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The Undecidable and the Fugitive: *Mille Plateaux* and the State-Form

Kenneth Surin

When intuitionism opposed axiomatics, it was not only in the name of intuition, of construction and creation, but also in the name of a calculus of problems, a problematic conception of science that was not less abstract but implied an entirely different abstract machine, one working in the undecidable and the fugitive. It is the real characteristics of axiomatics that lead us to say that capitalism and present-day politics are an axiomatic in the literal sense. But it is precisely for this reason that nothing is played out in advance.— Mille Plateaux (MP 576-7/ATP 461)¹

THE LAST DECADE HAS SEEN a remarkable resurgence of interest in the State.² We need only think of the influential contributions of Michael Mann and Anthony Giddens in comparative historical sociology; the “autopoieticist” theory of Niklas Luhmann and his associates; the influential “discourse analysis” of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe; and the efforts of Bob Jessop, building initially on some of the formulations of Nicos Poulantzas, and now providing one of the most interesting Marxist or neo-Marxist reflections on the State.³ While the work of these thinkers has been much discussed, a very different treatment of the State has gone totally unnoticed by “State-theorists.” I refer of course to the one provided in *Capitalisme et schizophrénie* by Deleuze and Guattari (Volume 1, *L’Anti-Oedipe*; Volume 2, *Mille Plateaux*). There is a striking difference between *Capitalisme et schizophrénie* and the work of the above-mentioned State-theorists; this is the resolutely metaphysical character of Deleuze and Guattari’s treatment of the State. Theirs is decidedly the metaphysics of a counter-tradition, as Deleuze and Guattari themselves acknowledge—one marked by its eschewal of anything resembling the traditional metaphysical attempt—associated above all with Hegel—to think the *absolute* and/or the *categorical*. However, State-theory today appears to have banished any trace of metaphysics from its purview. It is not difficult to appreciate why this is so: “metaphysics” (as the age-old project of thinking the *absolute*/the *categorical*) is commonly thought to be inextricably bound up with dis-

credited “universal histories,” with narratives of progress that have died with the death of the “grand narratives,” with a traffic in all kinds of unacceptable “essentialisms,” with mythic teleologies and necessities, and so forth. My intent is not to show how and why Deleuze and Guattari are not vulnerable to such strictures, but to proceed to their treatment of the State-form. I am chiefly concerned in this paper with those sections of *Mille Plateaux* which deal with the relation between the State and the War-Machine (Plateau 12—“Treatise on Nomadology”) and with the forms of the State in particular relation to the axiomatics of capitalism (Plateau 13—“Apparatus of Capture”).⁴

Beyond the “Theological” Concept of the State

Deleuze and Guattari are unabashed in their espousal of a “universal history.” This universal history, which is “rhizomatic” and hence “non-systematic,” is associated with three different forms of the State:

- (1) imperial archaic States, which are paradigms and constitute a machine of enslavement by overcoding already-coded flows (these States have little diversity, due to a certain formal immutability that applies to all of them);
- (2) extremely diverse States— evolved empires, autonomous cities, feudal systems, monarchies— which proceed instead by subjectification and subjection, and constitute qualified or topical conjunctions of decoded flows;
- (3) the modern nation-States, which take decoding even further and are models of realization for an axiomatic or a general conjugation of flows (these States combine social subjection and the new machinic enslavement, and their very diversity is a function of isomorphy, of the eventual heteromorphy or polymorphy of the models in relation to the axiomatic). (MP 573-4/ATP 459)⁵

Of particular interest is the depiction by Deleuze and Guattari of the form of the modern nation-State and its relation to the axiomatics of capitalism which they propound. Their approach furnishes theoretical resources which enable us to move beyond a pervasive—and “theological”—conception of the State which extends from Rousseau and Kant via Hegel down to Habermas today.

Central to this “theological” account of the State is the category of reconciliation. Allied to this category are a whole series of reflections on the construction of a transfigured social and political order. These lines of thought may extend in ostensibly different directions, but they invariably converge upon the same point, *e.g.*, the State as the “appropriate” polity for establishing a general will (*volonté générale*) out of the particular wills

(*volonté de tous*) of its citizens (Rousseau), or as the site of the resolution of the antagonisms which pervade civil society (Hegel's *sittlichkeit*). This approach to the State (more so in Hegel than in Rousseau, perhaps) effectively regards it as a *deus ex machina* which overcomes the otherwise unresolvable dichotomies of a "disorganized" civil society. The outcome is a theodicy of the State.⁶ It would be a mistake, however, to suggest that the treatment of the State in *Mille plateaux* is merely a repudiation of this age-old theology of the State. The breadth of *Capitalisme et schizophrénie* ranks it alongside Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*. That work sought above all to express in a philosophically comprehensive way the "spirit" of Hegel's age. Deleuze and Guattari certainly harbor no such ambition: theirs is an attempt to furnish a repertoire of concepts that will enable us to construct "lines of escape" from precisely such notions as that of the "spirit" of this (or any) age. But what both projects have in common is an expansiveness and a reach, which prompt one to think that if the *Phenomenology* had to be conceptually undone, it would take a work of the extraordinary scope and philosophical ingenuity of *Capitalisme et schizophrénie* to do it.

Evolution vs. "Reverse Causality"

Car, avant l'être, il y a la politique.

(MP 249/ATP 203)

Mille plateaux continues and extends the critique, made in *L'Anti-Oedipe*, of the evolutionist framework almost universally invoked by State-theorists in their attempts to portray the rise and growth of the State.⁷ The gist of their critique of evolutionism is that it is implausible to hold that the State arises out of agricultural communities with their already existing forces of production. For Deleuze and Guattari, the state springs up directly in hunter-gatherer groups which have no existing agriculture or metallurgy. The upshot is that it is

... the State that creates agriculture, animal raising, and metallurgy; it does so first on its own soil, then imposes them upon the surrounding world. It is not the country that progressively creates the town but the town that creates the country. It is not the State that presupposes a mode of production; quite the opposite, it is the State that makes production a "mode." The ... reasons for presuming a progressive development are invalidated. (MP 534, ATP 429)

The claim that the State-form prevailed even during the earliest hunter-gatherer groups seems insupportable in the light of what social evolutionists would regard as the "historical evidence."⁸ It becomes more convincing, however, when Deleuze and Guattari's espousal of the principle of "reverse causality" is brought into the picture. This causal principle is borrowed by them from biology and physics. Such reverse causalities, they say,

testify . . . to an action of the future on the present, or of the present on the past . . . which imply an inversion of time. More than breaks or zigzags, it is these reverse causalities that shatter evolution. (MP 537/ ATP 431)

So it is possible, given reverse causality, to say that in hunter-gatherer societies the (Paleolithic) State was

. . . already acting before it appeared, as the actual limit these primitive societies warded off, or as the point toward which they converged but could not reach without self-destructing. These societies simultaneously have vectors moving in the direction of the State, mechanisms warding it off, and a point of convergence that is repelled, set outside, as fast as it is approached. To ward off is also to anticipate. Of course, it is not at all in the same way that the State appears in existence, and that it pre-exists in the capacity of a warded-off limit; hence its irreducible contingency. (MP 537/ ATP 431)

The relation between the State and the "primal" peoples (*les primitifs*) is thus to be understood in terms of two inverse "moments" or "waves"—one prior to the appearance of the State (in which the hunter-gatherers are brought to a point of convergence that destabilizes the prevailing *socius*), the other subsequent to its manifestation (in which the State, now an apparatus, generates agriculture, the division of labor, animal husbandry, etc.). The two unfold "simultaneously in an 'archaeological,' micropolitical, micrological, molecular field" (MP 539/ ATP 431).

This contention is significant and radical. For it is evidently not the case, where *Mille plateaux* is concerned, that a molecular or micropolitics merely comes to appear at a relatively late stage in response to an already constituted State (which *qua* State is molar, macrological, etc.). On the contrary, the State, when it "arrives," is an arrestation or "caging" of something that is irreducibly molecular or micropolitical. Both State and non-State exist in a field of perpetual interaction, so that the State cannot be viewed as being in sole and absolute possession of a field that has been exhaustively molarized in consequence. In the beginning is politics, which has an intrinsic propensity to be micrological and micropolitical.⁹

This positioning of the State in a molecularized field means that the appearance of the State is not the outcome of its own efficacy or of its

having its own grounds. The State is an invention, an invention of thought. But it is an invention that has to show itself precisely as its “opposite”—that is, an *unthought* (at least where ‘origins’ are concerned): “Only thought is capable of inventing the fiction of a State that is universal by right, of elevating the State to the level of *de jure* universality” (MP 465/ ATP 375). *Thought* confers on the State the character of a singular and universal form, the fullest and most decisive expression of the rational-reasonable (*le rationnel-raisonnable*).

The foremost proponent of this understanding of the State is Hegel, who views the State as an explicit embodiment of the universal, as the realization of reason, and thus as the spiritual community that integrates all individuals within itself. This Hegelian view of the State as the “necessary” realization of the rational-reasonable is overturned by Deleuze and Guattari. They maintain that, on the contrary, it is the rational-reasonable itself that is *derived from* the State. The State provides the formal conditions for the enactment of the rational-reasonable (MP 465-6/ATP 375-6), and thought (as the rational-reasonable) in turn necessarily confers on the State its “reason”) (*lui donner nécessairement “raison”*) (MP 466n36/ATP 556n42). To wrest thought from the State and to return the State to thought, thereby “fictionalizing” the State (which is a fiction before it is anything else)—this is the demanding task set for those who would live out the nomadology of Deleuze and Guattari.

Capitalism and the State

To return the State to thought. In *Mille plateaux* this requires the State-form to be further conceptualized in terms of the axiomatics of capitalism formulated by Deleuze and Guattari. In *L’Anti-Oedipe* they had spoken of the need to

rediscover everywhere the force of desiring-production; to renew, on the level of the Real, the tie between the analytic machine, desire, and production . . . (62/53)

Here are the primary features of the relation between the State and capitalism, as identified by Deleuze and Guattari;

1. The State “comes into the world fully formed and rises up at a single stroke, the unconditioned *Urstaat*.” (MP 532/ATP 437)
2. The State that thus arises is an imperial, despotic machine of over-coding. This imperial State brought about a deterritorialization of the

primitive territorial codes, codes which it then reterritorialized, through its overcoding, in a way that instituted an organized production which brought with it the creation of “a particular kind of property, money, public works . . .” (MP 560/ATP 448)

3. The archaic imperial State which arose in this way then mutated. The principle of this mutation is internal, regardless of the external factors that may contribute to it. The archaic State was an overcoding apparatus, but it was not able to prevent a substantial quantity of decoded “flows” to escape from it:

The State does not create large-scale works without a flow of independent labor escaping its bureaucracy (notably in the mines and in metallurgy). It does not create the monetary form of the tax without flows of money escaping, and nourishing or bringing into being other powers (notably in commerce and banking). And above all, it does not create a system of public property without a flow of private appropriation growing up *beside* it, then beginning to pass beyond its grasp; this private property does not itself issue from the archaic system but is constituted on the margins, all the more necessarily and inevitably, slipping through the net of overcoding. (MP 560/ATP 449)

This transformation confronts the succeeding State apparatuses with a new task. Where the archaic imperial State had to overcode already coded flows, the new State apparatuses had to organize conjunction of the decoded flows that had escaped their predecessor. These were the apparatuses of the extremely diverse State. But even here, decoded flows continued to escape, until they reached a point where the diverse State was no longer able to contain them, and the decoded flows attained an “abstract,” “generalized” conjunction which overturned the more recent State apparatuses and created capitalism “at a single stroke” (MP 565-6/ATP 452-3). *Capital* thus represents a new threshold of deterritorialization. This “force of deterritorialization infinitely [surpasses] the deterritorialization proper to the State” (MP 566-7/ATP 453). But capital’s superiority did not spell the end of the State. Rather, the State underwent a further mutation, and the modern nation-State was born.

4. The relation between the State and capital is thus a reciprocal one. Capitalism is an “independent, worldwide axiomatic that is like a single City, megalopolis, or ‘megamachine’ of which the States are parts, or neighborhoods” (MP 541-2/ATP 434-5). The State is not totally displaced by the “worldwide, ecumenical organization” of capital, but it has, in its modern mutation, become “a model of realization” for capital. As such, it is the function of each State today to “[group] together and [combine] several sectors, according to its resources, population, wealth, industrial

capacity, etc." (MP 568/ ATP 454). Under capitalism, the State serves "to moderate the superior deterritorialization of capital and to provide the latter with compensatory reterritorializations" (MP 568/ ATP 455). It becomes a site for the effectuation of capital, and it does this by reterritorializing flows which capitalism connects and deterritorializes (MP 269-70/ATP 221). Capitalism will even sustain and organize States that are not viable, for its own purposes (mainly the crushing of minorities through integration and extermination). (MP 590/ATP 472)

5. International capitalism is able to ensure "isomorphy" (not to be confused with "homogeneity" in Deleuze and Guattari's scheme) of very diverse formations. As a molar multiplicity, an abstract machine, capital is situated at the crossing-point of all kinds of formations, and thus has the capacity to integrate and recompose non-capitalist sectors or modes of production. A case in point would be a country like Brazil, in which there is every conceivable kind of production, from the tribal production of the Amazonian Indians to advanced computer technology. It would seem that in such a country, every and any kind of production can be mediated and placed at the "disposal" of capital.¹⁰ This is a form of capitalism generated by the progressive and inexorable internationalization of the circuits of capital since the 1960s. It is an abstract machine which ensures several factors: the interpenetration of capital within international corporations, the existence of an international debt economy, the introduction of flexible manufacturing systems and labor processes associated with an international standardization of production. (Of course, the "benefits" of this development are confined to those who belong to the managerial and technocratic strata; thus there are "third worlds right in the center of overdeveloped nations.")¹¹

The Revolution Continues

The great merit of the "universal history" outlined in Plateaus 12 and 13 lies in its almost uncanny ability to chart developments that have become more manifest in the ten years since its publication. State-theory today is grappling with the phenomenon of "post-Fordism" and its practical and theoretical repercussions, but no one (except Toni Negri, who is affiliated with Deleuze and Guattari) has addressed the new conjuncture "theorized" under the auspices of "post-Fordism" with the conceptual subtlety and the unwavering political commitment of the authors of *Mille*

plateaux. In *Les nouveaux espaces de la liberté*, published in 1985, Guattari and Negri write:

... the revolution continues. The irreversible character of the hitherto completed processes affirms itself. The new subjectivities rearrange their political identity by "assimilating" (that is, semiotizing and smothering) the obstacles posed by the adversary—including those that the adversary has made them introject. The changing characteristics of the collective force of labor, the living forces of the non-guaranteed urban proletariat, the transfinite network of dissident discursive arrangements set themselves up as so many protagonists of the new cycle of struggle. (English edition, 84)

According to Deleuze and Guattari, capitalism today has the character of an "international ecumenical organization." As such, it is the ubiquitous, intermediate milieu which assures—"simultaneously"—the isomorphism of even the most heterogeneous orders (commercial or economic, religious, artistic, etc.) (MP 542ff/ATP 435ff). In this milieu, productive labor is formed in every component of society: the ubiquity of capital is simultaneous with the omnipresence of everything that yields surplus-value for capital. The absolute spatial division between exploiters and exploited posited by a more conventional Marxism has been eliminated. In the current regimes of accumulation, the whole of society is imbricated in the reproduction of capital. In the present regimes of capitalist accumulation, the work of the State is the essentially negative one of reterritorialization. The State deflects and dissipates, through such reterritorialization, the efforts of resistance on the part of social subjects. This point is well made in a passage of *Mille plateaux* that bears extended quotation:

One of the fundamental tasks of the State is to striate the space over which it reigns, or to utilize smooth spaces as a means of communication in the service of striated space. It is the vital concern of every State not only to vanquish nomadism but to control migrations and, more generally, to establish a zone of rights over an entire "exterior," over all of the flows traversing the ecumenon. If it can help it, the State does not dissociate itself from a process of capture of flows of all kinds, populations, commodities or commerce, money or capital, etc. There is still a need for fixed paths in well-defined directions, which restrict speed, regulate circulation, relativize movement, and measure in detail the relative movements of subjects and objects. This is why Paul Virilio's thesis is important, when he shows that "the political power of the State is *polis*, police, that is, management of the public ways," and that "the gates of the city, its levies and duties, are barriers, filters against the fluidity of the masses, against the penetration power of migratory packs," people, animals, and goods. Gravity, *gravitas*, such is the essence of the State. (MP 479/ATP 386-7)¹²

The State subserves the processes of accumulation by representing social production and reproduction to its subjects as “natural” and inevitable.

The State undertakes its integrative and neutralizing role in a way that accords with what Deleuze and Guattari (following Virilio) have identified as the fundamental law of the State—war and the fear of war. (The productive organization of this terror is the State’s *modus operandi* when it seeks social integration.) The traditional wielders of power are more and more obliged to resort to war and the preparation for war to quell or slow down social revolution, while their subjects (positioned “nomadically” within social space) are the carriers of this revolution, and must further it through strategies of stabilization, and especially the struggle for peace. This is a struggle to construct “*revolutionary connections* in opposition to the *conjurations of the axiomatic*” (MP 591 / ATP 473). Through the construction of such “*revolutionary connections*” a new kind of social power is organized which cannot be mobilized by war or the fear of war.

The goal here is the creation of a “postbourgeois” civil society. This is not necessarily more “proletarian” in the standard sense of “productive labor,” nor is it the *societas civilis* of Locke or the *bürgerliche Gesellschaft* of Hegel. It becomes possible to create this new civil society because in global capitalism, there is no State into which this new and nomadic socius can be adequately sublimated. The State still has the function of providing capitalism with its models of realization, but there is one thing, according to Deleuze and Guattari, that it cannot do: it cannot alter an ineluctable element in the axiomatics of capitalism—“While capitalism would like for us to believe that it confronts the limits of the Universe, the extreme limit of resources and energy,” it can however do no more than confront “its own limits (the periodic depreciation of existing capital); all it repels or displaces are its own limits (the formation of new capital, in new industries with a high profit rate)” (MP 579 / ATP 463). And adjacent to “the limits of the Universe,” is schizophrenia—that which signals the limit of capitalism by being its “exterior.” Schizophrenia is also the “exterior” of the State. This is the “exteriority” of the emergence of new collective subjectivities. It will, of course, take ceaseless human effort and human transformation to create a fully-fledged socius populated by these new subjectivities. Subjectivities that are the *loci* of a multiplicity of affects and potentials, the lines of which escape the coding of the state apparatuses. Packs and singularities, rather than model societies and individuals.

The Myth of a “Model Society”

There is as yet no theory of the State-form which has brought itself to the point where it can dispense with the idea of a “model society.” Nearly every version of Marxism has to affirm something like a “withering away” of the State, which involves a fairly drastic decoding if it is to be given any substance. But far more radical, and perhaps more politically productive, would be the expression of that which cannot be codified—the revolutionary forces, the intensities that elude the codes of the State apparatus and its surrogates. This of course hints at a productive convergence between Marx and Spinoza and perhaps Nietzsche. It is not enough to discredit the proposition that the State is not (and cannot be) the model society. Most versions of Marxism do this much. We need to go further. The notion of a “model society” itself needs to be dismantled. In its place must be put what Guattari and Negri describe as

the task of organizing new proletarian forms . . . concerned with a plurality of relations within a multiplicity of singularities—a plurality focused on collective functions and objectives that escape bureaucratic control and overcoding, in the sense that the plurality develops towards optimizing the processes of involved singularities. What is at stake here then is a functional multicentrism capable, on the one hand, of articulating the different dimensions of social intellection, and on the other hand of actively neutralizing the destructive power of capitalist arrangements. (107)

The *Capitalisme et schizophrénie* project is revolutionary because it is the most politically engaged and intellectually powerful conceptual cartography of these new collective subjectivities. For all the strictures against Marx and Marxism that it contains, *Capitalism et schizophrénie* is plausibly to be seen as a renegade and deviant member of this tradition of theory and practice. A tradition that it subverts and rewrites even as it stakes its (unspoken) claim to be positioned within it.

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NOTES

I am grateful to the members of my Deleuze graduate seminar at Duke University for interesting and stimulating discussions that have helped in the writing of this paper.

1. Page references to *Mille plateaux* will be given in the text first to the French edition, abbreviated MP, and then to the English edition, *A Thousand Plateaus*, abbreviated ATP.

2. I will follow Deleuze and Guattari's orthographic practice of using "State" in the upper-case.

3. A bibliography of all the relevant works by these writers would be very substantial, and to save space I refer the interested reader to the one given in Bob Jessop's *State Theory: Putting the Capitalist States in Their Place* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990).

4. Paul Patton, in his "Conceptual Politics and the War-Machine in *Mille Plateaux*," *SubStance* #44/45 (Vol. XIII, 1984), 61-80, has provided an exemplary *explication de texte* of what he aptly calls "the conceptual politics" of Deleuze and Guattari. I am indebted to this essay for the light it casts on Plateau 12.

5. A similar triptych—tribal society/despotism/capitalist society—is to be found in the version of the "universal history" developed in *L'Anti-Oedipe*.

6. For a fuller discussion of this theodicy of the State, see Kenneth Surin, "Marxism(s) and 'the Withering Away of the State,'" *Social Text* #27 (1990): 35-54.

7. Deleuze and Guattari are of course not the initiators of this critique of evolutionism. As they themselves acknowledge, the archaeologist V. Gordon Childe, and in some ways even Marx himself (described by them as an "historian"!) are responsible for taking the first steps towards a critique of evolutionism. But the most important figure in this critique for Deleuze and Guattari is Pierre Clastres. See his *Society Against the State*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Zone Books, 1988). A rather different critique of general theories of social evolution is to be found in Michael Mann, *The Sources of Social Power: Vol. 1: A History of Power from the Beginning to AD 1760* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

8. Even Michael Mann, despite his brilliant critique of general theories of social development, does not contend that the State-form was present in the Paleolithic Age (as the authors of *Mille plateaux* do). See his *The Sources of Social Power*, pp. 49ff.

9. This is at variance with a certain conventional reading of a Foucault-like micropolitics which declares this politics to be a "new" development arising in response to modalities and formations of power that did not exist prior to the onset of modernity. Whether Foucault himself should be saddled with this position or whether his own view is really akin to the one elaborated in *Mille plateaux* is a vexatious problem.

10. I owe the example of Brazil to Toni Negri ("Interview with Alice Jardine and Brian Massumi," *Copyright* #1 (1988) p. 83. Negri calls this kind of capitalism "Worldwide Integrated Capitalism."

11. See Saskia Sassen, *The Mobility of Capital and Labor: A Study in International Investment and Labor Flow* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), on the redeployment of "downgraded manufacturing" to South-East Asia, the Caribbean Basin and Mexico. See also Herman M. Schwartz, *In the Dominions of Debt: Historical Perspectives on Dependent Development* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989) pp. 9-29, for discussion of the phenomenon of "cumpulsory underdevelopment."

12. The work in question by Paul Virilio is *Speed and Politics*, trans. Mark Polizotti (New York: Semiotext(e), 1986). The quotation within the passage just cited is taken from pp. 12-13.

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