the difference between normal, healthy, sane people, and those that it deems aberrant to its (subjective) norm.



2. Thus the way capitalism works is by an infinite deferral in that it substitutes objects that, through an endless process of metonymy, represent desire for the human subject. Thus, capitalism functions by this process of infinite deferral and transference, in which it produces an infinite flow of desire at the same time that it breaks the individual desire off through displacement as a result of the Oedipal lacuna. The desiring machine can thus be seen to be the following:

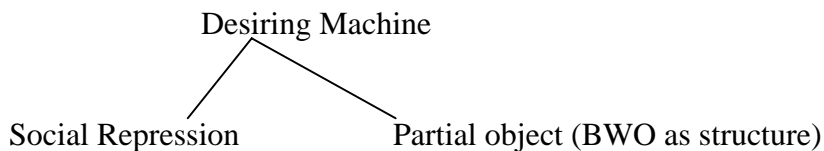
Desiring Machine – The fractured, incomplete object that says “(So that’s what) I want!”



Desiring machine → object 1 → deferral → object 2 → deferral → object 3 (ad infinitum)

This has consequences for the way one is believed to function in society: because we have experienced this loss, we use ersatz objects to replace that loss, through commodities and thus we get interpellated in consumer society. Also, since we are made aware of this loss, we are constantly seeking to replenish that lacuna with something new (be it in new clothes, cars, relationships, or prestige), and thus we establish an “economy of desire” or what is called in the introduction a “libidinal economy” (xviii). As Deleuze and Guattari states, this means that the economical theorizing of Marx can be very much seen (through the lens of Freudian theory) as an economy of desire, in which everyone participates in order to satisfy their desires: “Behind every investment of time and interest and capital, an investment of desire, and vice versa” (xviii).

Thus according to Deleuze and Guattari, the desiring machine is also the Body Without Organs, in that they are not antithetical to each other, but express the same desire, but in a different context: “From the beginning of the study we have maintained both that social production and desiring-production are one and the same, and that they have differing regimes, with the result that a social form of production exercises an essential repression of desiring-production, and also that desiring-production – a “real” desire – is potentially capable of demolishing the social form (*Anti-Oedipus* 116). Therefore there are two conceptualizations of “desiring machine”: one that is emblematic for social repression and psychic repression under capitalism and psychoanalysis, and one that is ultimately a reflection of the essential human condition as partial objects but not under the guise of capitalism.



3. The pattern of the Oedipal triangle gets replicated ad infinitum and thus becomes the master Symbol that structures society: Socially, the Worker is a Producer as well who produces products, as well as enters into another Oedipal Triangle and becomes the Father (the one who puts in place another Oedipal Triangle, but also one who replicates and inculcates his child with this system and thus produces a future worker (if this goes wrong, then there is always psychoanalysis)). The unconscious thus becomes the repository of hegemonic societal inculcation as it is susceptible to the powers of psychoanalysis and the demands of late capitalism (indeed, as Deleuze and Guattari note: “For the real question is this: of course the father acts on the child’s unconscious - but does he act as a head of a family in an expressive familial transmission, or rather as the agent of a machine, in a machinic information or communication? . . . [B]ut it is in this very way that they are from early childhood the libidinal investment of a social field. *In this field the father has a role only as an agent of production and antiproduction* (297))

The subject therefore becomes interpellated into a system of guilt by the law that forbids incestuous relationship between the mother and the child and that at the same time thus posits that *this is really what the subject wants* (hence, Deleuze and Guattari’s “so that’s

what I want!”). Deleuze and Guattari explicitly deny the existence of the Oedipal as an a priori human condition, as it capitalizes on Oedipalizing everyone and thus interpellating them in a system that emphasizes the unfulfilled desire in this construct and replaces it with a lack.

Thus we exist in a state as a partial object BEFORE we get Oedipalized and Triangulated in these structures of power and social repression. This Oedipal system therefore places us in a never-ending spiral of exactly the same relationships, through which Deleuze and Guattari attempt to break through by redefining subjectivity in a new manner. Rather than emphasizing sanity, wholeness, completeness and pointing out the impossibility of such a thing in the Oedipal Triangle (as desire should always be sublimated in the Oedipal drama, which is always an a priori condition of sanity for psychoanalysis and thus can never be entirely resolved because of its lacunal form) Deleuze and Guattari emphasize schizophrenia, incompleteness, fracture by their borrowing of Melanie Klein’s concept of “partial objects” (*Anti-Oedipus* 44). Thus, according to Deleuze and Guattari, partial objects, as essentially incomplete, dispersed, disjunctive and discursive objects, are a way of reconstituting a fractured self that is “*anoedipal*”:

Not only are they [partial objects] destined to play a role in totalities aimed at integrating the ego, the object, and drives later in life, but they also constitute the original type of object relation between the ego, the mother, and the father. . . Partial objects unquestionably have a sufficient charge in and of themselves to blow up all of Oedipus and totally demolish its ridiculous claims to represent the unconscious, to triangulate the unconscious, to encompass the entire production of desire.

(*Anti-Oedipus* 44)

Indeed, as Deleuze and Guattari state, this emphasis on incompleteness, dispersal, and disjunction of the self serves to illustrate, in a non-totalizing way the condition in which humans really exist. The Body without Organs thus becomes a critical concept of reconceptualizing the human self in Marxist terms as involved in a web of power as opposed to the confines of what they call the Freudian “theater” based on the myth of Oedipus: “Why was mythic and tragic representation accorded such a senseless privilege? Why were expressive forms and a whole *theater* installed there where there were fields, workshops, factories, units of production?” (*Anti-Oedipus* 298) Indeed, partly, their concept of the Body Without Organs serves to replace the traditional notion, from Hegel onwards, of “absolute spirit” of self, in the light of late capitalism and its influence on our conceptions of self through the unconscious.

Late capitalism, in the words of Fredric Jameson (who bases himself on Ernest Mandel’s division of the periods of capitalism) in *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, can be seen as the “purest form of capital yet to have emerged, a prodigious expansion of capital into hitherto uncommodified areas,” namely, “a new and historically original penetration and colonization of Nature and the Unconscious” (36). Before this, according to Jameson, Ernest Mandel’s *Late Capitalism* had distinguished the two preceding periods of capitalism after the industrial revolution of the 18th century: namely that of “market capitalism” and the “monopoly stage or the stage of imperialism” (36). These two forms ended up being catalysts for the period of ubiquitous, yet faceless, global capitalism: ““This purer capitalism of our time thus eliminates the enclaves of

precapitalist organization it had hitherto tolerated and exploited in a tributary way” (36). Indeed, as Jameson explains, the uses of technology in late capitalism plays a key role in conquering our unconscious, and as a result constitutes a better understanding of the uses of power:

The technology of contemporary society is therefore mesmerizing and fascinating not so much in its own right, but because it seems to offer some privileged representational shorthand for grasping a network of power and control even more difficult for our minds and imaginations to grasp: the whole new decentered global network of the third stage of capital itself (*Postmodernism* 37-38).

Indeed, as Jameson notes, Marxist distinctions of capitalist power (producer/product, bourgeoisie/working class) are indistinguishable in this enormous technological network of power and control that is hard to fathom and encapsulate (as it is deterritorialized), and thus there is only the notion of ‘silent’ capital where power is ubiquitous and obscured at the same time.

In the light of this, Deleuze and Guattari’s *Body Without Organs* can be seen as a reconceptualizing of the self in the state of Late Capitalism, in which it becomes the apothotic embodiment and development of late capitalism. Thus, in a world of disembodied capitalism and disembodied production through alienation and ultimately, psychic repression we end up with the deterritorialized body as its final end:

The body without organs is the limit of the socius, its tangent of deterritorialization, the ultimate residue of deterritorialized socius. The socius - the earth, the body of the despot, capital-money - are clothed full bodies, just as the body without organs is a naked full body; but the latter exists at the limit, at the end, not at the origin. . . . But in this very sense, if social investments can be said to be paranoia and schizophrenia, it is to the extent that they have paranoia and schizophrenia as ultimate products under the determinate conditions of capitalism. (*Anti-Oedipus* 281)

In this, Deleuze and Guattari see the *Body Without Organs* as a necessary development, not so much as a human form per se, but rather a conceptual entity that redefines the human body as a nexus of power relations, unbound by the Oedipal Triangle and its embodiment in the socius, in which it can change the stream of flows, engage and disengage, interrupt and break in an ever-present fluctuation. We therefore are in the age of the machine, in which our desires plug into flows in order to satisfy these desires. No longer is there a whole “subject”: only objects plugging into one another in an endless process of desire production, each human being composed of “molar” and “molecular” elements, neurotransmitters firing synapses, organs digesting and producing, skin renewing all under the a priori condition of desire. Yet this is not the human Deleuze and Guattari talk of, as man can be seen as either “vertebro-machinate mammal” or as an “aphidian parasite of machines”, and thus the polarities between man/machine are broken by the concept of the *Body Without Organs* (*Anti-Oedipus* 285). Thus, to Deleuze and Guattari, the *Body without Organs* is a Cyborg construct, a “desiring machine”, but in the sense that it is neither entirely seen as a human construct (“molar”) but also not as a subatomic construct (“molecular”), and thus it collapses the distinctions between man/machine, man/nature, self/other, male/female:

Once the structural unity of the machine has been undone, once the personal and specific unity of living has been laid to rest, a direct link is perceived between the

machine and desire, the machine passes to the heart of desire, the machine is desiring and desire, machined. Desire is not in the subject, but the machine in desire. . . In a word, the real difference is not between the living and the machine, vitalism and mechanism, but between two states of the machine that are two states of living as well (*Anti-Oedipus* 285-286)

The human, finally released from the capitalist clutches of the Oedipal theatrical farce, thus can be realized as a desiring machine in a world filled with desiring machines, each of the carefully constructed anthropocentric epistemes fallen away in a world of infinitesimal relationships on universal and subatomic levels of desire, each human/machine both producer and product of desire at the same time.

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