

Deleuze and Guattari's Absent Analysis of Patriarchy

EDWARD THORNTON

*Feminist philosophy has offered mixed opinions on the collaborative projects of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. But although there has been much discussion of the political expediency of what Deleuze and Guattari do say about sexual difference, this article will outline what is absent from *Anti-Oedipus* and *A Thousand Plateaus* (the two volumes comprising *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*). Specifically, I will argue that though Deleuze and Guattari offer a historical account of a range of power structures—most notably capitalism, but also despotism, fascism, and authoritarianism—they give no such account of the development of patriarchy. Secondly, this article will argue that Deleuze and Guattari's analysis of contemporary power relations could be improved by adding an accompanying analysis of the institution of patriarchy. After offering a detailed account of the technical vocabulary used by Deleuze and Guattari for the analysis of political institutions, I will argue that what their work requires is an account of how patriarchy is historically produced by an "abstract machine" of masculinity. This article will finish with some suggestions for the way that such an account could be given via an analysis of the abstract machine of phalluzation.*

DELEUZE AND GUATTARI ON PATRIARCHY

Feminist encounters with Deleuze and Guattari's work have tended to go in one of two directions. On the one hand, there have been those who have assessed the pair's explicit comments on sex and gender, especially in relation to their controversial concept of the "becoming-woman." These readings have brought about mixed results, from the heavily critical (Jardine 1985, 217), through engaged ambivalence (Braidotti 2003), to the openly approving (Griggers 1997). On the other hand, there have been those who have focused on Deleuze and Guattari's more general attempts to overturn the founding assumptions of Western philosophy. These thinkers have argued that, though not explicitly engaged with the question of sexual difference, Deleuze and Guattari's critiques of representational thought, Western rationalism, and hierarchical orders may contain hidden weapons that feminists could turn to their own ends. Elizabeth Grosz takes this tack when she argues that, despite the fact that Deleuze and Guattari "do not actively affirm or support feminist struggles," their work can "help clear the ground of metaphysical concepts so that women may be able to devise their own knowledges and accounts of themselves and the world" (Grosz 1993, 169). Hannah Stark's engagements with Deleuze typify the same position: "Deleuze's work is useful for feminist theory not because it worked in a sustained way on women or gender, but instead because his work undermines the philosophical systems that have oppressed women since the Enlightenment" (Stark 2017, 1).

Much of this work has been fruitful, pushing both feminist thinkers and Deleuzoguattarian scholars to rethink their respective positions.<1> Somewhat surprisingly, however, much less has been said about the applicability of Deleuze and Guattari's political philosophy to the

analysis of patriarchy as such. In *Anti-Oedipus* and *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari develop a detailed account of both the genesis and contemporary operations of a range of political institutions, including despotism, capitalism, fascism, totalitarianism, and authoritarianism. To take one example, Deleuze and Guattari attempt to show how fascism developed out of previous power structures, how it can be differentiated from totalitarianism, why it arose in Europe with such force in the twentieth century, how it might recur in a multitude of different settings, and how we might fight it when it does. In the sections that follow, I will aim to show that the reason Deleuze and Guattari's political philosophy has not yet been taken up in feminist discourse is that there is a notable absence in their account of political power regarding the question of patriarchy. By tracing the outline of the patriarchy-shaped-hole in Deleuze and Guattari's work, I will show exactly what is missing in their account of contemporary politics and what we might do to fill such a gap.

In contrast to the way they analyze other forms of political subjugation, Deleuze and Guattari's engagements with the question of sexual difference are always situated *post factum*: they discuss the heterosexualization of desire in the Oedipal family setting, and pick out "becoming-woman" as a privileged mode of emancipatory politics, but they give no answers to the questions of *why* the binary logic of disciplinary societies has played out historically in the form of a massive asymmetry that gives privilege to masculine power. Simply put, they give no account of the genesis of patriarchy.

Deleuze and Guattari only mention the concept of patriarchy in one short section of *Anti-Oedipus* (Deleuze and Guattari 2012, 188 and 191) and not at all in *A Thousand Plateaus* (Deleuze and Guattari 2004). This is especially odd given the fact that their two major reference points, namely Marx and Freud, had both given some consideration to the historical development of patriarchal forms.<2> Deleuze and Guattari's near silence on this matter must also be seen against the backdrop of the second-wave feminisms that tackled the question of patriarchy, running from Simone de Beauvoir's analysis of the phenomenon of male social power in the 1940s to the writings on the concept of patriarchy by figures such as Carole Pateman and Rosalind Coward in the early 1980s.<3> In order to understand why Deleuze and Guattari's historical analysis of political structures in *Anti-Oedipus* has so little to say about patriarchy, it will be necessary to go over the political philosophy offered in the two volumes of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* very closely.

My arguments in this article are not intended to criticize Deleuze and Guattari's work for failing to cover the topic of patriarchy—after all, it would be impossible for any work to cover all political problems.<4> However, by drawing our attention to this particular blind spot in Deleuze and Guattari's work, I hope to point to new ways in which their analysis of contemporary power structures could be improved. My contention is that their analysis of capitalist power relations could be strengthened by including an analysis of the political institution of patriarchy. To do this I will first outline the political philosophy included in both *Anti-Oedipus* and *A Thousand Plateaus*. I will then show that the concept of "becoming-woman" holds an anomalous place within Deleuze and Guattari's *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* project. Finally, I will conclude by providing some suggestions on how we might overcome this blind spot by supplementing their work with our own analysis of the abstract machine of *phallusization*. During this process I will argue for the power of their method of political analysis, while attempting to broaden its scope to cover new political ground.

Deleuze and Guattari's analysis of political structures in *Anti-Oedipus* aims to update a traditional Marxist account of the historical development of political economy with the psychoanalytic conception of desire. Collapsing Marx's discovery of the abstract concept of "labor" into Freud's discovery of "desire," Deleuze and Guattari posit "desiring-production" as the ground of all political formations (Deleuze and Guattari 2012, 45). Desiring-production is taken to be the creative force that drives political change and is defined as both the "production of reality" (30), and the "production of production" (45). In contrast to Marx's historical account of different modes of production, Deleuze and Guattari define any particular form of political or social organization by the specific mode of "anti-production" with which it captures or directs the forces of desire (10). For example, Deleuze and Guattari write: "The State, its police, and its army form a gigantic enterprise of antiproduction" (256). One might think that a political philosophy based on an analysis of the various ways in which social structures have constrained and controlled desire would be well placed to offer a historical critique of patriarchy, but this possibility is never directly considered in *Anti-Oedipus*.

Deleuze and Guattari's method is complicated somewhat by their claim that whereas political structures such as the state may have a certain level of stability and individuality, the forces of desiring-production that give rise to them are pre-individual and dynamic. The pair argue that desire is never the desire of a subject, and it does not follow the structural rules of serial connection and exclusive disjunction. Instead, desire is "an affirmation that is irreducible to any sort of unity" (45). In order to analyze political formations such as the state, while at the same time paying attention to the forces of desire that underpin them, Deleuze and Guattari suggest that we must be aware of the operation of two simultaneous regimes of power. For example, although the nation-state may seem to have rigid borders and a well-defined sense of national identity, it is also the case that these borders are constantly crossed, continually redrawn, and inconsistently policed. To pick out the different dynamics that operate at these two levels, Deleuze and Guattari introduce the terminology of the "molar" and the "molecular."

This terminology is drawn from the physical sciences, where one "mole" is a figure used to consider the effects produced by a large quantity of the same kind of molecule. For example, according to molecular physics, my body is made up mainly of empty space, and the molecules that compose it are colorless, tasteless, and have no temperature of their own. However, taken together as a large aggregate, these molecules produce something supposedly solid, colorful, and warm. Just as my body has different qualities when considered from these two different perspectives, one and the same political formation will appear different depending on whether we consider its regime of desiring-production, or its regime of social production (Bonta and Protevi 2004, 114–16). Deleuze and Guattari subsequently argue that "molar social production and molecular desiring-production must be evaluated both from the viewpoint of their identity in nature and from the viewpoint of their difference in regime" (Deleuze and Guattari 2012, 369). I contend that they direct this form of dual analysis at the political institutions of capitalism and fascism, but withhold it from their discussions of patriarchy.

One final point must be clarified here before I can show exactly what form an analysis of patriarchy would need to take in order to fit into—and complement—the political philosophy put forward in *Anti-Oedipus*. According to Deleuze and Guattari, the molecular regime is ahistorical, and history is only an emergent quality of molar formations of desire. In the physical sciences, the unidirectional flow of time is guaranteed by the entropic tendency of heat to dissipate. However, this phenomenon is based on a statistical tendency of the interaction of a large number of molecules.<5> It follows from this that the ordering of time is unidirectional only according to a molar regime of organization. Taking up our previous

example of the body, the physical laws that govern the molecules that produce my body are time-symmetrical, whereas the laws of thermodynamics that govern the emergent qualities of my body, such as its temperature, are time-asymmetrical. Subsequently, even if molecules do not deteriorate over time, the molar aggregate of my body does. In *Anti-Oedipus*, the authors attempt to show that political institutions such as the state are molar, statistical effects of large aggregates of desire and that under this perspective they are ordered by a “universal history” (Deleuze and Guattari 2012, 153–54). However, they also aim to show that the unconscious processes that produce these statistical aggregates are not historically ordered. This means that a complete account of any political institution must include both a molar, historical account of the rise of the institution, as well as a molecular, ahistorical account of the form of desiring-production that supports it. According to this assessment, a complete Deleuzoguattarian analysis of the institution of patriarchy would need to include both a historical analysis of the rise of masculine power and an account of the ahistorical molecular production of sexual difference.

CAPITALISM AND FASCISM, BUT NO PATRIARCHY

According to the molar history of political organizations that Deleuze and Guattari sketch out, the “civilized” mode of antiproduction known as capitalism follows two previous world-historical modes of political organization, which they call “savage” primitivism and “barbarian” despotism (Deleuze and Guattari 2012, 159–68, 210–17).<6> The progression from one of these modes of antiproduction to another is not governed by a determinate science, and as such, “universal history is the history of contingencies” (154).<7> Unlike dialectical accounts of historical progression, the movement from one mode of organization to another does not rely on the explication of society’s internal contradictions. Instead, the movements from primitivism to despotism, and from despotism to capitalism, are brought about when a “line of escape” connects a society to something external. Specifically, the breakdown of primitivism occurs only when an imperial despot arrives from over the horizon, and despotism collapses only when “the flow of merchant capital” connects one despotic regime to another, disrupting the despotic centralization of power (237, 258). When this occurs, the previous feudal system of guilds breaks down, bringing about both “the decoding of the worker” and “the deterritorialization of wealth” (246). It is the conjunction of these two deterritorialized flows that brings about the historical birth of capitalism.<8>

The molecular account that Deleuze and Guattari offer of each of these modes of antiproduction describes the particular organization of desiring-machines on which they rest. Here Deleuze and Guattari speak of the different methodologies of “coding” that produce the desiring-machines necessary for primitivism, despotism, and capitalism respectively. Specifically, they claim that the molecular composition of primitive societies is like a “megamachine that codes the flows of production” in order to keep qualitatively different social flows distinct from one another (156). According to this account, primitive societies make marks on human flesh and on the body of the earth in order to maintain a strict separation among different realms of social life. By constantly destroying any surplus products through ritual, they also actively ward off the possibility of a centralized power taking hold. These molecular processes of coding maintain the primitive territorial regime by organizing desire into a particular kind of self-replicating machine. The molecular make-up of despotic societies, on the other hand, does not work by coding social flows, but by a process of “overcoding practiced by the imperial State” (168). What this means is that, rather than destroying the previous social codes, a despotic or imperial society uses these codes to make all desire circulate around a single center, namely the body of the despot. Capitalism is

distinguished at the level of the molecular regime not by coding or overcoding, but by “the generalized decoding of flows” (168). Instead of using qualitative differences to keep social flows distinct from one another, capitalism uses a quantitative axiomatics to bring different social flows together, flattening all social interactions into a single market of equivalence. In effect, Deleuze and Guattari are giving their own account of the way in which money, as abstract capital, dissolves the qualitative differences among different social groups and flattens them onto a single market of quantitative value. To summarize, they define capitalism according to two different regimes: at the molar level, capitalism is a historical deterritorialization of labor and of money brought about by merchant trade, and at the molecular level capitalism is defined by the decoding of flows of desire by a quantitative axiomatic. Because they see capitalism as the major political form of organization controlling contemporary society, they put a lot of effort into analyzing it in great detail: describing its molar organization, its molecular organization, and the interaction of these two regimes.

Fascism, according to Deleuze and Guattari’s analysis, is not another mode of antiproduction, along with primitivism, despotism, and capitalism. Instead, it is a particular way in which desire comes to desire its own repression (xviii). At a molar level, they offer an account of the historical rise of fascism in Europe by showing how particular repressive techniques of authoritarian despotism are internalized by the state. However, because Hitler and Mussolini came to power in populist movements, Deleuze and Guattari claim that under fascism “the masses were not innocent dupes,” and that instead, “at a certain point, under a certain set of conditions, they wanted fascism” (31). For this reason, fascism must also be accounted for at the level of the molecular organization of desire. Once again, they see fascism as the result of the anachronistic force of despotic modes of organization in use in the capitalist machine. In the molecular formation of fascist desire, it is the Oedipus complex that plays a central role: “Everybody has been Oedipalized and neuroticized at home, at school, at work. Everybody wants to be a fascist” (xxiii). Although capitalism is defined at the molecular level by a generalized decoding of flows, it must use the overcoding machineries of despotism to recapture these flows. The Oedipal family unit is perhaps the most central of these machines. Under capitalism, the family unit is used to Oedipalize desire in order to create good capitalist subjects. This requires desire to be turned against itself, and if this process is not carefully constrained, then desire can become suicidal and can be expressed in large molar aggregates of state fascism.

If Deleuze and Guattari were to give as comprehensive an account of patriarchy as they have offered of both capitalism and fascism, then they would need to describe the molar, historical rise of patriarchy, the particular molecular organization of patriarchal desire, and the convergence of these two regimes in concrete assemblages of power. They are not completely silent here; they do speak of our current context as a “patriarchal and capitalist society” (191). However, as I will show, although they offer occasional comments on the molar regime of patriarchy and the molecular formation of sexual difference, they continually subsume these under their discussions of capitalism. Their analysis of the role of the Oedipus complex in the molar organization of desire is a good example. For them, the Oedipalization of desire is a historical contingency. Against those anthropological accounts that claim that incest is an inherent problem that must be guarded against by all societies, Deleuze and Guattari argue that the incest taboo arises historically only within despotism and is formalized only within the family structure under capitalism (181). This occurs initially when the coding of family alliances in primitive societies is disrupted by the overcoding of patrilineal filiations in despotism: a system of family *alliances* produces intermarriage through positive incentives, but it is only the despotic imposition of patrilineal *filiation* that treats incest as a negative threat to be avoided.

The Oedipus complex becomes a capitalist formation of desire when the Oedipal family takes on the role of the training ground for the production of capitalist subjects. Those who desire an unattainable (maternal) object that is kept from their grasp by a resolute (paternal) law will make the best capitalist workers, always consuming more and always obeying the rules that are imposed on them. Effectively, in a nuclear family setting, children's relationship with their mother teaches them how to relate to commodities, whereas their relationship with their father teaches them how to relate to their boss, and to the state. Deleuze and Guattari therefore claim that "Oedipus is never a cause: it depends on . . . family determinations" (195). This is one of their major revisions of Freud, whom they criticize for reversing the order of determination by which the social convention of the nuclear family creates Oedipal subjects, instead claiming that the familial romance is a "mere dependence on Oedipus" (62). Starting from this error, Freud then "neuroticizes everything in the unconscious at the same time as he Oedipalizes, and closes the familial triangle over the entire unconscious" (62). For Deleuze and Guattari the order of causation is the other way around. Under capitalism, the reproduction of capital in the public setting of the factory requires Oedipalized subjects, who are in turn reproduced in the private setting of the family triangle.

This historicization of the Oedipus complex is complemented by Deleuze and Guattari's molecular analysis of the production of sexual difference. Breaking from traditional Freudian interpretations of desire, they do not claim that all desire is, at root, sexual desire. On the contrary, desiring-production is the impersonal force that drives machinic connections of all kinds. According to this analysis, sexuality is an emergent property of molar aggregates that is unknown to desiring-production (324). Rather than claiming that desiring-machines are ignorant of sex altogether, Deleuze and Guattari state that they maintain a "nonhuman sex" or a "microscopic transsexuality" that brings together desiring-machines of all kinds (324–25). Whereas certain forms of coding produce a binary distinction between masculine and feminine sexuality via the threat of castration, "[t]he molecular unconscious, on the contrary, knows nothing of castration" (325). In brief, desire is not necessarily sexual and it is not necessarily split by the masculine/feminine binary; however, depending on the way in which desiring-production is coded in the unconscious, heterosexual normativity can emerge at the level of large aggregates of desire. As Eugene Holland explains, molar representation "imposes an exclusive disjunction: the subject must 'assume' its sex by choosing either male or female for identification" (Holland 1999, 117). Because Deleuze and Guattari's political philosophy necessarily goes by way of a molecular analysis of desire, they write that "[s]chizoanalysis is the variable analysis of the n sexes in a subject, beyond the anthropomorphic representation that society imposes on this subject. . . . The schizoanalytic slogan of the desiring-revolution will be first of all: to each its own sexes" (Deleuze and Guattari 2012, 325).

It may seem at this point as if Deleuze and Guattari have given us all of the working parts required for an analysis of patriarchy. We have a historical account of the rise of the despot who enforces the patrilineal filiation of descent and the beginnings of the Oedipalization of desire. We also have a molecular account of how the transsexuality of desiring-production becomes coded along a binary sexual axis. However, according to my evaluation, there are at least three significant gaps in this analysis. First, according to their molar analysis, they do not show why the coding and overcoding of sexual relations has always prioritized the masculine position. They explain that primitive societies must ensure that "[f]lows of women and children" are coded by strict rules of alliance, but despotic societies overcode this relation with a form of filiation that leads all sexual encounters back to the despot as the ultimate ruler (156). What they do not question is that the coding of sexual relations in primitive societies works by coding the flows of *women* and not the flows of *men*. Similarly,

in the case of overcoding, they do not explore why the despot must be male and why the shift from alliance to filiation produces a *patrilineal* line and not a *matrilineal* one. Second, according to their molecular account, Deleuze and Guattari have not explained why the binary sexual coding of desiring-production must include an asymmetrical power relation at its core. Although it might be the case that molecular transsexuality becomes split by a binary form of coding that produces the molar aggregates of both “man” and “woman,” what Deleuze and Guattari leave unresolved is the question of why one side of this relation, namely the masculine, has been invested with the majority of power? In short, they explain the molecular production of the binary itself, but leave to one side the asymmetrical nature of this binary formation. Finally, they do not give an account of how the molar history of patriarchal norms interacts with the molecular coding of desire. In order for them to carry out such an analysis they would need to look at the different ways that transsexual desiring-production has been coded at the molecular level at different moments in the “universal history” of political organization. These projects are left completely unfulfilled in *Anti-Oedipus*, and the authors analyze sexual difference and sexual domination only insofar as it fits with their world-historical analysis of capitalism.<10>

THE POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY OF *A THOUSAND PLATEAUS*

In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari develop a new methodology for discussing the differences among particular political regimes. This new technique, which is based on a semiotic analysis of different social forms, enables them to clarify a number of things that were left incomplete in *Anti-Oedipus*, including the kind of power wielded by the state and the precise difference between totalitarianism and authoritarianism. Deleuze and Guattari also use this new technique to provide a more nuanced account of capitalism. Despite the way in which they broaden the scope of their political analysis in *A Thousand Plateaus*, they pay no more attention to the question of patriarchy. However, by looking closely at the workings of this political analysis, it will be possible to show exactly what is missing from their political philosophy regarding the question of patriarchal power, and how we might rectify this omission.

Deleuze and Guattari’s political philosophy in *A Thousand Plateaus* relies on the identification of what they call “regimes of signs” (Deleuze and Guattari 2004, 123). In effect, they claim that we can identify the power structures in any society by looking at the particular ways in which language is used to overcode bodies. Which statements, coming out of whose mouths, bring about alterations in the state of affairs? Using the terminology of Deleuze and Guattari’s linguistic pragmatism, we can ask: Which “order-words” circulate in a semiotic system, and what kinds of “incorporeal transformations” do they bring about (119–20)? This analysis is antistructuralist because Deleuze and Guattari argue that the efficacy of statements does not rely only on the relations that exist between words, but also on the relations between words and bodies. When a priest says, “I now pronounce you husband and wife,” or when a judge says, “I find you guilty,” these statements bring about alterations in the material state of affairs, not only because of the words themselves, but because of the social infrastructure of the church, or of the courts. In these instances, the important thing is not what the statements mean, but what role they play in enforcing socially accepted forms of desire. Although the efficacy of statements in a given society is always changing, Deleuze and Guattari write: “To the extent these variables enter at a given moment into determinable relations, the assemblages combine in a *regime of signs*” (92).

In place of the molar, historical analysis of primitive, despotic, and capitalist societies that was offered in their previous work, in *A Thousand Plateaus* they identify four different

regimes of signs.<11> These are the presignifying, the signifying, the countersignifying, and the postsignifying regimes. We may recognize the signifying regime in situations where “every sign refers to another sign, and only to another sign, ad infinitum” (124). The inter-referential nature of the signifying regime results in a circular system in which all meaning revolves around a single center. The signifying regime upholds this circular asymmetry of power relations through the use of paranoia. According to Deleuze and Guattari, this is the semiotic organization of the despotic state apparatus, in which all signifiers lead back to the face of the despot. In contrast to the signifying regime, the presignifying regime is defined as the expression of a social stratification that actively wards off the possibility of a despotic and signifying regime taking hold. It does this by maintaining multiple forms of expression, including “corporeality, gesturality, rhythm, dance, and rite,” which “coexist heterogeneously with the vocal form” (130). This pluralism, or polyvocality, is designed to prevent the power takeover by a despotic form of signification that would reduce all expression to linguistic expression.

On top of these two regimes of signs, Deleuze and Guattari also discuss countersignifying regimes and postsignifying regimes. Countersignifying regimes of signs are defined by their use of a mixed semiotic based on “arithmetic and numeration” (131). Deleuze and Guattari claim that the countersignifying regime is adopted by nomadic societies, where signs are used in the process of creating “smooth space” (424–25). Postsignifying regimes, however, differ from the state form not by resisting the stratification of space, but by escaping the circular system of reference on a “line of flight” (135). This happens when a “packet of signs detaches from the irradiating circular network and sets to work on its own account” (134). Deleuze and Guattari’s favorite example here is the escape of the Jewish people from the imperial Egyptian system of reference. In this case, a group of people take up a “passional” relation with a packet of signs (the Ark of the Covenant) and define their social existence by the way they follow this proceeding. It is not possible in this article to go into much depth about the detail of how these four regimes operate; however, it is important to point out that for Deleuze and Guattari, the distinction between the signifying regime and the postsignifying regime—which they also call “the passional regime, or the regime of subjectification” (141)—aligns with the difference between *totalitarianism* and *authoritarianism*. In signifying regimes, statements gain their efficacy through the way that they refer back to the despot as the totalizing center of all power. But in subjectifying regimes, statements gain their efficacy by the way in which they extend the passional proceeding of a single authoritarian aim.

How does this analysis of regimes of signs relate to the political philosophy of *Anti-Oedipus*, and what role does sexual difference play in the articulation of the four regimes? In a certain sense, the distinction between the presignifying regime and the signifying regime is simply a new way of articulating the difference between the primitive and despotic political forms discussed in *Anti-Oedipus*. However, this does not mean that Deleuze and Guattari simply follow the trajectory of *Anti-Oedipus* and align either the countersignifying or the postsignifying regime with capitalism. On the contrary, in *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari claim that capitalism is nothing other than a particular mixture of the signifying regime and the subjectifying regime. They write that “the semiotic of capitalism has attained this state of mixture in which signifiante and subjectification effectively interpenetrate” (202). Adding one further layer of complexity to their account of contemporary power, they also pick out the organic stratification of our bodies as a third conditioning force. They speak of “the organism, signifiante, and subjectification” as “the three great strata concerning us, in other words, the ones that most directly bind us” (176). What is of interest to us here is the fact that they also refer to this system as “[o]ur semiotic of modern White Men” (202). But if it is the case that the regime of capitalism is inherently dominated by white men, and if

Deleuze and Guattari are aware of this, then how do they account for this fact? In short, what is the relationship between patriarchy and capitalism in *A Thousand Plateaus*?<12>

Deleuze and Guattari do not leave us completely empty-handed here as they offer some insights into the masculinity of the signifying and subjectifying regimes. For example, the face of the despot, around which all signification circulates in the signifying regime of signs, is assumed to be a male face. This is implicit in Deleuze and Guattari's description of the despotic regime of signification. Consider, for example, the implicit gendering of the subject who undergoes signification in this passage: "Your wife looked at you with a funny expression. And this morning the mailman handed you a letter from the IRS and crossed his fingers. Then you stepped in a pile of dog shit. You saw two sticks on the sidewalk positioned like the hands of a watch. They were whispering behind your back when you arrived at the office. It doesn't matter what it means, it's still signifying" (Deleuze and Guattari 2004, 124). Part of the explanation for the implied masculinity of the signifier may reside in the fact that "[w]ith the despot, everything is public" (128). The circulation of signifiers takes place in the public space of the city, and not in the private realm of the family home. The result of this is that in a signifying regime of signs it is the statements of men, issuing from the mouths of men, that have the power to bring about "incorporeal transformations" in the material regime of bodies. Similar assumptions about the masculinity of the subject are made in Deleuze and Guattari's analysis of the postsignifying regime. For example, they code the passion of the subjectifying escape as a resolutely masculine passion in which someone flees from despotism "in the mad hope of founding, with a woman of their family, a race that would finally be pure and represent a new beginning" (139). Once again, in this context, it is those statements of male desire that have efficacy in the regime of signs.

What is telling is that Deleuze and Guattari speak of this power in masculine terms, but they do not give any explanation of *why* the despot is taken to be male, and *why* the passion that escapes the despot is understood as masculine. Their analysis of the gendered nature of linguistics is typical of the way in which they take note of sexual difference, without offering an account of its genesis. They write: "Let us suppose that the constant or standard is the average adult-white-heterosexual-European-male-speaking a standard language" (116). They "suppose" this because "[i]t is obvious that 'man' holds the majority, even if he is less numerous than mosquitoes, children, women, blacks, peasants, homosexuals, etc." (116). However, on reading these passages, we are left without any account of the historical conditions that made the majoritarian position of man so "obvious" to us today. Once again, Deleuze and Guattari imply the existence of contemporary patriarchy, but refuse to include an account of it in their historical analysis of the rise of capitalist power relations. If we are to correct this oversight, we must turn to the vexed question of the role of the concept of the becoming-woman within *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*.

ABSTRACT MACHINES, FACIALIZATION, AND THE ANOMALOUS BECOMING-WOMAN

As well as giving a description of the different regimes of signs, and the other stratifications that bind us, the political philosophy of *A Thousand Plateaus* attempts to describe how it is possible to escape each of them in turn. These escapes are given in the form of different "becomings." In what remains of this article, I will aim to show that in the long list of different "becomings" that Deleuze and Guattari discuss, their conception of "becoming-woman" holds an anomalous place. Specifically, "becoming-imperceptible," "becoming-indiscernible," "becoming-impersonal," and "becoming-animal" can each be correlated with a specific regime of power that it is necessary to escape, but Deleuze and Guattari put forward the supposed importance of "becoming-woman" without explaining what it enables

us to escape from. This is particularly bizarre given their claim that “[a]lthough all becomings are already molecular, including becoming-woman, it must be said that all becomings begin with and pass through becoming-woman. It is the key to all other becomings” (Deleuze and Guattari 2004, 306). If it is the case that becoming-woman plays a privileged role in the revolutionary process of becoming-minoritarian, then surely there should be a regime of masculinization—or, as we will see, an abstract machine of masculinization—from which becoming-woman will enable us to escape.<13>

As a mode of revolutionary politics, the processes of becoming that Deleuze and Guattari outline are like methodologies for undoing the sedimentation of particular regimes of power. The concept of “becoming” attempts to grasp the kind of movement that occurs in processes of transformation without subordinating those transformations to the particular beings that they produce.<14> “Becoming-woman” is not the process of changing from a man into a woman. On the contrary, Deleuze and Guattari claim that it is “not imitating or assuming the female form, but emitting particles that enter the relation of movement and rest, or the zone of proximity, of a microfemininity” (304). This means that such a process is not the “prerogative of the man” and that “the woman as a molar entity *has to become-woman*” (304). In brief, if the majoritarian ideal of “man” is taken as a norm against which all men and all women are compared, then both men and women need to find ways of escaping this norm. As Rick Dolphijn and Iris van der Tuin state, becoming-woman is “an act upon the fundamental phallogocentric organizational politics of society, claiming that every emancipation (also of men) has to take up a femininity as a necessary means to undo patriarchy” (Dolphijn and van der Tuin 2013, 132). It is not my intention here to go over the many debates concerning the potential power of what Claire Colebrook calls “that tortured concept of “becoming-woman”” (Colebrook and Weinstein 2008, 1). Instead, what I hope to show is that this concept holds an anomalous position *within* Deleuze and Guattari’s work, and that to grasp its significance we must find a way of closing the patriarchy-shaped-hole in their analysis of power.

To show how the concept of “becoming-woman” holds such an anomalous position, we must take note of the way it differs in its relation to the other “becomings” suggested by Deleuze and Guattari. First, given that becomings are designed as modes of escape from stratification, we should not be surprised to find that they explicitly list three kinds of becoming that relate to “the three great strata” of “the organism, signification, and subjectification” (Deleuze and Guattari 2004, 176). These three becomings are “the (anorganic) imperceptible, the (asignifying) indiscernible, and the (asubjective) impersonal” (308). However, what is most interesting for us here is the fact that they do not think it is possible to carry out becoming-imperceptible, becoming-indiscernible, or becoming-impersonal directly. This is because the three great stratifications that they combat do not work separately. If capitalism is the interpenetration of the signifying and the postsignifying regime of signs, then what we must escape first is the particular abstract machine that enables these two regimes to interpenetrate. For Deleuze and Guattari, an abstract machine is what connects “forms of expression or regimes of signs (semiotic systems) and forms of content or regimes of bodies (physical systems)” (155). Regimes of signs can give us some insight into the power relations in a particular society, but the important point is how a regime of signs interacts with the regime of bodies that make up such a society. As in our previous example, the priest’s words in the marriage ceremony gain their significance and their power through the ability they have to alter the material arrangement of bodies.

According to their analysis in *A Thousand Plateaus*, it is the abstract machine of “faciality” that connects the regime of signification and that of subjectification with the physical systems that they overcode. It is the human face that acts as the site of both signification and subjectification, and it is the different capacities of the face that put these

two regimes into their state of mutual presupposition. Specifically, the face of the despot, seen from the front, acts as the “white wall” onto which all signification is inscribed, and the act of subjectification is always accompanied by a turning away of the face toward a “black hole” (186). Concrete examples of faces are said to be “engendered by an *abstract machine of faciality*,” which also “gives the signifier its white wall and subjectivity its black hole” (187). The human face is capable of being taken up by this abstract machine of faciality because humans evolved to stand on two feet, thus freeing their hands for grasping, in turn freeing their mouths to be used for speech (68). In effect, the abstract machine of faciality thus accounts for the combination of the three great strata: it is a particular organization of the body, namely the deterritorialization of the head to create a face, that allows for the interpenetration of signification and subjectification. Because this abstract machine is a necessary part of the interpenetration of the three great strata, we must find a way of escaping the abstract machine of faciality before we can begin the processes of “becoming” aimed at any of these three strata individually. The particular mode of becoming that Deleuze and Guattari wield against the abstract machine of faciality is the becoming-animal. They speak of the “one who loses his or her face” as “entering into a becoming-animal” (128). Animals, especially those of the pack with whom Deleuze and Guattari are so enamored, are said to have heads, but no faces. By becoming-animal it is possible to denature our faces and to turn our heads into what they call “probe-heads” (211).

For Deleuze and Guattari, many different abstract machines allow for the different ways in which the regimes of signs can mix with one another. It is for this reason that an “apparent progression can be established for the segments of becoming in which we find ourselves; becoming-woman, becoming-child; becoming-animal, -vegetable, or -mineral; becomings-molecular of all kinds, becomings-particles” (300). If each of these becomings correlates with an abstract machine, and if “all the molecular becomings . . . begin with becoming-woman,” then there must be an abstract machine more general, or more central, than the abstract machine of faciality (308). This abstract machine would need to account for the particular mixture of regimes of signs that produces the patriarchal norm of the white man. Although Deleuze and Guattari’s analysis of faciality recognizes that the abstract face “is White Man himself, with his broad white cheeks and the black hole of his eyes,” this abstract machine would need to explain why it is the case that this norm of masculine faciality is produced (196). That is to say, it would need to explain the role that patriarchy plays in the production of the capitalist power relations of contemporary life. It is an account of just such an abstract machine that is missing from *A Thousand Plateaus*, and it is here that we can locate their absent analysis of patriarchy.

It is worth emphasizing here the way in which my approach differs from those of a number of other scholars who have discussed the difficulties presented by the concept of becoming-woman. In her insightful analysis, Rosi Braidotti also claims that “there is an unresolved knot in Deleuze’s relation to the becoming-woman” (Braidotti 2003, 47). However, whereas Braidotti aims to uncover a tension *within* the concept of becoming-woman—one that oscillates around the “double pull” of empowering women while dissolving the concept of woman—I aim to explore a wider problem in Deleuze and Guattari’s work, to which the concept of becoming-woman points. The problem is this: *if* the process of becoming-woman is privileged in relation to the other becomings, *then* we should expect there to be an accompanying account of the specified social stratification from which such a becoming would escape. If we find this lacking in Deleuze and Guattari’s account, then we are in a position to strengthen their overall analysis by supplementing it with a new account of this stratification.

THE PRESIGNIFYING REGIME OF BODIES AND THE ABSTRACT MACHINE OF PHALLUSIZATION

Perhaps the most surprising thing about Deleuze and Guattari's identification of organization, signification, and subjectification as the strata "that most directly bind us" is that it comes with no accompanying justification (Deleuze and Guattari 2004, 176). We are simply told that these three strata are the most restrictive without an explanation of why, say, the stratifications brought about by the other regimes of signs are of less consequence. This is important because what they overlook is the possibility that the "primitive" stratifications of the presignifying regime of signs might still be operative in contemporary society. It is by refusing to take account of this fact that they fail to acknowledge the extent to which patriarchy governs contemporary life.<15> In this final section, I aim to show that an analysis of the presignifying regime is necessary to see how patriarchy has become one of the "great strata" of modern capitalism.

For Deleuze and Guattari, the presignifying regime of signs designates a particular semiotic form of coding, prevalent in primitive societies. This semiotics is essentially polyvocal, so that a number of different chains of meaning operate simultaneously, without overlapping. They call it "a segmentary but plurilinear, multidimensional semiotic that wards off any kind of signifying circularity" (Deleuze and Guattari 2004, 130). In effect, the presignifying regime is simply the semiotics of the primitive societies that they described in *Anti-Oedipus*. Here, all social flows are coded according to qualitative differences and are subsequently kept apart from one another. Specifically, Deleuze and Guattari write that "[f]lows of women and children, flows of herds and of seed, sperm flows, flows of shit, menstrual flows: nothing must escape coding" (156). Men and women must be coded separately in the presignifying regime because the mode of social reproduction operative here relies on the transfer of women among family alliances. They speak of a system of alliances in which "mobile debts" circulate among families, including "women, consumer goods, ritual objects, rights, prestige, status" (164). In brief, a society of tribal alliances that operates with multiple simultaneous semiotic registers relies on the coding of male and female bodies, and the circulation of the female bodies among the male.

But how do male and female bodies become coded in the presignifying regime? It cannot be via signification or subjectification, which arise only with signifying and postsignifying regimes respectively. Neither can the division of male and female bodies rely on the abstract machine of the face. As Deleuze and Guattari point out: "*Certain assemblages of power (pouvoir) require the production of a face*, others do not. If we consider primitive societies, we see that there is very little that operates through the face" (195). Instead, in primitive societies, the coding of different social flows "operates through bodies" (195). What separates male and female bodies in the primitive regime is therefore a system of bodily distinctions that does not rely on the face, or on signifying language. What I want to suggest here is that instead of an abstract machine of faciality, presignifying distinctions between men and women come about via an abstract machine of phallusization. Just as the abstract machine of faciality transforms the head into a face via an incorporeal transformation that allows for the birth of signification, it is the transformation of the penis into a phallus that allows for the birth of the presignifying system of social reproduction. Just as the human head is freed from its previous functions to become a face, with humans standing on two feet, the penis becomes a visible marker that can be taken up in the coding of gender. When the penis is no longer taken as simply a physical organ, but as a marker of gender difference, it becomes the phallus. The birth of presignifying regimes is also the event in which the phallus becomes a sign.<16> The phallus is a mark on the exterior surface of the body used to separate the flows of men and women in primitive societies.<17>

It is important to explicitly speak about this abstract machine of phallusization, which transforms the penis into the phallus, because an analysis of this machine can help us to see how the presignifying regime interpenetrates with the signifying and the postsignifying regimes in capitalism and how they mutually create our contemporary patriarchal modes of life. In his introduction to *Anti-Oedipus*, Holland notes that Deleuze and Guattari's work suggests that "gender was fundamental to social identity under savagery and despotism" and that, in comparison to capitalist modes of oppression, "further schizoanalysis of the patriarchies of savagery and despotism would show that they operate very differently" (Holland 1999, 116 and 146). This article has begun such a schizoanalysis by arguing that the use of the phallus to qualitatively code bodies as male and female is a necessary precondition for both the signifying and the postsignifying regimes. As we have already seen, despotic or totalitarian societies utilize a signifying regime of signs to overcode the previous codings of the primitive societies they capture. A single signifying chain is used to overcode the others, collapsing the previous polyvocality and creating a circular irradiating network of signification with a single, "master signifier" at the center (Deleuze and Guattari 2012, 225). It is the phallus, first created in the presignifying regime, that takes on this role. It is for this reason that the despot can be assumed to be male. Similarly, the masculinity of the passionate subject of the postsignifying regime, who follows "the mad hope" of escaping "with a woman of their family," is guaranteed by the coding of bodies carried out by the abstract machine of phallusization (Deleuze and Guattari 2004, 139). It is the transformation of the penis into the sign of the phallus that allows for both the original qualitative distinction between men and women and the interpenetration of the presignifying, signifying, and postsignifying regimes in contemporary patriarchy.<18>

With the central role of the abstract machine of phallusization in mind, we are now in a position to understand why it might be the case that the process of becoming-woman is primary in relation to the becoming-animal. Becoming-animal is a technique for combating the facialization of the head that can be used to undo the interpenetration of the three stratifications of organization, signification, and subjectification, but it is only the becoming-woman that can resist the phallusization of the penis and subsequently disrupt the mutual upholding of the presignifying regime with the other three great stratifications.

TOWARD A SCHIZOANALYSIS OF PATRIARCHY

By sketching out the political philosophy offered in both *Anti-Oedipus* and *A Thousand Plateaus*, in this article I have tried to show that Deleuze and Guattari do not offer an adequate account of patriarchy. They do not identify it directly as one of the major structures constraining contemporary life and, crucially, whenever they do discuss the gendered nature of power they simply take the dominance of masculinity for granted, without offering a genetic account of this domination. They argue that binary sexual difference is only an effect of molar aggregations of desire, and that at a molecular level there is nothing other than a "microscopic transsexuality" (Deleuze and Guattari 2012, 324–25). At no point, however, do they explain why the particular binary that is produced between male and female sexuality is an asymmetrical one that repeatedly prioritizes male desire. They also speak of the way in which sexual difference in the family setting is mobilized by capitalism to produce docile, Oedipal subjects of consumption, and the way in which totalitarian and authoritarian regimes rely on masculine forms of desire. However, they never offer an account of how the gendered division of sexual desire comes about, or why it is so embedded in the operations of signification and subjectification. All of this makes their claim that becoming-woman is "the key to all other becomings" very confusing indeed (Deleuze and Guattari 2004, 306).

Following this, and by showing the anomalous position held by the concept of becoming-woman in the *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* series, I have attempted to show how it would be possible to supplement Deleuze and Guattari's analysis of contemporary power relations with an account of the abstract machine of phallusization. My aim here was to show how an account of the genesis of sexual difference in presignifying societies could strengthen Deleuze and Guattari's political philosophy. This project is important for feminist scholars of Deleuze and Guattari because it shows not only that the gendered nature of political power plays a role in the development of contemporary capitalism, but that it is a prerequisite for the "three great strata" of organization, signification, and subjection that typify the capitalist mode of antiproduction (Deleuze and Guattari 2004, 176). Though my initial account of phallusization was brief, a full analysis of this abstract machine could allow for a Deleuzoguattarian reading of politics that is able to explain the centrality of patriarchal power in contemporary life and also explain why the becoming-woman—as a technique capable of combating phallusization—must be seen as the key to all other becomings.

NOTES

1. There is no space in this article for a full overview of the many feminist encounters with Deleuze and Guattari's work. For a concise and lucid overview of the major themes, see Colebrook and Buchanan 2000. For a more up-to-date overview, see Stark 2017.

2. Marx, for example, writes: "If supremacy and subordination come to take the place of slavery, serfdom, vassalage and other patriarchal forms of subjection, the change is *purely one of form*" (Marx 1982, 1027–28). Freud also claims that "[w]ith the introduction of father-deities a fatherless society gradually changed into one organized on a patriarchal basis," so that it was the "divine kings" who "introduced the patriarchal system into the state" (Freud 1981, 149–50).

3. See Beauvoir's claim that "the triumph of patriarchy was neither an accident nor the result of a violent revolution" (Beauvoir 2009, 88). It is likely that Deleuze and Guattari would have been familiar with Beauvoir's work, and Rick Dolphijn and Iris van der Tuin even suggest that the concept of becoming-woman might have been borrowed from Beauvoir (Dolphijn and van der Tuin 2013, 132). Carole Pateman sees the concept of patriarchy as vital because it is "the only concept that refers specifically to the subjection of women, that singles out the form of political right that all men exercise by virtue of being men" (Pateman 1988, 20), and Rosalind Coward sees it as the term that "has been most widely used as the foundations for a specifically feminist investigation of sexual relations" (Coward 1983, 7).

4. Despite this, I have decided to concentrate specifically on the *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* series in this article for two reasons. First, because it is in these two books that Deleuze and Guattari most clearly set out their own political philosophy. This point is clearly argued by Guillaume Sibertin-Blanc (Sibertin-Blanc 2016, 9–17). Second, *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* marks a new direction for both Deleuze and Guattari in which they move away from many of their previous positions concerning the structural nature of power relations (Thornton 2017).

5. For a simple overview of this interpretation of molecular physics, see Rovelli 2014, 60. For a more in-depth look at the role of statistical probabilities in determining the directionality of time, see Halliwell, Pérez-Mercader, and Zurek 1994, 108–15.

6. Because they consider universal history to be an emergent quality of molar aggregates, the "history" that they put forward is intended to be ironic. It is an account of the way in which history is fantasized from the perspective of capital: "In a word, universal history is

not only retrospective, it is also contingent, singular, ironic, and critical” (Deleuze and Guattari 2012, 154).

7. For a comprehensive account of this form of historical contingency, see Lundy 2013.

8. Deleuze and Guattari agree with Marx’s claim in *Capital* regarding the role of merchant capital in the downfall of the feudal system (Marx 1982, 895), but they attempt to rescue Marx from Hegelianism by refusing to read this transformation as an internal sublation of the contradictions of feudalism, and instead highlight the creative act of deterritorialization required for merchant capital to circulate. For more on the traditional Marxist account of the birth of capitalism, see Birnbaum 1953, 135–37.

9. Given Deleuze and Guattari’s materialist conception of desire, their comments here do not easily map onto the sex/gender distinction. As the individual subject is also a molar aggregate for them, the closest thing we can say is that material desire makes no distinction between either sex or gender, but that the expression of this desire in molar aggregates of sexuality determine both sex and gender at different levels.

10. In a certain way, Deleuze and Guattari can be seen as falling foul of the charge made by Coward that although the concept of patriarchy offers itself as “an account of the history of sexual relations . . . at a certain point the same question has to be asked: why was it men who took control and what were the interests thus served?” (Coward 1983, 8).

11. Deleuze and Guattari do not drop the distinction between the molar and the molecular in this text, but they do not use it in the same way. This is due to the fact that the three different forms of articulation of content and expression that they discuss in *A Thousand Plateaus*, namely the physical, the organic, and the alloplastic, split the molecular and the molar regimes in different ways (Deleuze and Guattari 2004, 46).

12. As these quotations indicate, Deleuze and Guattari take note of the racialized nature of desire under capitalism. This is also evident in their analysis of subjectifying, authoritarian desire, which I mention below (Deleuze and Guattari 2004, 139). However, they pay little attention to the specifics of this history. Although I do not have the space to do so here, I would argue that their political philosophy could also be strengthened through a close analysis of the historical production of racial power. As Nick Fox and Pam Alldred argue, to Deleuze and Guattari’s analysis of molar forms we must “add patriarchy, heteronormativity, racism, biomedicine and other systems of thought that territorialize bodies” (Fox and Alldred 2013, 782). Michelle Koerner has begun this work by situating Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of the line of flight in black radical thought, via an analysis of the writing of George Jackson (Koerner 2011, 157–80); Simone Bignall has explored the political possibilities of dismantling the “White-Man Face” (Bignall 2013, 73); and, more recently, Colebrook has been developing a Deleuzoguattarian account of racial power that explicitly deals with its qualitative difference from, and interactions with, patriarchy (unpublished).

13. In her essay “Woman in Limbo: Deleuze and His Br(others),” Alice Jardine notes that each mode of becoming enables us to escape from a particular stratification and that the becoming-woman holds a primary position in relation to the other modes of becoming (Jardine 1984, 52). She does not, however, connect the dots and suggest that Deleuze and Guattari’s analysis of contemporary power relations fails to give an account of the specific stratification from which the becoming-woman would enable us to escape.

14. Becoming is one of the central concepts that connects Deleuze’s earlier work to his work with Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus*. See Deleuze’s essay “Control and Becoming” (in Deleuze 1995, 169–74).

15. In a certain sense, we could see Deleuze and Guattari as guilty of Pateman’s charge against those theorists who claim that “modern society can be pictured as post-patriarchal and patriarchy seen as a pre-modern and/or familial social form” (Pateman 1988, 21).

16. There have been a number of feminist critiques of the concept of the phallus in psychoanalytic theory. Luce Irigaray has argued, for example, that in Freudian theory, the phallus is the “[e]mblem of man's appropriative relation to the origin” which ultimately confirms his access to social control (Irigaray 1985, 42). In light of these claims, I must clarify that my analysis of the abstract machine of phallusization does not return the phallus to its position as the originary cause of sexual difference. On the contrary, my analysis takes the de facto power of the phallus as requiring an explanation, while simultaneously critiquing any de jure claims of the phallus as the center of all meaning. It is an attempt to explain the genesis of phallogocentrism without taking phallogocentrism as natural or necessary.

17. It may be possible to interpret this move within Thomas Laqueur’s account of the shift from the one-sex to the two-sex theory of human anatomy, especially regarding Laqueur’s claim that the former mode of social organization aimed to control the flow of “fungible” bodily fluids (Laqueur 2003, 19). The move to a two-sex model would then be explained in Deleuzoguattarian terms by the way in which the binary logic of despotic societies captured this qualitative difference and used it to overcode other social functions. However, Deleuze and Guattari’s methodology is distinct from that of Laqueur as the narrative that they put forward in their anthropology is intended to be both ironic and critical, rather than strictly historical, in the traditional sense of the term.

18. There is a connection here between my analysis of a Deleuzoguattarian reading of patriarchy and that of Zillah Eisenstein. Eisenstein recognizes two ways in which the term *patriarchy* is used: “(1) a legalistic concept involving the historical period of father-right from antiquity to the demise of feudalism and (2) as an all-encompassing view of human culture that spans recorded history to the present” (Eisenstein 1986, 18). Eisenstein critiques both of these views in favor of a reading in which patriarchy is “a dynamically changing political system” that operates “alongside the economic mode of society” and that “alters itself in order to preserve itself” (20). Deleuze and Guattari’s ahistorical analysis of the molecular regime of desire can thus be thought of as a radicalization of Eisenstein’s position, which sees patriarchy as differential in itself, rather than as differing throughout a linear history.

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