Deleuze & Guattari and Minor Marxism

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Felix Guattari and I have remained Marxists, in our two different ways, perhaps, but both of us.... think [that] any political philosophy must turn on the analysis of capitalism and the ways it has developed.
- Gilles Deleuze in *Negotiations*

It is fairly clear in *Anti-Oedipus* what happens to Freud at the hands of Deleuze & Guattari: psychoanalysis gets transformed into a "revolutionary materialist psychiatry" called schizoanalysis.¹ It is not so clear, even taking the two volumes of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* together, what happens to Marx – especially in light of the fact that a Marxist concept central to the first volume, the mode of production, gets demoted (though not eliminated) in the second volume: in *A Thousand Plateaus* they "define social formations by machinic processes and not by modes of production;" it is modes of production, they go on to say, that "on the contrary depend on the processes" [TP 435].² And so it is "not the State that pre-supposes a mode of production; quite the opposite, it is the State that makes production a 'mode'" [TP 429]. Marx nevertheless remains crucial to the political philosophy that develops across the two volumes of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* and in their last collaboration, *What is Philosophy?*³ – and in effect what happens is that orthodox or dialectical Marxism gets transformed into what I call a "minor marxism."⁴ In what follows I explain how this transformation of major Marxism into minor marxism is carried out, through a set of displacements affecting five categories or problematics: the ambivalent relation between capitalism and freedom; the dialectic of forces and relations of production; the base-superstructure model and linear history; the relation between production and reproduction; and the relation between finance and industrial capital.
At the dawn of the industrial age, Marx would understandably situate capitalism in a grand narrative relating the conquest of scarcity by productivity, the passage from the realm of Necessity to the realm of Freedom. Marx's stance toward capitalism is thus essentially ambivalent: as critical of capitalism as Marx ultimately is, he nonetheless recognizes and explicitly acknowledges the importance of capitalism's "constant revolutionizing of production" for the development of human society and for world history. Deleuze & Guattari's stance toward capitalism is ambivalent, too, but for very different reasons. In a social formation aptly characterized by Foucault in terms of "biopower" and whose hyper-developed productive forces already threaten wholesale environmental collapse, increasing productivity can hardly be considered the beneficial side of capitalism any longer. What is the best way to follow a great philosopher (such as Marx), Deleuze & Guattari ask in *What is Philosophy*? It is *not* to merely repeat what he said, they insist, but rather to do what he did: create new concepts for "problems that necessarily change" [WP 28]. So what they consider to be the beneficial side of capitalism cannot be the freedom from necessity that is achieved by the development of productive forces; it is rather the freedom from standardization (or from norms, in the Foucauldian idiom) – a standardization that is both *imposed* by capitalism due to the private appropriation of surplus-value but also *subverted* by capitalism in its constant expansion of exchange-value and the continuous re-organization of social life by the cash nexus of markets.

In *Anti-Oedipus*, the subversive side of capitalism is explained in terms of de-coding and the kind of "schizophrenia" that results therefrom. On the first page of his most important solo philosophical work, *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze had laid the groundwork for this analysis of capitalism. There are, he insisted, two principal enemies of difference:
representation and exchange, "the qualitative order of resemblances and the quantitative order of equivalences" [DR 1]. Capitalism plays one against the other: the cash nexus of the market de-codes representation and thereby frees desire from its capture and repression by codes (and norms). "All that is solid melts into air," as Marx put it; for Deleuze & Guattari, all fixed, fast-frozen social standards are swept away by the free form of desire they (following Lacan) call schizophrenia. Although capital also re-codes desire (through "paranoia") so as to enforce the private appropriation of surplus-value, the fundamental and beneficial moment of capitalist axiomatization is market de-coding, which always generates more differences than capitalist paranoia can re-capture in identities.

By the time they write *A Thousand Plateaus*, the problems have necessarily changed, and so have the concepts created to address them. The ambivalent relation of capitalist axiomatization to freedom from standardization is no longer posed in terms of paranoia and schizophrenia, but in terms of denumerable and non-denumerable sets. Exchange-value, techno-science and biopower quantify: they make populations, raw materials, technical procedures, and social relations calculable. Capitalist axiomatization operates on the basis of predictive calculations that the forced conjugation of specific denumerated sets of production factors will produce a positive differential (surplus-value). But in doing so it generates all kinds of un-forced connections, both material and social, which escape denumeration. "*At the same time as capitalism is effectuated in the denumerable sets serving as its models, it necessarily constitutes non-denumerable sets that cut across and disrupt those models*" [TP 472]. Majority standards of all kinds are promulgated in the attempt to ensure the friction-free quantification and axiomatization of everything and everyone as factors of production, yet the very processes
of axiomatization generate sets of minorities that remain non-denumerable. *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* will thus end up calling for the mobilization of "revolutionary connections in opposition to the *conjugations of the axiomatic*" and defines "revolutionary movement ... [as] the composition of nondenumerable aggregates, the becoming-minoritarian of everybody/everything [devenir-minoritaire de tout le monde]" [TP 473]. Or, as Deleuze put it as early as *Difference and Repetition*, "Revolution is the social power of difference" [DR 208]. Minor marxism, then, will focus on the differences that escape capitalist axiomatization, even those that axiomatization generated in the first place.

To the extent that axiomatization generates more differences than it can re-code and re-capture in standard-model identities, capitalism functions as a "difference-engine." It thus stands alongside other difference-engines, such as biological evolution and linguistic expression, all of which operate according to the fundamental processes of differentiation and consolidation (the diastole and systole of the cosmos, in Deleuze & Guattari’s colorful turn of phrase). In the case of life, random mutation produces differences, from which ecological selection then consolidates organs and species; in the case of language, infinite semiosis produces differential relations among both signifiers and signifieds, from which expression consolidates signs. In the case of capitalism, the division of labor generates an increasingly differentiated multiplicity of specialized jobs, which the market articulates at any given time in the service of a specific regime of capital accumulation. As Deleuze says as early as *Difference and Repetition*, Althusser and his collaborators were right to
insist [that] the fundamental difference between Marx and Hegel... [is] that in *Capital*
the category of differenciation (the differenciation at the heart of a social multiplicity:
the division of labor) is substituted for the Hegelian concepts of opposition,
contradiction and alienation, the latter forming only an apparent movement and
standing only for abstract effects separated from the principle and from the real
movement of their production. [DR 207]

The real motor of history for a minor marxism, then, is not the dialectic of class struggle, nor
even the dialectic of forces and relations of production, but the differentiation and articulation
(or the de-composition and re-composition) of labor at the heart of the social multiplicity – the
diastole and systole of universal history, if you will.

But the concept of history itself does not remain unchanged. Already in *Anti-Oedipus*, Deleuze
& Guattari emphasize the changes wrought by Marx himself on the Hegelian notion of universal
history, which would henceforth have to be "retrospective... contingent, singular, ironic, and
critical" [AO 140]. But even more than that: in *A Thousand Plateaus*, history becomes explicitly
non-linear. Arguing against anthropological evolutionism with its causal explanations for the
emergence of the State, Deleuze & Guattari complain that "the human sciences, with their
materialist, evolutionary, and even dialectical schemas, lag behind the richness and complexity
of causal relations in physics, or even in biology" [TP 431]. In contrast to the simple causality of
linear history, they go on to say,

Physics and biology present us with reverse causalities that are *without finality* but
testify nonetheless to an action of the future on the present, or of the present on the
past, for example, the convergent wave and the anticipated potential, which imply an inversion of time. More than breaks or zigzags, it is these reverse causalities that shatter evolution. [TP 431]

In this instance, it is two political forms – anti-State ("primitive") and State societies – that co-exist as virtual basins of attraction and repulsion, each of which represents a self-sustaining degree of consistency once the threshold separating it from the other has been crossed. And "this threshold of consistency," Deleuze & Guattari insist, "is not evolutionary but rather co-exists with what [viz., the other political form of society] has yet to cross it" [TP432]. But the same is as true of economic forms as it is of political forms: modes of production are conceived of as virtual structures that do not evolve from one to the next, but rather represent basins of consistency that, once a critical threshold of emergence has been crossed, can become more or less self-sustaining. Althusser in fact adapts a term from Deleuze to characterize the emergent coherence or consistency of a mode of production: "becoming-necessary". The so-called laws governing a mode of production aren't given as necessary *ab nihilo*; rather they *become*-necessary as the mode consolidates itself and attains sufficient consistency. This is the sense in which Deleuze & Guattari say that a mode of production depends on the (machinic) processes that constitute it, rather than the other way around. Instead of conceiving the economic instance as the base or infrastructure and other instances as parts of the super-structure, Althusser and Deleuze consider the mode of production to be a virtual structure or problem to which all social instances are components of an actual solution. Indeed, this conception is already present in *Difference and Repetition*, where Deleuze approvingly cites Althusser and his collaborators for being
profoundly correct in showing the presence of a genuine structure in Capital, and in rejecting historicist interpretations of Marxism, since this structure never acts transitively, following the order of succession in time; rather, it acts by incarnating its varieties in diverse societies and by accounting for the simultaneity of all the relations and terms which, each time and in each case, constitute the present: that is why 'the economic' is never given properly speaking, but rather designates a differential virtuality to be interpreted, always covered over by its forms of actualization; a theme or 'problematic' always covered over by its cases of solution. [DR 186]

On this view, history is no longer to be understood in terms of linear or transitive causality, but in terms of virtual structures or basins of attraction and the various a-historical – that is to say: non-linear and emergent – becomings associated with them. And for minor marxism, this understanding of history focuses attention on the conditions of emergence, on the machinic processes of becoming-necessary, rather than on the resultant mode as it appears to have become necessary.10 In other words, rather than focusing on the results of capital accumulation (which may well be amenable to dialectical mapping), minor marxism focuses special attention on the structural preconditions for capitalism – that is to say, on the issue of so-called primitive accumulation, to which we return below.

But the Deleuze-inspired Althusserian category of "becoming-necessary" is of crucial importance not only for understanding the emergence of a mode of production to begin with, but also for assessing its ability to endure over time, to maintain or enforce the degree of consistency among its diverse component instances necessary for it to survive and evolve. The
contingency of capitalism's emergence, in other words, is matched by the contingency of its ongoing reproduction. It is often and easily forgotten that Althusser's early essay on "Ideological State Apparatuses," with its famous neo-Lacanian re-definition of ideology, was in the first instance a prolonged reflection on the problem of reproduction: the necessity – and even more, the difficulty – of continually reproducing the conditions required for capitalism (or any other social system) to persist over time. Assuring the requisite conditions for the reproduction of the capitalist mode of production is all the more difficult given that, as Marx originally showed (and Rosa Luxembourg later and David Harvey more recently have emphasized) capitalism's inherent crises of over-production compel it to reproduce itself on an ever-expanding scale. Capitalism first emerges through the conjugation of liquid wealth (available for investment in means of production) and "free" laborers (available for hire as wage-slaves). Key to the "free" status of these wage-slaves was the side of "so-called primitive accumulation" that Harvey calls "destitution": workers' inability to access means of life other than via the market. As Michael Perelman has shown in his meticulous study of the "secret history of primitive accumulation," abject dependence on the market was carefully enforced so that labor would not only have to work for wages, but would also have to spend those wages on goods produced by capitalist enterprise so as to avert crises of realization (when surplus-value fails to accrue to capital because already-produced goods go unsold). For capitalism to "take off" and begin becoming-necessary, in other words, both labor-power and purchasing-power had to be captured by capitalist markets and made dependent on them. Yet the processes of "primitive" accumulation/destitution/dependency don't end there – in fact, they don't end ever: new populations must constantly be stripped of their previous means of life and
assimilated into capitalist markets for their buying-power and their labor-power, and existing populations must be prevented from gaining access to any means of life other than those provided by capitalist markets. Capitalism must continue to capture ever-larger portions of the globe and of social life in order to continue "becoming-necessary," and it does so by means of a pincer-like machine whose analysis is crucial to minor marxism.

One half of the pincer involves debt – and key to assessing the world historical role of debt is understanding the origins of money. One of the foundational myths of bourgeois political economy is the notion that money evolved from barter as a way of facilitating the exchange of goods of equal value – a myth that Marx's brilliant analysis of the commodity-form in the early parts of the first volume of *Capital* unfortunately does little to debunk, and may in effect reinforce. In fact, money arose as a means of establishing, measuring and paying debt between parties of unequal power. Only much later did it branch out into commercial exchange – without ever leaving its role in debt relations behind. Equally important, it was debt relations that produced the category of labor in the first place – by isolating productive activity and detaching it from the warp and woof of social activity in general for the express purpose of paying back an infinite debt owed to conquerors (in the figure of what Deleuze & Guattari call the Despot) for sparing the lives of the conquered (whether through slavery or tribute-payment). Crucially, both money and labor arise from unequal power relations long before money is used to buy goods of equal value, not to mention labor-power. This is why Deleuze & Guattari insist that it is "not the State that pre-supposes a mode of production... [but] the State that makes production a 'mode'" [TP 429]. Indeed, given the preponderant pre-capitalist
function of money, it would make more sense to speak of a "mode of reproduction" rather than a mode of production — inasmuch as money initially served to reproduce the unequal power relations of debt rather than facilitate the "constant revolutionizing of production" as the money-form of capital does under capitalism. Considering capitalism (following Althusser) from the perspective of modes of reproduction provides important insights into the issue of so-called primitive accumulation: in this light, the emergence of capitalism entails the transfer of Despotic debt from the Despot to capital. The infinite debt once owed to the Despot for sparing the lives of the conquered is henceforth owed to capital for sparing the lives of the destitute by giving them jobs, so to speak.

But that's not all that changes. Surplus-labor is henceforth extorted not through slavery or the appropriation of tribute, but through wage-slavery and the appropriation of surplus-value. The specifically bourgeois accounting fiction of "necessary labor" is invented to rationalize — in both sense of the term — the extortion of surplus labor from labor-power through the value form. The fiction of "necessary labor" in effect forms the lower half of the pincer of capital, of which the infinite debt forms the upper half. Many dialectical readings of Capital take necessary labor as a point of departure, and treat surplus-labor as a derivative of necessary labor. For minor marxism, this amounts to confusing Marx's order of presentation with the order of real relations: for surplus-labor came first historically, and what's more, it retains its primacy — even or especially under capitalism. Marx defines productive labor under capitalism, after all, as whatever produces surplus-value for the capitalist — defines it, that is to say, in relation to surplus-labor rather than necessary labor. So-called "necessary" labor is thus an artifice or subterfuge, allowing the supposed value of necessary labor-power to be set as low
as is culturally and politically possible at any given time so as to enable the extraction and
private appropriation of surplus-value. In this light, the famous last Part of the first Volume of
Capital, on "so-called primitive accumulation," would appear not as some kind of afterthought
or historical coda (as some dialectical readings would have it\textsuperscript{17}), but as the book's very
conclusion and the final lifting of the veil off the real workings of the so-called capitalist "mode
of production" – which would then appear as one historical variant among other modes of
extorting surplus-labor for the sake of reproducing class power relations, and might therefore
be better called a "mode of reproduction," perhaps, than a mode of production.

Yet it is not just necessary labor that is an accounting fiction: so in a sense is capital
itself. Here again there is a possible misunderstanding fostered by dialectical presentations
that treat surplus-value as a derivative of value, when in fact the reverse is the case. Whatever
may have been true of pre-capitalist money-lending, under modern capitalism surplus-value (or
what is sometimes called "fictitious capital") is created by central banks out of thin air – usually
with the proviso that there be a "reserve requirement" that limits fictitious capital to some
finite multiple of the "real" capital held in assets.\textsuperscript{18} Such fictitious capital is then loaned out so
as to trigger the circulation of value through cycles of wage-mediated production and
consumption, with the expectation that these cycles will return a surplus for private
appropriation. The point is, against the grain of many dialectical accounts of capitalism, that
finance capital has both historical and actual effective primacy over industrial capital, and that
the power of finance capital derives less from its position of superiority vis-à-vis industrial
capital than from its imbrication with the State, which has always played and continues to play
an indispensible role in the creation and legitimation of infinite debt and the ensuing processes of capital accumulation, both "primitive" and "fictitious".

As in other modes of re/production, the extortion of surplus under capitalism still reproduces the unequal power relations expressed and enforced by the infinite debt, but the force or source of the extortion appears to have become strangely impersonal: surplus in its value form presents itself as surreptitiously economic and anonymous rather than overtly political and personal or interpersonal. But do class relations really just serve the extraction of surplus-value, or does the extraction of surplus-value instead merely serve to reproduce the power relations of class? Although many debates within Marxism and between Marxism and anarchism hinge on this question, for minor marxism, the answer is not either/or, but both. Formerly the transcendent engine for the glorious expenditure of proceeds from the infinite debt, as Deleuze & Guattari show, the State-form has become immanent to capital – which does not, however, mean that is has simply become subordinate to capital.19 For capital continues to depend on the State both (as Althusser's very term for "Ideological State Apparatuses" reminds us) for the reproduction of the conditions required for capitalism to continue "becoming-necessary" despite its constant revolutionizing of the means of production and the products of consumption, and also for serving as official guarantor of the infinite debt.

In addition to its part in cementing the inextricable relationship between State and capital in modern capitalism, the primacy of "fictitious" finance capital over "real" industrial capital has one other important ramification for minor marxism: it underlies capitalism's world-historically unprecedented mobilization of the virtual. Marx praised humankind’s unique ability to
generate virtual images of products in the mind before actually producing them; and long before capitalism, money represented a virtual form of value (exchange-value) in comparison with the actual use-value of the goods being exchanged. (This is one reason philosophy flourished in ancient Greece, when minted coins achieved widespread currency.\textsuperscript{20}) With the primacy of finance capital in modern capitalism, most major decisions are made based on virtual calculations that the introduction of new means of production and consumption will generate a surplus, well before said production and consumption actually take place. If freedom from standardization is one of the features Deleuze & Guattari appreciate about capitalism, the access it grants to the domain of the virtual is another. It's not just that the capitalist difference-engine is constantly de-territorializing everything ("constantly revolutionizing the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production, and with them the whole relations of society," as Marx and Engels say in \textit{The Communist Manifesto}), but that capital plots out its peculiar (and limited) kind of "revolutionary" strategies in the virtual domain before realizing (or failing to realize) them in actuality. This is one reason why the utopian vocation of philosophy depends today on the spread of the world market: philosophy's task is to map the vast potential of the virtual realm opened up by capitalism, in order to plot out different ways of actualizing that potential that would improve upon the version we currently inhabit and suffer from so greatly.\textsuperscript{21} A key component of this cartography, of course, is diagnosing the forces of actual re-territorialization that tie potential revolutions in production, consumption and social life back to both the reproduction of capitalist social relations through the permanent obligation to repay the infinite debt, \textbf{and} the continued valorization of already-existing, privately-owned capital in order to expropriate the surplus. The
central challenge of minor-marxist anti-capitalism, in this light, is to render re-territorialization collective and progressive rather than private and conservative, and thereby free surplus difference from capture by the capitalist value-form. This is easier said than done, no doubt, but the role of philosophy, according to Deleuze & Guattari, is precisely to provide the best possible theoretical formulation of problems that inevitably change, so as to enable experimentation with practical ways to re-orient inevitable change for the better.22
NOTES

1 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Capitalism and Schizophrenia, Vol. 1: Anti-Oedipus (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1980); hereafter cited in the text as AO.

2 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Capitalism and Schizophrenia, Vol. 2: A Thousand Plateaus (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 1987); hereafter cited in the text as TP.

3 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, What is philosophy? (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994); hereafter cited in text as WP.


5 For more on their use of the term "schizophrenia," see my Deleuze & Guattari’s Anti-Oedipus: Introduction to Schizoanalysis (New York: Routledge, 1999).


7 On denumerable and non-denumerable sets, see especially the "Apparatus of Capture" plateau in TP.

8 The term "difference-engine" derives from the title of Keith Ansell-Pearson's collection, Deleuze and Philosophy: The Difference Engineer (London: Routledge, 1997); it is developed in my essay on "Karl Marx" in Jones and Roffe’s Deleuze’s Philosophical Lineage (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009): 147-66.

9 Louis Althusser, Philosophy of the Encounter: Later Writings, 1978-87 (London; New York: Verso, 2006). It should be said, however, that Althusser uses the term at cross-purposes with Deleuze & Guattari: for him, it indicates a tendency toward consistency, whereas becomings for them are a movement away from consistency.

10 For more on this focus in minor marxism, see my Nomad Citizenship, especially the Conclusion.


14 On the history of debt, see David Graeber, Debt: the First 5,000 Years (Brooklyn: Melville House, 2011).

15 On the figure of the Despot (and the mode of libidinal production called barbarism or Despotism), see especially Chapter 3 of AO.

16 For a compatible view of value under capitalism, see Moishe Postone, Time, Labor, and Social Domination: a Reinterpretation of Marx’s Critical Theory (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

18 For Marx’s treatment of the concept of “fictitious capital,” see especially Chapters 29 through 32 of Capital, Volume III.

19 On the State’s becoming immanent to capital, see especially Chapter 3 of AO.

20 On the advantageous relation of philosophy first to ancient Greece and then to the world market, see the "Geophilosophy" section of WP, pp. 85-113.

21 On the utopian vocation of political philosophy in Deleuze & Guattari, see especially Chapter One of my Nomad Citizenship.

22 For more on the concept of the "slow-motion general strike" as a form of practical experimentation based on the theory of minor marxism, see the Conclusion to my Nomad Citizenship.