

Anti-History: Deleuze and Guattari's Attack on Civilization

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Abstract

The goal of this essay is to sketch, in broad form, Deleuze and Guattari's militant critique of civilization in general and the capitalist mode of production specifically. It will be shown that the development of civilization is framed in historico-temporal terms, and as such grappling with this structure is vital for posing any sort of escape from it. Concentrating on the strange time-structure embedded in the design of their book *A Thousand Plateaus*, it will be shown how exceedingly abstract meditations take on a material depth that allow Deleuze and Guattari to sketch not only the development of civilization, but find the cracks and fissures within it that allow the possibility of a new world to emerge. Such a new world would be the realization of a new form of temporality, a "no-longer-alienated history", to quote the Marxist theorist Moishe Postone. Arriving in the near-present, it will be seen how Deleuze and Guattari's analysis converges with the anti-work tendencies in Marxist thought, and the way in which the rejection of labor – understood as an organization or "economy of time" – serves as the ground for the destruction of historical time. What emerges, then, is the charting of a passage from "pulsed time" to "non-pulsed time", through which a new articulation of 'history' can emerge.

The First Puzzle: Strange Dates

We will begin with a small puzzle of sorts, one that concerns the interplay and divergence between dates and history, and how this interplay is operationalized in the structure of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus*. As has been well recognized, the structure of the book is flush with the argument that the book puts forth; it illustrates, in radical form, the continuity between a material substrate and the ways in which it is expressed, at the intersection of linguistic, cultural, political, and other forms of instantiation. In place of chapters, plateaus – «continuous, self-vibrating region[s] of intensities whose development avoids any orientation towards a culmination point or external end» (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 2). The plateau is always an affair of the *middle*, and in its original articulation by Gregory Bateson, is a dynamic equilibrium achieved via rigorous and mindful balance; he contrasts it with what he calls *schismogenesis*, a violent upswing of energy that threatens the overall stability of the system that it is emerging from (Bateson 2000). Read through the prism of the Spinoza-inflected ethics advanced in the plateau titled "How to Make Yourself a Body Without Organs?", the distinction drawn by Bateson is elevated to a program for making possible a process of *destratification*, a following of a *line of flight*, that doesn't collapse into suicidal disarray or catastrophe – a

“black hole”, as they describe it. This constitutes a higher stage of the project unleashed by Deleuze in his earlier work *Difference and Repetition*, where he took up the task of liberating philosophy from what he called the “dogmatic image of thought”. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, the dogmatic image of thought was restaged as a system of *arborescence*, and the new image of thought – one so radical that it was in fact described, in the pages of *Difference and Repetition*, as an “image without thought” – became associated with the rhizome. The rhizome, in turn, is composed of plateaus: «We call a ‘plateau’ any multiplicity connected to any other multiplicity by superficial underground stems in such a way as to form or extend a rhizome. We are writing this book as a rhizome» (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 2).

Each of the thirteen plateaus that make up the book is marked by both a title and a date. At a glance, the order appears to be utterly random: some dates are broad and denote years, if not a span of years, while others appear as more specific by featuring a month and day in addition to the year. There is a careful logic at play, however, with the dating system seemingly indicating some of articulation of history. Dates mark historical events; they establish events in a linear succession in way as to allow an analysis of their interplay. From this perspective, events appear as escalating magnitudes, with the dates serving to ‘anchor’ them in time, a calendrical time, that renders intelligible history as series of ‘phase shifts’ culminating into the present. Chronology, a reflection the order of time designated by Deleuze, in his works with Guattari and outside of their collaboration, as *Chronos*: «the time of measure that situates things and persons, develops a form, and determines a subject» (Deleuze & Guattari: 1987, 262). But the arrangement of dates here is doing something different, as Deleuze acknowledged elsewhere by stating «The dates do not refer to a unique and homogeneous calendar, but to space-times that must change each time» (Lampert 2011: 74). The dates, in other words, have been freed from the structuralization of Chronos, and instead exist under the sign of *Aeon*, «the indefinite time of the event, the floating line that knows only speeds and continually divides what transpires into an already-there that is at the same time not-yet-here» (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 262).

This dual nature of being ‘already-there’ and ‘not-yet-here’ underscores how dynamically different Aeon is from Chronos. Whereas the latter divides the time in a past, present and future (a unification that, it must be said, produces an eternal present, with the past and future just barely out of view), the former «forever sidesteps the present» (Deleuze 1990: 77). As the intensive continuum «enveloping the whole of time without unifying it», Aeon is «already past and future, at once more and less, always the day before and the day after» (Deleuze 1990: 77). From this side, the unity of the date and the function of the plateau become clear, as the signals of what Anna Greenspan has referred to as «Aeonic occurrences» (Greenspan 2000: 142), which is an event understood not through the magnifying glass of history, but as the imperceptible force of becoming – and becoming, Deleuze and Guattari are quick to tell us, stands distinct from history.

Here we return to our puzzle, able to truly glimpse it for the first time. Each plateau's date tells us something about the content of the plateau in question and the event that 'organizes' it. Almost all of these are either revealed within the plateau itself or are easily deduced from context clues. "One or Several Wolves" is dated 1914, the year that Freud wrote "From the History of an Infantile Neurosis", his first text on Sergei Pankejeff, his infamous 'Wolfman'. The "Postulates of Linguistics", meanwhile, is dated November 23rd, 1923 to mark the pegging of the German mark to the Rentenmark in an effort to end runaway inflation, a maneuver described by Deleuze and Guattari as a «semiotic transformation that, although indexed to the body of the earth and material assets, was still a pure act or incorporeal transformation» (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 82). "On Several Regime of Signs" is marked by a considerable span of time, 587 BC through 70 AD, which are the years of the two-fold devastation of the Temple that is so important to Jewish history, and "How Do You Make Yourself a Body Without Organs" is attached to the would-be date of Antonin Artaud's radio play, *To have Done Without the Judgment of God*, where the concept of the body without organs made its first debut. The plateau titled simply "Faciality" is related to 'Year Zero', the birth of Christ and the split in time that retrocausally grounded the origins of Western civilization. "Three Novellas, or 'What Happened?'" is dated 1874, the year that Barbey d'Aurevilly's *Les Diaboliques* was published – a work regard by Deleuze and Guattari as indicating the way the novella *folds* the "posture" of the mind and body together (in contrast to the tale, which is marked by *unfolding*).

Continuing onward, the next plateau, "1933: Micropolitics and Segmentarity", is concerned with the 'molar' and 'molecular' iterations of fascism and is thus indexed to the year of Hitler's ascendancy. "1730: Becoming-Intense, Becoming-Animal, Becoming-Imperceptible" spends a considerable amount of time exploring human-animal, and even human-bacterial, becomings, which finds its social and literary articulation in figures such as sorcerers, werewolves and vampires; 1730, they suggest, was the year in which a veritable vampire-mania began to sweep Europe. "1837: Of the Refrain" alludes to the year that Robert Schumann composed his *Symphonic Etudes* and 'Davidsbündlertänze Op. 6', and "1227: Treatise on the Nomadology – The War Machine" is anchored to the year that Ögedei Khan assumed power after Genghis Khan died. The lead date of "7000: The Apparatus of Capture", which forms a direct counterpart of the "Nomadology", concerns the systematization of agriculture in Mesopotamia. Finally, 1440, the year to which the final plateau, "The Smooth and the Striated", is tied to the rapid developments in Portuguese map-making technology, which greatly accelerated oceanic navigation and the formation of the world-market.

In all of this, one plateau is missing: "The Geology of Morals", which is indexed with the year 10,000 B.C. Nothing in the text of this plateau, nor its footnotes, yields a clue to why this particular data is selected. One is tempted to turn towards the hermetic sciences for contextualization, perhaps looking towards occult doctrines (of which Deleuze was at

least partially familiar with) (Kerslake 2007), that locate the in this epoch a ‘higher civilization’ which seeded that which followed (Picknett & Prince 2001) – and it is, ironically, the birth of this *megamachine* that is so often called ‘civilization’ that this date ultimately derives from. It isn’t the hermetic sciences or the scriptures of mystery religions that reveals this, however: it’s a series of clues scattered cross “The Geology of Morals” and the plateau that best serves as its counterpart, “Of the Refrain”. “The Geology of Morals” is home to the infamous phrase «God is a lobster, or a double pincer, a double bind», which is especially highlighted by a large picture of clawed lobster at the outset of the section (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 40). Lobsters are referred to repeatedly in the plateau, but in the main body of *A Thousand Plateaus* they appear in one other place, precisely in “Of the Refrain”. There, referring to movements away from pre-established territories, Deleuze and Guattari cite «long marches, such as those of lobsters» (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 326). And it is in the footnote to this passage that we find the explanation for the mysterious dating of “The Geology of Morals”:

...spiny lobsters along the northern coast of the Yucatan Peninsula sometimes leave their territories. They assemble, at first in small groups, before the first winter storm, and before any sign detectable by human instruments. When the storm comes, they form long march processions, in single file, with a leader that is periodically relieved and a rearguard (the speed of the march is five-eighths of a mile per hour, for sixty miles or more). This migration does not seem to be associated with egg laying, which does not take place until six months later. Herrnkind, a lobster specialist, hypothesizes that this is a “vestige” from the last ice age (more than 10,000 years ago). Cousteau leans toward a more current interpretation, even mentioning the possibility that it is a premonition of a new ice age. The factual issue is that in this exceptional case the lobsters’ territorial assemblage opens onto a social assemblage, and that this social assemblage is connected to cosmic forces, or, as Cousteau says, “pulsations of the earth”. (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 549)

The end of the ice age: the meaning behind the date of “The Geology of Morals”. The puzzle appears as solved, but a new one immediately arises – why the end of the ice age? What is the importance of this event, if any?

The Second Puzzle: Composites

Our answer to this second puzzle comes in the careful exegesis by Christian Kerslake of the influence of historian Arnold Toynbee on *A Thousand Plateaus*. Toynbee, whose historical methodology is rooted in the philosophy of Henri Bergson, appears elsewhere in Deleuze’s oeuvre, namely in *Difference and Repetition*. There Deleuze takes up Toynbee’s

‘challenge-response’ model of civilizational evolution. Simply put, the population and systems that constitute a given civilization are faced with an unpredictable challenge, which can appear in a myriad of forms ranging from the rates of population growth to environmental catastrophes; the socio-technical complex must then respond. Overcoming the challenge leads to a new composition that constitutes ‘civilization’, and thus adaptation and evolution is achieved. As Deleuze highlights in *Difference and Repetition*, this also leads to the “differentiation” (distinct from *differentiation*), or variation that occurs beyond difference determined by identity and comparison (Deleuze 1994). In his analysis of Bergson, Deleuze uses the term to designate the actualization of the virtual – the emergence of something from the intensive sea of variables and possibilities.

As Kerslake points out, Toynbee speaks of a “differentiation of civilization” that begins with the end of the last ice age. Societies had been incubated within the material situation of the ice age, and as it receded, altering all manner of environmental, hydrological and geological systems, a great challenge was posed. Kerslake writes:

There were three possible responses to this environmental challenge, all involving radically different ways of life. The passive response was to stay still and not change, for the primal hunter-gatherers to risk extinction by remaining at home, living wretchedly on the scrawny animals and robust plants that remained after the loss of the rain. But Toynbee says that this was not the path that led from the “Integration of Custom” – where a harmony reigned between evolution and habituation – to the “Differentiation of Civilization”. The second alternative was for the hunter-gatherers to migrate, following their prey as it shifted with the climactic belt. This path was taken and led to the emergence of the first civilizations. (Kerslake 2008: 21)

Toynbee suggests that this emergence of earlier ‘civilized’ formations – Egypt and Sumer, among others – constitutes the beginning of history-as-such. As we’ve seen already, for Deleuze and Guattari, history is identifiable with the time of Chronos; importantly, they also offer their own analysis of ‘sedentary’ civilizations, which takes place under the sign of the “Apparatus of Capture” plateau. Tellingly, these sedentary formations are contrasted with *nomadic* societies, which are expressed through the “Nomadology” plateau. If sedentary civilizations are correlated to historical temporality, it would follow that the nomad charts a different course. This is the next piece of puzzle: Toynbee himself sees the rise of nomadic societies as another response, a distinctively non-civilized response, to the challenge of the ice age’s end – and he describes these peoples as a “society without history” (Kerslake 2008: 21). This what emerges is a historico-temporal structure hidden within the dating-system of ‘Aeonic occurrences’ that make up *A Thousand Plateaus*: “The Geology of Morals”, marking the end of the ice age, “The Apparatus of Capture” marking the formation of civilized societies, and the “Nomadology” marking the escape of the nomads.

Further evidence for this is to found in the content of “The Geology of Morals”. The

lobster-god that reigns over the text is none other than the representation of stratification itself, and three primary strata are moved to the fore. These are the “physico-chemical” strata, the biological strata, and the socio-linguistic-technical strata, which is described as the “alloplastic” strata (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 60). The physico-chemical and biological strata are those of the ‘natural’ world, with the alloplastic alludes to the strata that arises in the emergence of a human society capable of «bring[ing] about modifications in the external world» (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 60). Interestingly, just as Toynbee’s system is ultimately traceable to the influence of Bergson, so too is this tripartite schema. Deleuze and Guattari make reference (albeit critically) to the “noosphere” of Teilhard de Chardin, which is a popularization and elaboration of the concept first posed by Russian scientist Vladimir Vernadsky. For both de Chardin and Vernadsky, the noosphere – the world of human thoughts and action, which allows intervention into natural processes’, is the third moment in a succession, following behind geosphere and the biosphere (Vernadsky 1998). Together, the three correspond to Deleuze and Guattari’s three strata – and importantly, both de Chardin and Vernadsky, like Deleuze, were careful readers of Bergson. Like Deleuze, like Toynbee, each adopted Bergson’s idea of *creative evolution* to explain processes of emergence, and the way each of these spheres – or strata – underlaid and give rise to the next.

Returning to the question of the alloplastic, we find in the conclusion to *A Thousand Plateaus* to «two great alloplastic and anthropomorphic assemblages, the *war machine* and the *State apparatus*» (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 513). These are, of course, the nomadic and sedentary societies; it becomes clear, then, that the alloplastic as it is understood in “The Geology of Morals” is the general frame for the bifurcation between the forces sketched by the “Nomadology” and the “Apparatus of Capture” plateaus. But this also opens into the way in which Deleuze and Guattari diverge from Toynbee. In the latter’s work, ‘historical’ civilization and ‘non-historical’ nomadic societies constitute something of an antinomic opposition; the path of civilization is the path of creative evolution itself, with the nomadic being something else. Deleuze and Guattari, by contrast, offer an analysis of evolutionary development proceeding through the various encounters, intermixings, hybridizations and divergences between these two positions. The specter of Bergson once again hovers over these developments, as this methodology, which underscores much of Deleuze’s work both with and without Guattari, was first formulated in Deleuze’s *Bergsonism*. As he writes,

The Bergsonian dualisms are famous: duration-space, quality-quantity, heterogeneous-homogeneous, continuous-discontinuous, the two multiplicities, memory-matter, recollection-perception, contraction-relaxation, instinct-intelligence, the two sources, etc. Even the running heads that Bergson puts at the top of each page of his books indicate his taste for dualisms – which do not, however, have the last word in his philosophy. What, therefore, do they mean? According to Bergson, a composite must be divided according to its natural articulations, that is, to elements which differ

in kind. Intuition as a method of division, Platonic in inspiration. Bergson is aware that things are mixed together in reality; in fact, experience itself offers us nothing but composites. (Deleuze 2002: 21-22)

When Deleuze speaks of “difference in kind”, it is precisely the order of difference that is grappled with in the term *differentiation*. While Toynbee wishes to see *differentiation* at work only in civilization, in history, Deleuze and Guattari relocate it in the distinction between civilizations (or the State apparatus) and the nomad. This becomes especially clear in the conclusion of *A Thousand Plateaus*, where the two are described as «differ[ing] in nature... they do not have the same lines, or the same components» (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 513). And yet, in empirical reality, it is not these ‘natural articulations’ which are realized, but the composite of their respective tendencies. This occurs not only in the case of the two great sides of the alloplastic, the State apparatus and the nomadic, but at all levels of the analysis offered in *A Thousand Plateaus*. The famed opposition of the rhizome and the arborescent structure becomes a situation in which «[t]here exist tree or root structures in rhizomes; conversely, a tree branch or root division may begin to burgeon into a rhizome» (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 15). As we will shortly, the opposition of Chronos and Aeon translates into the profound implication of one within the other. Even at the highest level, the distinction between the strata and the process of destratification breaks down: «Above all, there is no lesser, no higher or lower, organization... What it comes down to is that we cannot content ourselves with a dualism or summary opposition between the strata and the destratified plane of consistency» (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 70).

This leads us to a complex interplay of ambiguities and ambivalences that are scattered throughout the text, ones that arise particularly when Deleuze and Guattari are read politically. There’s a tendency to overemphasize the anarchic aspects of their work, with a privileging of the nomad and the smooth space as both the agents and ultimate goal of revolutionary transformation. A close examination of the text, however, reveals particular composites being the sites that Deleuze and Guattari prefer. After identifying themselves as sorcerers, they write that «[s]orcerers have always held the anomalous position, at the edge of the fields or woods. They haunt the fringes. They are at the borderline of the villages or between villages» (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 246). The sorcerer, in other words, is neither nomadic nor sedentary, but something that exists on the borderline of the two: «the anomalous... is a phenomenon, but a phenomenon of bordering» (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 245). Similarly, the “Nomadology” appears as privileging the figure of the metallurgist (which, historically, is closely linked with the cousin of the sorcerer, the shaman) (Eliade: 1988; Ccru: 1999) – and it is between the nomadic and sedentary society where the metallurgist is found to operate:

Artisans-metallurgists are itinerants because they follow the matter-flow of the sub-soil... They have relations with the farmers of the sedentary communities, and with

the celestial functionaries of the empire who overcode those communities; in fact, they need them to survive, they depend on an imperial agricultural stockpile for their very sustenance... In their space, they have relations with the nomads, since the sub-soil unites the ground (sol) of smooth space and the land of striated space: there are no mines in the alluvial valleys of the empire-dominated farmers; it is necessary to cross deserts, approach the mountains; and the question of control over the mines always involves nomadic peoples. (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 412)

Finally, there's the famous imperative that is so often read as revision of the stance laid out in their previous work, *Anti-Oedipus*: "Mimic the strata" (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 160). While the strata is the "judgment of God", the apparatus of capture par excellence, one does not abolish it "by wildly destratifying". This chaotic, rapid flight from the strata is a line of flight, they suggest, that ends in death, or at the level of the political, in fascism. This harkens back to the very distinction, cited at the outset, between the plateau and schismogenesis; it can be said, even, that the plateau itself is precisely the active realization of this mimicry. This is expressed particularly graphically in the movement of Professor Challenger, the 'fictional' character whose lecture frames the "Geology of Morals". As he finds himself positioned on the far end of the alloplastic strata, his hands transform into lobster pincers – the sign of the lobster-god, whose judgment constitutes the strata. He does not, however, remain suspended in time at this critical moment, but *proceeds outwards*, moving at a pace described as both slow and hurried (corresponding to the unique composition of positive and negative feedback processes that make up Bateson's plateau), into «the Mechanosphere, or rhizosphere» (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 74).

These composites thus become the site through which escape becomes possible, by virtue of their position of *in-betweenness*. Perhaps they are best articulated as processes: each has a degree of fixity in the striated, the sedentary, the historical, which serves as their point of origin or on which they depend. But they angle themselves to that which is beyond it. Professor Challenger exits to the plane of consistency. The sorcerer, located at the borderlands of the village and forest, enter into "demonic alliances" with all sorts of non-human forces, which usher in *becomings* that do not advance themselves through any hitherto-realized normative senses (if one doubts the radical identity of Professor Challenger as himself a sorcerer, follow Deleuze and Guattari's trail: the moments of the "Geology of Morals" where Challenger dissipates into the aether features a series of quotations from Lovecraft's "Through the Gates of the Silver Key", a citation which appears again in their discussion of the sorcerer and the anomalous).

Escaping the Punctual System

Let us return to the question of Chronos and Aeon. As mentioned at the outset, Chronos, as historical time (or perhaps, more specifically, the *transhistorical* sense of time that is

necessary to contextualize what is meant in the specificity of *historical time*), is the time that situates persons and things in a series of correspondences and position, and in doing so gives rise to subject. Chronos is thus the temporal articulation of the arborescent structure: a «pulsed» time composed of lines, «formal and functional» (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 262). While they do not explicitly mention Chronos in this particular context, the implications of this sense of time is sketched out in a provocative – and difficult – section of the plateau titled *Becoming-Intense, Becoming-Animal* dedicated to what Deleuze and Guattari call the “punctual system”.

The punctual system is a diagram of that element vital to the construction of history, memory. In *Anti-Oedipus*, memory – or more properly, *mnemotechnics* – is analyzed through a Nietzschean lens, historicized as forming through an act of great violence that occurred at the dawn of civilization:

Nietzsche says: it is a matter of creating a memory for man; and man, who was constituted by means of an active faculty of forgetting (*oubli*), by means of a repression of biological memory, must create an other memory, one that is collective, a memory of words (*paroles*) and no longer a memory of things, a memory of signs and no longer of effects. This organization, which traces its signs directly on the body, constitutes a system of cruelty, a terrible alphabet. (Deleuze & Guattari 1984: 144)

This organization is precisely what becomes the punctual system in *A Thousand Plateaus*. In the introduction, a distinction is drawn between “short-term memory”, affiliated with the rhizome, and “long-term memory”, affiliated not only with arborescence, but is cited as being constituting the basis for «family, race, society, or civilization». (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 16). A *molar* (as opposed to *molecular*) order, memory in this sense is opposed to the sorcerous force of becoming. From here, everything moves in accordance with reference to a central Point, an automaton, a God-like organizing body or a State apparatus. *Differentiation* – difference-in-kind – has no truck here; what matters is the parsing out of different functions in accordance with equivalences and comparisons. A grid begins to form:

Following the law of arborescence, it is this central Point that moves across all of space or the entire screen, and at every turn nourishes a certain distinctive opposition, depending on which faciality trait is retained: male-(female), adult-(child), white-(black, yellow, or red); rational-(animal). The central point, or third eye, thus has the property of organizing binary distributions within the dualism machines, and of reproducing itself in the principal term of the opposition; the entire opposition at the same time resonates in the central point. The constitution of a “majority” as redundancy. Man constitutes himself as a gigantic memory, through the position of the central point, its frequency (insofar as it is necessarily reproduced by each dominant point), and its resonance (insofar as all of the points tie in with it). Any line that goes from one point to another in the aggregate of the molar system, and is thus defined by

points answering to these mnemonic conditions of frequency and resonance, is a part of the arborescent system (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 292-293).

«What constitutes arborescence is the submission of the line to the point», and in the expanded organization of the punctual system, «a point basically refers to linear coordinates» (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 294). The line is not only dominated by the point; it serves to draw two or more point together. Lines move horizontally and vertically, giving rise to a cohesive system of coordination. In the case of memory or the mnemotechnical system, the moment of the present is determined by «the horizontal line of the *flow* of time (kinematics), which goes from the old past to the actual present, and the vertical line of the *order* of time (stratigraphy), which goes from the present to the past, or to the representation of the old present» (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 294). Arborescent memory in other words, is composed through the *spatialization* of time, understood as the splitting-up of the flow of time into quantifiable units, and the distribution of these units in a particular order. This is the rising to the level of Chronos, as a grand (trans)historical temporality, and it finds its natural complement in the discussion of the manner in which the State apparatus captures the nomad and *overcodes* it, affixing it to a time and space and number and order.

Nick Land is one of the thinkers who has taken ahold of Deleuze and Guattari's discussion of numbers and overcoding and propelled into schizophrenic territories that they implied, but scarcely ventured into. Numbers are at once the system of *oecumenical* domination and the means to escape to the *planomenon*. To rehearse these complex maneuvers and sorcerous methodologies is far beyond the present scope of this essay – but what is of interest is Land's insistence on the diagonal method discovered by the mathematician Georg Cantor. In Cantor's work, the method unveils the existence of uncountable sets of numbers that are incapable of being correlated to natural numbers – that is, numbers deployed for counting and ordering purposes. If the mechanisms that express the operations of natural numbers corresponds to the process of overcoding, then the uncountable number is *decoded*, an excess that cannot be contained within the coded numerical system. For Land, the diagonal method that produces this is a machine for innovation: the production of the new is, itself, decoding, the production of that excess. As he describes, «diagonal methods activate an inexhaustible innovative potential. It exploits capabilities no greater than those presupposed by a prospective completion, which it then subverts, by finding an extraneous item relative to any list, even an infinite one... Cantor slides across schizophrenia, nomos nozone, magnitude is occupied without being counted» (Land 2018: 524).

Elsewhere, Land finds the diagonal method underscoring Kant's discovery of the *synthetic a priori*, which makes its advance through a grid organized around the oppositions of synthetic/analytic, a posteriori/a priori. Like the uncountable set, the *synthetic a priori* is the production of the new, which Land likens to Deleuze and Guattari's line of flight. It is telling, then, that in his own exegesis of the production of the synthetic a priori, Deleuze

recourses to the language of geometry: «the straight line is the shortest way from one point to another» (Deleuze 1978). Our ears prick up: is this not the very language used to describe the punctual system, with its relations between lines and point? And indeed, the diagonal appears in the pages of *A Thousand Plateaus*:

From one point to another, a line can (or cannot) be drawn, but if it can it takes the form of a localizable connection; diagonals thus play the role of connectors between points of different levels or moments, instituting in their turn frequencies and resonances on the basis of these points of variable horizon or vertical, contiguous or distant. These systems are arborescent, mnemonic, molar, structural; they are systems of territorialization or reterritorialization. The line and the diagonal remain totally subordinated to the point because they serve as coordinates for a point or as localizable connections for two points, running from one point to another. (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 295)

Thus when it comes to the identity of the diagonal and the line of flight, that revolutionary line, Deleuze and Guattari say: *not quite yet*. The diagonal itself becomes the very site of contestation, as a component of the punctual system that nonetheless is the line that is capable of transforming into the line of flight. They continue:

Opposed to the punctual system are linear, or rather multilinear, systems. Free the line, free the diagonal: every musician or painter has this intention. One elaborates a punctual system or a didactic representation, but with the aim of making it snap, of sending a tremor through it. A punctual system is most interesting when there is a musician, painter, writer, philosopher to oppose it... free the line and the diagonal, draw the line instead of plotting a point, produce an imperceptible diagonal instead of clinging to an even elaborated or reformed vertical or horizontal. (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 295-296)

In drawing out the antinomy of the punctual system and the “multilinear system”, Deleuze and Guattari speak of the “innocence of becoming” that breaks with “‘history-memory’ systems”: «forgetting as opposed to memory, geography as opposed to history, the map as opposed to tracing, the rhizome as opposed to arborescence» (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 296). The diagonal line becomes the *transversal line*, which is precisely why the opposition to the punctual system takes the form of the multilinear system. Freed from the coordinates of the punctual grid, the diagonal-transversal line – the ‘creative, mutant line’ – is capable of establishing its own series of coordinates and connections without the mediation of the center point. Deleuze and Guattari described the non-pulsed time that this line moves in comparison to the music of Boulez, writing that it acts as a «deterritorialized rhythmic block that has abandoned points, coordinates and measure» (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 296).

Yet non-pulsed, or Aeonian time, is not to be confused with the time of the eternal. It is,

instead, the *unhistorical* or the *untimely*, a concept that Deleuze and Guattari draw from Nietzsche, and to which Deleuze has returned to time and time again. In *Difference and Repetition*, it appears in his vicious assault on the dogmatic image of thought: the untimely, as something “neither temporal nor eternal”, is something out of joint with the dominant orders of common sense that reinforce the regime of representation (Deleuze 1994: 130). In *The Logic of Sense*, the untimely is being described as «pertain[ing] to modernity», something that is «extract[ed] from modernity» but reversed again it, with the hope of engendering a «time to come» (one can easily glimpse how this is a preamble to the discussion of the punctual system in *A Thousand Plateaus*) (Deleuze 1990: 265). Later, in *What is Philosophy?*, Deleuze and Guattari attribute the concept to Catholic philosopher and poet Charles Péguy – though it bears keeping in mind that in the pages of *Difference and Repetition*, Péguy often appears in conjunction with Nietzsche. When Péguy appears again in *What is Philosophy?*, the description of the untimely immediately recalls the language of *The Logic of Sense*, if the earlier work’s use of ‘modernity’ is swapped for ‘history’ more generally:

the unhistorical vapor that has nothing to do with the eternal, the becoming of without which nothing would come about in history but that which does not merge with history... Acting counter on the past, and therefore on the present, for the benefit, let us hope, of a future – but the future is not a historical future, not even a utopian history, it is the infinite Now, the Nun that Plato already distinguished from every present: the Intensive or the Untimely, not an instant but a becoming. (Deleuze & Guattari 1994: 112)

In his own work, Nietzsche’s untimely appears in the book *Untimely Meditations*, in the section titled “On the uses and disadvantages of history for life”. There, he diagnoses a situation in which modern civilization is «suffering from a consuming fever of history» (Nietzsche 1997: 60). As the thrasher of modernity rolls across the European landscape, the modern subject finds themselves inundated with the full weight of historical memory. He «clings relentlessly to the past: however far and fast he run, this chain runs with him» (Nietzsche 1997: 61). Against this (and using language that Deleuze would later rearticulate), he poses *forgetting*. Though this forgetting may occur only for a moment – though it can extend much further – it constitutes the «capacity to feel *unhistorically* during its duration». He goes on to raise the stakes higher for this untimely or unhistorical experience, making it the basis for a flourishing and vital form of life. «The unhistorical is like an atmosphere within which alone life can germinate and with the destruction of which it must vanish» (Nietzsche 1997: 63-64).

And yet, at the same time, Nietzsche erects limits to the unhistorical. From the side of the unhistorical, history is unmoored from its position as a “sovereign science”, which is precisely the position Nietzsche wishes to see it relegated. But we’re not to dispose of history entirely, as *preserving* elements of it are equally vital to the promotion of life. This

is a complex interplay, because it is through the mediation of the unhistorical that this preservation occurs; to drift aimlessly in the ethereal vapor of the unhistorical, within the elements of the historical to provide some sort of ground, would hasten life towards its very end. We can see here the beginnings of the famous odes to caution found in *A Thousand Plateaus*; is this not precisely the same the too-rapid deterritorialization and destratification that winds itself down into death? We can also glimpse a faint anticipation of the relationship between the punctual and multilineal systems, not at the moment of the break or critical event, but what comes after, when what emerges from history, reverses itself against history, *goes down in history*, becomes the motor of history itself. A subterranean line is forged from Nietzsche to Bergson, with the methodology of the composite, as described earlier, being used to probe the way in which this process may unfold.

It is in these moments that the concrete manifestations of the punctual and multilineal systems begin to come into view. So far, we've remained at a high level of abstraction, occupied with the general dynamics of the strata. As such, it appears to remain locked within the contours of philosophy itself. What this means, in turn, is that the account up to this point has remained in a *contemplative* state. From the alloplastic to the directly historical, and from the historical to the unhistorical and the reconstitution of the historical on this basis – this is a machinery for mapping the contours of a grand movement. It describes becomings, but does not grasp it in its particularities. The unhistorical or untimely might give rise to life, but life seems curiously absent.

This, however, isn't quite the case. In a 1990 interview with Antonio Negri, Deleuze is asked on the relationship between the untimely and the uprisings that occurred across the month of May in 1968. He responds, providing in two a gloss on the aforementioned position sketched by Nietzsche:

It was Nietzsche who said that nothing important is ever free from a “nonhistorical cloud”. This isn't to oppose eternal and historical, or contemplation and action: Nietzsche is talking about the way things happen, about events themselves or becoming. What history grasps in an event is the way it's actualized in particular circumstances; the event's becoming is beyond the scope of history. History isn't experimental, it's just the set of more or less negative preconditions that make it possible to experiment with something beyond history. Without history the experimentation would remain indeterminate, lacking any initial conditions, but experimentation isn't historical. In a major philosophical work, *Clio*, Peguy explained that there are two ways of considering events, one being to follow the course of the event, gathering how it comes about historically, how it's prepared and then decomposes in history, while the other way is to go back into the event, to take one's place in it as in a becoming, to grow both young and old in it at once, going through all its components or singularities. Becoming isn't part of history; history amounts only the set of preconditions, however recent, that one leaves behind in order to “become”, that is, to create something new. This is precisely what Nietzsche calls the Untimely. May 68 was a demonstration, an irruption, of a becoming in its pure state. (Deleuze & Negri 1990: 170-171)

This leap, from the philosophical to the socio-political, is not something that is merely relegated to Deleuze's interviews or personal life. It emerges, most specifically, in the course of final plateau: "The Smooth and the Striated".

Escaping the Economy of Time

When it comes to the distinction of perspectives between *Anti-Oedipus* and *A Thousand Plateaus*, the late Mark Fisher raised a very important point (Fisher 2017). In between the two works, Deleuze and Guattari came into contact with Italy's so-called *Autonomia* movement, a quasi-anarchic and exceedingly militant variant of Marxism that had emerged in part from the country's workerist ferment, which in the 60s had come to oppose not only the orthodox communist party, but the overly-bureaucratic and often pro-corporate structures of the organized labor union movement. There's something of an interesting historical movement here: the influence of *Anti-Oedipus* on the autonomists is well-known and documented, and it was them who translated key elements in the maddening text into practice as part of a liberatory struggle. This struggle, in turn, helped give rise to *A Thousand Plateaus* – and indeed, a perusal of the book's footnotes confirms Fisher's hypothesis, with its many references to autonomist thinkers like Antonio Negri, Franco "Bifo" Berardi, and Mario Tronti.

There's another interesting element in play here. *Anti-Oedipus* is often recognized as a book imbued with the spirit of May '68 – but at the same time, it's a critical work. The question that motivated it, in part, was 'what went wrong? Why did the movements turn out the way that they did?'. *Autonomia*, too, was born out from a similar sort of questioning. It questioned the Marxist orthodoxies, with its emphasis on vanguard parties, centrally-planned economies, states and an organization of labor that differed very little from the capitalism that it so opposed. In response, it offered a new pathway, one that established the terrain of struggle not only in the despotic factory or the halls of the university, but in the contours of daily life itself. Above all, it advocated – sharing similarities with the roots of what now is referred to as communization theory – the immediate realization of communism through revolutionary action, the apex of which was the *refusal of work*. In one incendiary passage in his 1977 text *Capitalist Domination and Working-Class Sabotage*, Negri had written

We are here; we are indestructible; and we are in the majority. We have a method for the destruction of work. We are in search of a positive measure of non-work, a measure of our liberation from that disgusting slavery from which the bosses have always profited, and which the official socialist movement has always imposed on us like some sort of title of nobility. No, we really cannot call ourselves 'socialists' for we can no longer accept your disgrace. (Negri 2008)

While there are various problems with the path forged by *Autonomia*, both theoretically and practically, it's worth taking a moment to look at these anti-work politics in relation to Marx's own writings, which will become incredibly useful for parsing the position put forward towards the end of *A Thousand Plateaus*. Doing this will require foregrounding time and temporality as the key component of Marx's theory; after all, what is value – the «the thing, the unnameable» (Deleuze & Guattari 1983: 154) that is the baseline for not only capitalism's inner dynamics, but the way it organizes society – but the magnitudes of *socially-necessary labor time*, quantified and commodified, the blocks of time through which labor-power (or the capacity to do labor) is exchanged for the wage. Value is at once the ultimate source of profits (under its guise as *surplus value*) and a social relation; if value is a reflection of time, then time is at the basis of social order. For Marx, this isn't only true of social relations under capitalism: in the first chapter of *Capital Volume I*, he presents labor as a transhistorical condition, acting as the force which mediates between human society and labor (Marx 1976). Labor, as a social force, is always an affair of some form of organization – and as such is also an affair of time. In the *Grundrisse*, Marx sums this up succinctly: «every economy is an economy of time» (Tombazos 2014: 13). It becomes an affair then of identifying the particular way this economy of time manifests as historical specificity – and it is through the analysis of value that Marx is able to identify the structures and processes that separate capitalism from what came before.

In his reading of the *Grundrisse*, Moishe Postone emphasizes what he considers to be the primary contradiction of the capitalist mode of production as that between value and wealth (Postone, 1978). For Marx, the ever-increasingly mechanized character of capitalist production entails an escalating amount of commodities produced per unit of labor-time, which means that the amount of value embedded in each commodity has a tendency to fall over the long-run. At the same time, wealth itself is ever-increasing, even if profit – surplus value realized in exchange – falls at the same time. The tendency for capital, in other words, is to annihilate labor through the very mechanism for the realization of wealth. Yet it cannot realize in full the outcome of this tendency, because it cannot destroy the very thing that it requires to expand, that is, value. Hence the claim of Marx, reiterated by Deleuze and Guattari in *Anti-Oedipus*, that while capital has no external limit (it can overcome any spatial boundary), it has an inner limit, which is itself.

Because there is an edge to capitalism that is angled towards a self-annihilation that will never arrive, it is haunted by a world beyond it, that specter identified by Marx and Engels in the *Manifesto* as communism. In the *Grundrisse*, the question of time is made immediately relevant to this situation. Communism, being realized through the destruction of value, is therefore the abolition of socially-necessary labor-time as the force that organized social life (and social time). Developments in machinery and science under capitalism are already destroying the necessity of labor, whilst simultaneously retaining it; what this means is that large portions of labor gain a *superfluous* character. As Postone argues, superfluous labor becomes indicative of this contradiction:

superfluous is the immediate negation of necessary, a transitional category of contradiction which reflects the historical point at which it becomes possible to distinguish society from its capitalist form, to separate out their previous necessary connection. The contradictory moment allows for the judgment of the older form and the imagination of a newer one. (Postone 1978: 774)

In the section of the *Grundrisse* on machinery, Marx describes this new society in which the contradiction between value and wealth is overcome in a way that superfluous labor time is transmuted into free-time:

Forces of production and social relations – two different sides of the development of the social individual – appear to capital as mere means, and are merely means for it to produce on its limited foundation. In fact, however, they are the material conditions to blow this foundation sky-high. ‘Truly wealthy a nation, when the working day is 6 rather than 12 hours. Wealth is not command over surplus labour time’ (real wealth), ‘but rather, disposable time outside that needed in direct production, for every individual and the whole society’. (Marx 1973: 706)

Thus the attack on work itself, on labor, becomes the basis for an opposition to capital, with the realization of communism being the destruction of work itself. Production will continue, of course, and so will forms of labor, but they will lose the quantified, despotic character that they previously exhibited. It becomes indistinguishable from the free development of individuals, a veritable fountain of creative mutations. For the first time in history, the “economy of time” will no longer dominate lived time, social time. Lodged at this far-out point, it becomes exceedingly difficult to talk of the persistence of historical time as-such.

The temporal order of work, production and capitalism is traced extensively by Deleuze and Guattari in “The Smooth and the Striated” plateau, but to contextualize their position, we must move back to the “Apparatus of Capture”. There, Deleuze and Guattari assess the moment when sedentary civilization became actualized, Toynbee’s *differentiation*, as the «Immemorial *Urstaat*... a system of *machinic enslavement*: the first ‘megamachine’» (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 427-428). The megamachine or State apparatus operates along a particular ‘formula’, expressed through the forms of “property, money, [and] public works” that are unique to it – and it is through the integration, territorializing and coding of free variables – variables that we can deem nomadic – into the formula that produces work as a regime. The State apparatus engenders work as a discipline, producing alongside it an immense surplus – and «Standard-man began as the man of public works» (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 490). In this figure of the ‘standard-man’, we see the production of the subject in accordance with the economy of time, which advances itself and its surplus through the regimentation of individual into the gears of the (mega)machine.

The overcode only lasts for so long. The surplus that is produced by the work regime

topples over, becomes decoded, and enters into a partial circulation. The property of the first State apparatus passes towards a mixture of public and private property, not yet capitalist, and the ‘communal worker’ transmutes into the individual worker. So machinic enslavement passes into *social subjection* – an excess that is at first uncontainable in the matrix of the system. But when capitalism itself comes to be realized, with the individual worker becoming the mass worker and the general equivalent of money coming to mediate social relations, machinic enslavement returns in full force, with acts as a pole that operates in conjunction with social subjection. Deleuze and Guattari describe capitalism as an axiomatic system, a machine of capture that operates precisely on the flows of decoded and deterritorialized labor, money, commodities, and land, all with a reconstituted *urstaat* serving both as a subordinate and vital factor in it. As an axiomatic machine, capitalism is explicitly identified as a punctual system. In “The Smooth and the Striated”, this transformation is analyzed through a temporal-disciplinary lenses. The economy of time is described as “striated space”, in contrast to a “free action” that occurs within “smooth space” (we might improve this picture, even, by talking of a *striated time* and a *smooth time* – recalling the ‘pulsed’ and ‘non-pulsed’ time of Chronos and Aeon respectively). They write:

Impose the Work-model upon every activity, translate every act into possible or virtual work, discipline free action, or else (which amounts to the same thing) relegate it to “leisure”, which exists only by reference to work. We now understand why the Work-model, in both its physical and social aspects, is a fundamental part of the State apparatus... labor performs a generalized operation of striation of space-time, a subjection of free action, a nullification of smooth spaces, the origin and means of which is in the essential enterprise of the State, namely, its conquest of the war machine. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 490-491)

Deleuze and Guattari then add what they describe as a “counter-demonstration”:

...where there is no State and no surplus labor, there is no Work-model either. Instead, there is the continuous variation of free action, passing 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... Certain outstanding ethnologists have raised an essential question. They have turned the problem around: so-called primitive societies are not societies of shortage or subsistence due to an absence of work, but on the contrary are societies of free action and smooth space that have no use for a work-factor, anymore than they constitute a stock. They are not societies of sloth, even though their differences with work may be expressed in the form of a “right to laziness”. (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 491)

This phrase at the end, the “right to laziness”, is perhaps an invocation of the work by

Paul Lafargue, the wayward son-in-law of Marx, titled *The Right to be Lazy* (Lafargue 2013). Lafargue's argument is an attack on the cult of productivity, which he saw as having ensnared the proletariat in a way that imprinted the struggle for socialism with the very thing that it was supposed to break with. Whether or not Deleuze and Guattari are directly resurrecting Lafargue here is less important than the immediate context, where this 'right' appears as that which breaks with the work-order, and reverses itself against it. Like the Autonomists that Deleuze and Guattari were so close too, *A Thousand Plateaus* unveils an anti-work politics, a buried call for a refusal of work. It is not, however, just a repudiation of capitalism, but that which capitalism retroactively assembles: 'civilization' itself, that machine erected so deep in the past.

There's also something quite interesting in the quote above. Deleuze and Guattari are discussing labor and time under the conditions of modern capitalism, but when discussing the right to laziness, they abruptly switch gears and call upon the examples of "so-called primitive societies". One might be tempted, then, to think of Deleuze and Guattari trending closely to a primitivist position; after all, it's only a small leap from professing an 'anti-civilization' position to one that longs for the return to an impossible past. This line is quickly dismissed, however, by perusing other comments made elsewhere in *A Thousand Plateaus* where the pair remain resolutely Marxist, noting that the ongoing development of constant capital and variable capital – capital allotted to machinery and capital allotted to human labor, a dynamic which gives rise to the aforementioned contradiction between wealth and value – as the basis for a potential society *beyond* capitalism. Such a position is keeping in with how the diagonal line operates in respect to the punctual system: it emerges both from within the system in question, but as a mark of that excess that overwhelms it.

And yet there is still the lingering question of this strange temporal structure. If we recall earlier, in Land's work, the diagonal is identified as *innovation*; in his most radical formulation, its mechanics are those of capital itself. By identifying the diagonal as a component of the punctual system, of which capitalism is an example, Deleuze and Guattari seem to affirm this – and just as Marx saw the innovations of capitalism being put to use to realize something beyond it, the imperative is to "free the diagonal". Curiously, in the drafts of his letter to the Russian revolutionary Vera Zasulich, Marx reveals a temporal character to his understanding of capitalist development and what moves beyond it. Referencing the work of American anthropologist Lewis H. Morgan, and taking stock of the suggestion that the Russian agrarian commune serve as the basis of communism, he writes that

the rural commune finds it in a state of crisis that will end only when the social system is eliminated through the return of modern societies to the 'archaic' type of communal property. In the words of an American writer who, supported in his work by the Washington government, is not at all to be suspected of revolutionary tendencies, ['the higher plane'] 'the new system' to which modern society is tending 'will be a

revival, in a superior form, of an archaic social type'. We should not, then, be too frightened by the word 'archaic'. (Marx 2014).

Later, he goes on to suggest that communism can be realized through the commune on the basis of its integration with the advances in technology and society coming from Western Europe. The 'archaic revival' on a 'higher plane' is, then, realized through revolutionary action and the linking together of the cutting-edge with the stuff of the past.

Is this not precisely what is offered in the figure of the untimely and the unhistorical, analyzed first by Nietzsche and resurrected by Deleuze (and Guattari)? The linear flow of time is broken, an element from the modern liberated and conjoined with something from the past, combined in a way to throw itself against modernity? Postone too converges on this in his reading of Marx, moving from the liberation of time from the economy to a sense of history that can only be described as non-linear. Postone:

The objectified past is preserved in alienated form and, as such, oppresses the living. Yet, beyond a given point, it allows for people's liberation from the present by destroying its necessary moment and thereby makes possible the future - the appropriation of history such that the older relations are reversed and transcended. Instead of a social form based on the present, direct labor time, there can be a social form based upon the full utilization of a no-longer-alienated history, both for society in general and for the individual. (Postone 1978: 775-776)

A no-longer alienated history, a future full of reversibility and the transcension of older modes. This is, in concrete form, the passage from Chronos to Aeon, from the fixed time of domination and subject-formation to the floating time of free-form development of all faculties. The time in which the declaration made by Nietzsche, used so prominently in *Anti-Oedipus*, that he is "all the names of history" can be materially realized. All the names of history, without the domination that history entails.

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