Culture, Desire & Production: From Marx to Deleuze

Abhay Puri
Senior Thesis
4/21/2012
Prof. Jason Lambacher
Dept. of Political Science
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

1 Introduction ......................................................................................... 3

2 Marx, Economy and Ideology............................................................ 11
   2.1 The relevance of Marx
   2.2 Marx on capitalist production and culture
   2.3 Ideology, consciousness and subjects
   2.4 Adorno, Marcuse and commodification
   2.5 Consciousness, Alienation and Transformation

3 Desire, Machines and Production.......................................................... 40
   3.1 Deleuze, Language and Politics
   3.2 Flows and Bodies, Desire and Machines
   3.3 The Capitalist axiomatic, or, how does capital work?
   3.4 The Schizophrenic process & deterritorialisation
   3.5 Culture, Revolution, Lines of flight
   3.6 Becomings and stretching limits

4 Diagrams ........................................................................................... 75

5 Conclusions ....................................................................................... 84

6 Bibliography ....................................................................................... 89
“In a world which really is topsy-turvy, the true is a moment of the false.”

- Guy DeBord¹

1. Introduction

One of the characteristics that ties many radical thinkers together is their disdain for the status quo - their conviction in the longevity and legitimacy of their own ideas. Whether it is Marx in *The Poverty of Philosophy* or Nietzsche's radical critiques of traditional thought and morality, greatly influential thinkers are frequently inspired by the inadequacy of their predecessors and their societies in seeing what consequently appears intuitive. The disconnect between theory and practice, and the manner in which present theory is inadequate in terms of explaining or representing the complexity of reality lies at the root of this intellectual frustration, paving the way for new concepts, new modes of understanding and thinking. Of course, this is a simplistic view of the link between theory, practice and history, and the degree to which ideas appear intuitive or visionary is subjective. Nonetheless, as a starting point for my contentions, it seems apt to point to the stark lack of continuity between theory and reality in contemporary political thought. It would be absurd to suggest that we do not have enough political analysis or endless theoretical and rhetorical discussion surrounding a wide range of political issues - quite the opposite, in fact. More accurately, what I mean to say is that the categories and criteria which we use to theorize and evaluate the political today are limiting and inadequate considering the rate of societal, technological and economic change over the

past century, and in particular the past few decades.

This is not only due to the forces inextricably associated with globalization - the unprecedented compression of space and time according to the needs of the market; the intensification and extensification of electronically-mediated culture on a world-wide scale; the effects of the growth of finance capitalism; the shift from nation-state based sovereignty to a diffusion of sovereignty into international organizations, trade conventions, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and transnational corporations and so on. Just as influential is the conceptual impact of these empirical developments - the conceptual shift toward global citizenship, the epistemic break that it appeared to signal, and the unique relations and processes that it has engendered. The unforeseen shifts at every level of the political that have accompanied the Cold War and post-Cold War eras are inextricably linked with changes in the social, economic and cultural sphere. Despite this, the study of politics largely continues to confine itself to bureaucratic and conceptual process, isolating itself from the very forces that drive and determine it by treating politics as an autonomous and regulatory sphere.

The factors, groups and variables that comprise the political, are diverse, flexible, and contingent upon the material and cultural organization of society from the individual to the state. Following the events of the 20th century, the almost universal spread of neoliberal capitalism has vastly altered real social and economic conditions everywhere, and yet, seems accompanied by the sense that there really is no alternative to embracing the acceleration of the global economy. But hasn't history definitively demonstrated that systems like communism are a utopian fantasy in the modern world, and capitalism, in historical and statistical terms, has created the most value for the most people? Following
this line of thought, however, it also quickly becomes clear that capitalism, in historical and statistical terms, has also created inequality, destruction and misery to the greatest degree for the greatest number. Critiques of capitalism, in particular in the past two decades, are almost ubiquitous, on grounds such as its propensity for creating inequality, reinforcing existing power structures, exploitative and unsustainable chains of production, colonization of culture, and environmental impact, among others. The dark underbelly of globalization is frequently pointed to as a problem, yet the trafficking of illicit goods, arms and people continues unabated, treated as a crime rather than as the real effects of economic policy driving people to desperation.

It is foolish to expect politics to formulate clear or immediate solutions to the complex problems that society generates, but today politics seems to continue to pursue and expand the very structures that create these problems, rather than alter its course. The way politics represents democracy and citizenship lies in opposition to stark material reality, yet academy and society perpetuate oppressive structures simply by accepting their categories and frames of reference. Rather than speaking from and within the reality of global capitalism, we are prisoners to a homogenizing and official language that inherently misrepresents the political and already sets it apart and bestows it with quality. Most 'political' analyses focus on the technicalities of particular events and theories without elaborating the underlying connections and hugely significant changes in terms of self-consciousness, perspective and access to information, as well as in terms of shifts in relations between individuals, groups and communities over the past few decades. By understanding capitalism as something more than a set of principles of production and consumption, by separating it as a category to be critiqued and distinct from rather than
part of the underlying logic of the society which we are within and are produced by, we
fail to recognize the true nature of our situation.

The first step in making political functioning more effective is an acute
understanding of what it entails and how it is embedded in society. It is important to keep
in mind that no true economic and political system can be referred to as purely capitalist
(or statist or socialist), but rather, that these terms simply describe a dominant mode of
production and exchange within the social configuration. In reality, all societies are
hybrid, in that they incorporate localized elements of different modes of economy -
market, state and civil society hold varied degrees of influence depending on the
particular localized instances. Capitalism requires the state to perform certain basic
functions; statism requires labor and capital to produce goods, etc. When I refer to
capitalism or neoliberal capitalism, it is based on the fact that capitalist modes of
production, distribution and consumption are dominant today - global capitalism is the
name usually given to complex contemporary global systems of economic and social
organization, even though their actual functioning does not always mirror 'real' capitalist
principles. The free market is not really free, to start with, and the state as well as civil
society inherently serve the interests of the powerful in terms of regulating the limits of
complex and interconnected networks of production and consumption through various
mechanisms of law, coercion and organization. The question of why and how this system
perpetuates itself is not just a political or economic one - it is situated in the social, and to
beliefs and practices from the individual to the global level. How are the political,
economic and personal tied together? How are they organized, and how do they influence
each other? How are we to evaluate power structures and class within the neoliberal
order?

These are hardly new questions, and as always, there are plenty of possible lenses through which we can consider the question of economic and political organization. I believe that the sphere of culture can offer a number of directions to explore in terms of explaining the relationships between social, political and economic activity and order. Culture is a vague and broad term, and in general can refer to a number of different phenomena, attitudes, values, practices and ideologies that characterize society at large. For my purposes, I will define it as the set of attitudes, values and practices of a particular social group in terms of their 'way of being' - in terms of norms and modes of social interaction and patterns of behavior. Traditionally, analyses of culture focus on mass-produced consumer or leisure goods or services, and make claims based upon how particular media or messages relate to ideology, social class, nationality, ethnicity, gender and other criteria. What I am most interested in thinking about is the theory behind the emergence and establishment of culture, and the ways in which mass culture is linked with and represents the political. How does culture represent and reproduce the relationships of politics, and does culture reinforce, question or subvert the prevailing power and class structures? How does the process of culture work, and what political impact does it have? My goal is to advance theory linking economics, political organization and cultural phenomena, by examining and criticizing different ways in which these relations have been formulated and explained by theorists. In doing so, I realize that the sphere of culture is a broad and amorphous one, so I plan to focus in particular on the particular questions of defining and tracing the 'genealogy' and evolution of culture's position and role with respect to economic and political conditions. Where
does culture stand within the social and economic fields? How do we explain social organizations and relations, and where does politics intersect this? How do the media that popular culture perpetrates by means of relate to the definition and values upon which a society constructs gender and ethnic roles, identity and political beliefs? Doesn't our understanding of culture ultimately derive from our view of societal order and political organization in general? In my opinion, these are the questions that we need to expand upon, explore more, so that we can better identify and contextualize particular political activity; also, so that we can better understand views on neoliberal capitalist culture and the role of politics and culture in the context of society, class and economic organization.

Attempting to understand the political dynamics of contemporary culture requires first an understanding of historical views of culture and the theories surrounding it. Obviously, doing so for culture at large and historically is a project beyond the scope of my expectations, but I want to focus the understanding of culture in the context of capitalism and its political and economic functioning. To this end, I plan to start with Marx’s account of capitalism and its functioning, and consequently examine different ways in which the concepts of alienation and class structure can be understood today, and the ways in which the current system both embodies and conquers what is criticized within it. Looking at the literature surrounding various contemporary interpretations and applications of Marxist critique of culture and its role in relation to politics and economic order, I then plan to focus on elaborating on Deleuze's writing on capitalism in this context, and propose a way of interpreting and classifying the current order that I will argue is essential to our understanding of politics, political activity, and the realm of culture. As I have already mentioned, my major aim is to question and re-orient the
language that we use to understand the realm of the political, as well as to bring into question the ways in which culture, politics, economics and society are tied together. In this context, I shall examine Marx’s view of ideology, capitalist reproduction and culture, and then put different thinkers and interpretations in conversation before arguing that a Deleuzian approach is the most appropriate to explaining the nature of capitalism as it exists today.

Such approaches to understanding economy and society are frequently labeled 'Marxist' or 'post-Modern', yet, as I will argue, these labels and categories are more detrimental to the ends that critique aims to achieve. Rather than engaging with the content of political critique, it seems that our time is characterized by an overflow of information and content that constantly requires the branding and marketing of political debate and discussion. I believe that progress lies in engaging with diverging ideas and perspectives rather than in relegating thought to totalizing labels that create a false unity. As the trajectory of communism in the last century has demonstrated, theories and ideas often suffer from inadequacies in the understanding of their complexity and dynamics. Theories are imposed from the top rather than generated organically, an ideal is always set that is outside of rather than directly tied to current conditions. Particularly in the context of the current global order, if such a thing exists, terms like Marxist and post-modern are frequently misused, misunderstood, and already carry a connotation and judgments based on the weight of history and representation. Moreover, I believe that we are already well beyond the point where Marxism or communism can be seen as an alternative system to capitalism. This is not only based on the vast logistical and institutional forces alternative systems must repel in order to even compete with the scale
of global capitalism, but also the assertion, which I will elaborate on later, that the production of entire spheres of society is tied to the capitalist order and power structures. Since my approach entails selecting the concepts and critical discussions that illuminate the Marxist understanding of ideology and the nature of capital’s functioning, while putting these understandings in conversation with alternative approaches, it is not one that begins as radical but rather one of consideration and interpretation. Today, the challenge is to find ways to better understand and accurately depict our system, and to try to solve its problems pragmatically and contextually rather than creating transcendent ideals or overarching laws. Instead of labels, it is the ideas behind them that need to be grasped and applied; by engaging with theorists as they approach and explain the intersection of the political, economic and social, and putting them in conversation in the context of our era, I believe we can do this.

Moreover, framing capitalism and communism as opposite poles already subscribes to a capitalist logic of competition, endowing both theories with a totalizing historical and material weight, when in reality all economic formations are hybrid aggregations of individual transactions, exchange and circulation, usually dominated by a particular mode of production but never purely capitalist or communist. These theories are representational, as I will argue, and understood as images, entire 'things' rather than what they are – forms of economic logic governing different modes of production, distribution and consumption, based on different interpretations of market activity and derivatively, human interaction.
“No matter what philosophical standpoint people may adopt nowadays, from every point of view the *erroneousness* of the world in which we think we live is the most certain and firmest thing which our eyes are still capable of apprehending.”

- Friedrich Nietzsche

2. Marx, Economy and Ideology

*The Relevance of Marx*

In any consideration of modern cultural commodities, the nature of production, consumption and the structures and processes by which capital operates must be considered, as must its effects in terms of society, culture and political or economic influence. This mode of understanding the functioning of systems and the division of labor is one that was pioneered by Karl Marx, and for this reason, among others, my starting point is the work of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in the 19th century; not simply because their analysis of industrial capitalism remains accepted as one of the most influential critical depictions of this mode of economy, but also because of their commitment to historical and materialist dialectic, which I think lends itself to a more objective understanding of the mechanisms of capital and society in general than many other approaches. Marx was a prolific thinker in philosophy and economics, and wrote extensively on the dynamics, structures and conditions of industrial capitalism. Even though communism and socialism may seem a distant utopian dream (or nightmare) in

---

our world, his outline of the trajectory of economic history and the development of
capitalism, as well as his criticism of the system, are still a valuable source for those who
want to better understand our political condition. Despite the tortuous complexity and
rigor of his writing, Marx is an invaluable resource in terms of thinking about how to
approach theory as derived practice rather than outside of it. His economic criticisms are
particularly compelling because they are grounded in historical and scientific
observation, yet offer the possibility of divergent interpretations and applications.
Moreover, his understanding of ideology and culture is one that has been interpreted in
various ways and led to many different understandings of the relationship between
political economy and culture. Marx's analysis, critique and predictions about the growth
of capitalism have frequently been hailed as prescient, and by returning to his work and
different interpretations of it in the context of capitalism today, it is possible to see the
links between culture, politics and capitalism from their conceptual roots and work
towards understanding these links better.

Following Hegel in seeing history as dialectic, Marx inverts the traditional mode
of philosophic investigation, based on materialism, and the assertion that "Life is not
shaped by consciousness, but consciousness by life."⁴ Marx believes that capitalism is an
inevitable result of prior economic formations, since the "development of the productive
forces of social labor is the historical task and justification of capital"⁵. Capitalism is the
result of the self-development of humanity, founded upon the historical convergence of
the establishment of private property rights and the free availability of wage labor, factors
which themselves arise as a result of various 'stages' i.e. different pre-capitalist economic

⁴ Marx, *The German Ideology*, 1847, pp. 155 in *The Marx-Engels Reader*
⁵ Marx, *Capital*, 1864, pp. 259
formations. Understood as such, the economic system within a state or community is the
determining condition for social class and politics. For Marx, the capital-labor
relationship of production forms the basis of bourgeois society, and is complemented by
the institutional and ideological mechanisms that ensure its continuation. Having posited
this understanding of the development of capitalism, Marx (with Engels) offers a detailed
critique of what he sees as the oppressive nature of this mode of production. Basically,
Marx argues that the accumulation of wealth by capital and the exploitative and
alienating nature of wage-labor would inevitably lead to a rift between social classes. In
Capital, his four volume magnum opus, he lays out in exhaustive detail the logic and
process at the heart of capitalism; discussing value, ownership, labor, and the functioning
of capital, his claim is that the fetishization of goods and ideas, as well as the antagonism
between working class and private property will ultimately lead to the downfall of
capitalism at the hands of the proletariat. Understanding man’s nature as ‘a free conscious
producer’, the condemnation of wage labor is based not upon magnitude of wage but the
dehumanizing nature of this type of labor, which inherently limits creativity and need for
diversity in favour of efficiency and productivity. As Marx says, “constant labour of one
uniform kind disturbs the intensity and flow of a man’s animal spirits, which find
recreation and delight in mere change of activity.”\(^6\) Ultimately, the tendency of capital to
alienate and disaffect the very labor it is reliant upon will lead to a working class that is
“conscious of itself as a dehumanization and hence abolishes itself.”\(^7\) Socialism, which
Marx saw as the inevitable ending point of historical economic formations, would
consequently be established and allow for the universal self-realization of man.

\(^6\) Ibid, pp. 414
\(^7\) Ibid, pp. 124.
There is indubitably an idealism to Marx’s vision of the future and a simplicity to his idea of what comes after capitalism that is apparent with the benefit of hindsight, but in terms of analysing and understanding the workings and effects of capital itself, he has few peers. I would argue that Marx’s political philosophy by and large can be understood through three major themes — his theoretical framework explaining historical materialism and the stages of development in ‘the history of production’; his critical writing on political economy, the nature of capitalism and its effects; and his conception of the downfall of capitalism and the inevitable socialist revolution. Given the expansion and metamorphosis of capitalism and the failure of modern communist and socialist experiments, the idea of revolution is impractical, even virtually impossible given political dynamics; similarly, any understanding of historical and economic developments in societies that culminate in capitalism, which serve as the basis of Marx’s understanding of and approach to the present order, can be seen as providing the framework for his critique. Thus, I believe it is his critical work on political economy and the character of capital that holds the most relevance with relation to modern capitalism and culture. Culture or ideology is frequently depicted in modern Marxism as the sphere that can explain the absence of a revolution despite the undeniably competitive and marginalising nature of many contemporary capitalist societies. From this perspective, the question I am interested in investigating surround how we understand culture and ideology in modern capitalism, and how different theorists have understood questions of capitalist labour and subjectivity.
Marx on Capitalist Production and Culture

Marx rarely speaks of culture as we understand it today, he refers extensively to the ideological apparatus within society that contributes to the domination of working class consciousness. Though he uses the concept of ideology extensively in his work, Marx does not clearly define it except as a product of the ruling class, tied to morality, ethics and civil society. The belief that socioeconomic activity provides the base upon which all other activity is predicated is central to Marx’s dialectic, and his radical assertion is that the history of production is a manifestation of ruling class domination. For Marx, what we would understand as culture is thus derived from material conditions, not organically developed, as it may appear: “Morality, religion, metaphysics, all the rest of ideology and their corresponding forms of consciousness, thus no longer retain the semblance of independence. They have no history, no development; but men...their real existence, their thinking and the products of their thinking.”

Contending that the dominant class in any society “rule also as thinkers, as producers of ideas, and regulate the production and distribution of the ideas of their age”, Marx thus explains the manner in which the mode of production within a society contributes to its ideological and institutional ‘superstructure’. It would appear that Marx conceives of the prevailing attitudes, values and norms in society as a consequence or effect of capitalist production, ultimately serving its ends and legitimizing a system that continues to dominate the working class. Such an understanding of culture rests upon his privileging

---

8 In *Anti-Duhring*, Engels discusses the idea of morality in the context of ideology, as class interest, and makes the claim that all morality is class morality, historically and economically derived, and subject to the interests of the ruling class. ‘True ethics’ for both Marx and Engels appears to require societal equality, and can only be actualized in Communism. In this aspect they critique morality in the same manner as Nietzsche, but from the basis of class difference rather than a genealogy.
10 Ibid, pp. 19.
of class within the political dynamic and his commitment to materialism. The production and distribution of ideas within a society is concentrated amongst the owners of the means of production, these ideas thus receive more prominence and dominate the subordinated group, and this perpetuates the cycle of class warfare since these ideas ensure the continued subservience of the group.

Religion is a frequent target of Marx's thought, and interestingly parallels this relation of dominance through ideology. Marx sees capitalism as positive in that it frequently invalidates the superstitions and myths that uphold religious dominance, yet he sees capitalism as simply replacing the object of fetishism (‘God’) with another one (money or the commodity) rather than dispelling the fetishism itself. Looking at economic systems that preceded capitalism, he argues that the faith in a deity commanded by religion indoctrinates slave labour and hence ensures the continued dominance of the aristocratic class, who are tied to the clergy and justify their regime by means of divine ordinance. Moreover, projecting an idealized conception of humanity onto ‘God’, Marx argues, leads to religious alienation and dehumanization, by depicting as hateful and sinful essential aspects of earthly reality and subordinating individuals to a fictitious set of moral criteria that serves class interests.

Just as "in religion, man is governed by the products of his own brain, so in capitalistic production, he is governed by the products of his own hand"¹¹, alienated from his material reality by the dominant ideology, aligned to the reproduction of class inequalities, and imbued with a false consciousness. What is the nature of this false consciousness, and how does it work? The inseparability of capital from the

---

¹¹ Marx, Capital, 1864, pp. 148.
'estrangement' of wage labor is, for Marx, the basis of capitalism's dehumanization of the worker, as the laborer serves the role of a cog within a machine rather than a free and conscious individual, thus becoming alienated from himself. This assertion is justified by Marx as based upon the very nature of relations of production, which are characterized by "a dual character, that in the self-same relations in which wealth is produced, poverty is produced also; in the self-same relations in which there is a development of the productive forces, there is also a force producing repression."\(^{12}\) The wealth that capital generates is derived from the 'surplus value' of labour — this is why, for Marx, the capital-labour relation is inherently exploitative and negative. Labor is subject to the material and ideological domination of the ruling class until it develops class-consciousness, raising the question of what brings labor to this point and what factors determine the emergence of class consciousness. The question of how ideology works to ensure the continuation of the prevailing order is also the question of nature of the relations of production.

This is why dynamics of the relationship between base and superstructure, or political economy and culture/ideology, have been a central concern of many modern theorists attempting to apply Marxist ideas within the rapidly changing systems of the global political order. Even so, it would be simplistic to paint Marx as an economic determinist, considering both his critique of viewing the economy in isolation as affecting other sectors of society and the society from which he was writing. In *The German Ideology* as well as in *Capital*, he discusses at length the ways in which ideology is based on historical and productive forces, as well as upon social relations; "Men are the

\(^{12}\) Marx, *Principles of Communism*, 1847, pp. 176 in *The Marx-Engels Reader*
producers of their conceptions, ideas, etc. – real, active men, as they are conditioned by a
definite development of their productive forces and of the intercourse corresponding to
these”13. Marx’s understanding of the relation between economic production and
ideology is far more complex than straightforward determinism, as his explanation of the
capital-labor and production-consumption relations indicates. For him, the ‘two-fold’
natural and social nature of production is the means by which “production produces
consumption (1) by creating the material for it; (2) by determining the manner of
consumption; (3) by creating the products, initially posited by it as objects, in the form of
a need felt by the consumer.”14 At the level of production, ideology is linked to the way
in which a society evolves and creates the conditions that make the division of labor
possible. At the level of the product, the fetishism of the commodity form is related to the
surplus value of labor and the opposition between individual and social needs, again tied
with the development of production and ideology. At the level of consumption, it is the
social nature of production that allows consumption to appear productive, and “as
urgency, as need.”15 Thus, in looking at the relationship between ideology, culture and
political economy, what needs to be considered most comprehensively is the emergence
and nature of existing relations of production and consumption, the historical and
ideological development of labor and the forces underlying and configuring production.

One of the most fascinating aspects of Marx’s writings is the tension between his
harsh critical disillusion with capitalism and the regard in which he holds its systemic
domination; claiming that it is a form of organization emergent from many centuries of
human development and technological progress, he certainly recognizes the ways in

13 Marx, The German Ideology, 1847, pp. 154. In from The Marx-Engels Reader
15 Ibid, pp. 231.
which capitalist logic is tied to activity, change, the only constant of society. In a famous passage from *The Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels claim that the "constant revolutionizing of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all previous ones. All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient prejudices and opinions are swept away, all newly formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face, with sober senses, his real conditions of life and his relations with his kind."\(^{16}\) In a sense, Marx’s great achievement was recognizing and challenging the power of capitalism, and recognizing its capacity for global production, acceleration and subjection. Despite this, it seems likely that even he would be surprised by the scale and rapidity of its growth since the Second World War and consequent acceleration after the events of 1989. Given the benefit of historical perspective (a benefit that Marx utilized more than any of his philosophical predecessors?), thinkers in the contemporary era have proposed a variety of readings of Marx’s thought. Looking briefly at the ways in which some of these interpretations have categorized and challenged Marx’s view of production, ideology and class, as well as the way they relate Marx to the contemporary world, the variety of perspectives surrounding Marx frequently illuminates what is otherwise concealed, provoking new questions and raising new ideas.

Before examining responses to Marx, it is relevant to point out the magnitude of cultural change in terms of forms of media and human interaction; our understanding of culture itself is today based upon a number of largely capitalist phenomena and ‘cutting-edge’ technologies, and the past century has no recorded equivalent in human history.

Consumer goods, popular media, digital evolution – all of these phenomena are unique in terms of the way in which they have transversed various spheres of interactions and their sheer speed. At the same time, capitalism is not fixed but always reinventing itself and creating new fields of industry and methods of expansion. The shift from primarily industrial ‘factory’ capitalism that Marx wrote of towards new forms that privilege intellectual labor and innovation, as well as the emergence of the digital and the global, constitute a relative inversion in the way we understand the relationship of capital-labor; nonetheless, the repression of labor through the extraction of surplus value continues in new ways, systemically and individually. Increasingly the economic, cultural and political cannot be separated from capitalist production, consumption and ‘rationality’. In terms of culture, what I want to examine in particular is the position and functioning of ideology – it’s shifting manifestations as related to production, consumption and consciousness, and its capacities and limits within the capitalist framework.

**Ideology, Consciousness and Subjects**

Why was there no socialist revolution despite capitalist domination? How are the relations of capitalist production maintained although there is certainly alienation? This is the question that Italian political activist and thinker Antonio Gramsci attempted to engage with in Marx, based on his communist activity and imprisonment in early 20th century Italy. Gramsci understands Marxism as a theory focused on the emancipation of the working class, but rejects Marx’s apparent economic determinism. Gramsci argues that Marx does not take into account the nature of the class struggle, and rejects the
materialist view of the historical class struggle. Instead, Gramsci advocates a kind of absolute historicism in understanding class, arguing that Marx’s dialectic fails to grasp the fluidity and heterogeneity of social formations. Marx implies that a revolutionary consciousness will organically and simply develop from the objectively oppressive and unequal conditions of working life. The fact that economic crises do not necessarily lead to political and ideological crises of the working class is a counterpoint to the claim that the material sphere be seen as determining social conditions. Marx’s economism essentializes the complexity of society, which cannot be separated into an infrastructure and superstructure.

The class struggle is not only economic, or industrial, it is political and cultural – this idea informs Gramsci’s concept of hegemony, which he sees as a means of control that capitalist societies have over their members. Capitalism is maintained not just through political and economic coercion, but also at the level of ideology, through a hegemonic culture by which bourgeoisie values come to be seen as normal or societal values. It is not a system just of domination, but also one of ideological consent – hegemony relies on ‘consented’ coercion, Gramsci says, working because the groups given concessions are those which do not threaten the framework of dominance. For Gramsci, culture is “the exercise of thought, acquisition of general ideas, habit of connecting causes and effects”\(^{17}\) on a social scale, and hegemony describes the way culture is controlled institutionally and shaped by the mechanisms of civil society in the image of the bourgeois. The ownership or control of spheres of education, family, religion, mass media and popular culture rests with the dominant group, who

\(^{17}\) Gramsci, Antonio. *Selected Writings*, pp.23.
consequently can shape or at least manipulate people’s attitudes and perceptions, thus maintaining their dominance as consented or legitimate.

Culture here is seen as both political and produced, not just in terms of the way it follows the principles and mechanisms of capitalist organization, but also through its tendency to be a social aggregate of beliefs and ideas, inherently tied with political economy and individual consciousness. Hegemony as the phenomenon of ideological acculturation across social classes? Who determines the values and perceptions of ideology? Gramsci says that it is intellectuals who must create an autonomous culture of the working class, just as it is bourgeois individuals who largely control the production of dominant and popular culture? But how can this happen? For Gramsci, the class struggle rests upon counter-hegemony – the constant struggle at the level of consciousness, to change individual beliefs and destroy ‘false consciousness’. Shifting the dominant hegemonic values, beliefs and modes of interaction is the central goal of politics in Gramsci’s thought; “the class struggle is not linear”, but a constant part of civil society, a ‘war of position’, a question of creating revolutionary consciousness – ‘the passive revolution’. Just as capitalism only came about through a series of historical progressions, the socialist consciousness must emerge before actual conditions for change can be realized.

Gramsci’s concepts of hegemony and the everyday nature of the political are commonly used in political and cultural analysis in different capacities. His direction from which to approach Marx’s thought has been applied in terms of the theory of American hegemony in the political sphere – the idea that ‘soft power’ in the form of mass produced consumer goods, the internationalization of American/western media, and
the market dominance of primarily American corporations is the basis of American political dominance; the political and economic coercion (wars in the Middle-East, virtual control over institutional law, trade and sanctions) of the American hegemon is legitimized by and inseparable from the ideological grip which it holds over power, and influences civil society through (by means of international institutions, corporations, mass media, etc.) This is a compelling view to turn to, because of the ways in which production and consumption are tied to the state’s creation of the possibilities and conditions of production using coercion legitimized through the language of democracy, as well as to the ideological function of a dominant and engineered culture. Even so, such a theory creates a false national unity of ‘America’ rather than looking to the actions, networks and ultimately, individuals that actually comprise and perpetrate ‘dehumanizing practices’. The ‘global American hegemony’ claim, as well as the idea of cultural hegemony generally, presuppose the consciousness, coherence and agency of classes and social groups. Moreover, such a claim usually ties culture to American political and economic dominance at the level of international relations rather than at the level of individual consciousness.

Gramsci’s proposed mode of combating hegemony, the generation of an autonomous working-class culture and ideology, is also problematic in that it automatically places the dominant ideology as other; moreover, any new ideology will draw its inspiration and audience from the very field that has been socialized in the ways of the dominant as normal. The global age and the fragmentation of identity and consciousness are much more complex and raise immediate areas of inquiry – the problem of how to consider class and consciousness across/beyond national borders,
whether class is still a central determinant to identity as Marx and Gramsci understand it, the particular mechanisms by which culture and ideology change and are produced, and how they work – the difference between the capitalism Marx and even Gramsci wrote of and today’s global system of “post-modern hyperreality” seems insurmountable. Despite this, the ideas, modes of analysis and theoretical bases they offer are hugely relevant to the current context precisely because of how thoroughly Marx engaged with the workings and logic of economy and capital; what he lacked, for Gramsci and many other subsequent critics, though, was an equally convincing understanding of ideology and cultural relations.

This was a problem that Althusser attempted to analyze by structurally interpreting Marxism as a science, arguing that the reproduction of capitalist production requires a reproduction of the existing conditions of production as well as the reproduction of the conditions involved in socializing individuals towards fulfilling particular roles. For Althusser, it is impossible to access the "real conditions of existence" due to our reliance on language; however, through a rigorous “scientific" approach to society, economics, and Marx, we can come close to perceiving if not those "real conditions" at least the ways that we are inscribed by complex processes of recognition as part of the social, and thus ideologically constructed. He argues that in Marx’s work, ideology is akin to an imaginary afterthought, a ‘dream’ that follows as a

---

18 Althusser engages with Marx in great depth, attempting an anti-essentialist and structural reading, and arguing that Marx's work represented a fundamental shift in terms of thinking about knowledge as produced rather than discovered or apparent. Marx's *Capital* has greater explanatory power than does political economy because it provides both a model of the economy and a description of the structure and development of a whole society. In Althusser's view, Marx does not simply argue that human needs are largely created by their social environment and thus vary with time and place; rather, he abandons the very idea that there can be a theory about what people are like that is prior to any theory about how they come to be that way i.e. consciousness shaped by society.
result of ‘the day’s residues’ rather than related to the real world we construct around us and our position in it. Adapting Marx’s historical materialism using his ‘scientific method’, Althusser puts forth a theory of ideology “interpellating individuals as subjects”\(^{19}\) within a social order.

Ideology has its own ‘relatively autonomous’ effects that are generated by institutions of society (particularly education) all working in the service of the mode of production to the end of social reproduction—we are integrated as capitalist subjects through ideology. Our mode of life is defined by institutional subjectification, the functioning of the ‘ideological state apparatus’ that Althusser sees as the political complement to capitalist relations of production. Put differently, it is our performance of our relation to others and to social institutions that continually instantiates us as subjects. Ideology is already manifest in types of relations and institutions, and organizes behaviour by defining the conventional. While the nature of different ideologies may differ, Althusser argues that in general, “ideology has no history”\(^{20}\), which is to say that is a permanent structure of society, a particular function that is “as such an organic part of every social totality.”\(^{21}\) While this theory is compelling in appealing to the ways in which (and degree to which) interactions with social structures of power affect subjectivity and subjectification, it is lacking in that it does not allow for ideology to serve any other function than social reproduction, essentially arguing against agency in classes or social

\(^{19}\) Althusser, Lenin & Philosophy, 1971. Although he presents his example of interpellation in a temporal form (I am interpellated and thus I become a subject, I enter ideology), Althusser makes it clear that the "becoming-subject" happens even before we are born. As Althusser puts it, "the individual is interpellated as a [free] subject in order that he shall submit freely to the commandments of the Subject, i.e. in order that he shall (freely) accept his subjection, i.e. in order that he shall make the gestures and actions of his subjection 'all by himself'". (pp. 123)

\(^{20}\) Ibid, pp. 150

\(^{21}\) Althusser, For Marx, pp. 232.
groups attempting to alter and undermine institutions. Althusser takes to the limit one of Marx’s most important assertions – every mode of production is linked with a mode of subjection and more broadly, a mode of life, yet he does not accept Marx’s belief in the importance of class struggle, instead understanding the working class as a dominated subject generated for and by the interests of the ruling class. Ideology serves the role of reproducing the social conditions that enable and aid production, and thus culture comes to be understood as a production of ruling class values which is ensured by state institutions and political organization. What this analysis points to in particular is the complex relation between political organization, social structures, and cultural belief – these phenomena cannot be seen as causing each other or dependent but inter-related and productive.

Althusser attributes this to Marx himself, since he does not see Marx as an economic determinist because as much as he criticises the idea that a social theory can be founded on an historical conception of human needs, Marx equally critiques the idea that economic practice can be used in isolation to explain other aspects of society. Pointing to Marx’s claim of determination of the base ‘in the last instance’, Althusser presents economic and ideological as interdependent entities that are comprised of various social ‘levels and practices’. Unlike Gramsci, who rejects Marx’s theory of economic determinism to argue that dominant groups rule through hegemony, Althusser alters it on the basis of ideology and institutions being inseparable from the process of economy in that they reproduce the conditions of production. Both Althusser and Gramsci engage with Marx’s apparent failure to account for the importance and integrated nature of

---

22 Althusser does not explicitly understand it as ruling class domination but more accurately as a historical, economic and ideological subjectification of labor into a social structure.
ideology and culture, but come up with very different understandings of how ideology works within the socio-economic space. But these readings converge in that they point to the ideological nature of production itself, as well as the importance of consciousness, subjectivity and social groups and structures in the development of this form of production. Both of them adapt Marx’s understanding of base-superstructure to their own ends, but as process rather than object, and as a struggle at the level of subject, consciousness and language rather than in terms of mobilization and revolution. Political struggle is located within the realm of civil society as well as the state, and ideology and class-consciousness are seen as ongoing, in terms of structures and group dynamics within the social.

Adorno, Marcuse and Commodification

While Gramsci and Althusser provide the basis for looking at political economy through the lens of ideology, they primarily remain content with understanding the position and production of ideology, its role in society and political economy. In terms of understanding culture based on its content and manifestations rather than its relation to other dimensions of society, many thinkers of the Frankfurt school have adopted a Marxist approach in looking at modern society and in particular, consumer and mass culture. Their conception of these processes generally consists of critical analysis of particular social phenomena, although it would be unfair to paint the diversity of thinkers within the Frankfurt School as homogenous. In particular, I believe that the ideas of Adorno and Marcuse are relevant to the discussion and situation of the cultural within the socio-political, and contribute to the historical progression of cultural critiques of
capitalist economy. It would not be unfair to say that to some degree or another, most thinkers of the Frankfurt School agree with the assertion that ‘culture has become a discourse of economics’ in modern society.

Adorno takes this idea furthest in his negative dialectic, arguing against identity thinking, based on the commodification and domination of ideology, primarily through mass culture and entertainment. Adopting a critically rational viewpoint in which society is a totality that determines individuals by their mediation in it, he says that individuals do not choose ideology; instead, it is organically imbued into them by the conditions and experiences of the society that they are born into. While following the same line of thought as Althusser did in seeing ideology as closely related to self-consciousness and identity, the focus of Adorno’s critique is the various forms of mass and commodity culture, and particularly forms of entertainment such as music. Seeing modes of economy being related to identity and domination, Adorno argues that the same ideals of instrumental rationality and mechanical forces are suffused into cultural commodities – individuals serve as objects within a system of historical, social and political making, and the advancement of capitalism subjects identities to the needs of its reproduction rather than any genuine culture or freedom. Adorno focuses on cultural regression under late capitalism, but does not adopt a Marxist viewpoint or refer in detail to ideology and class. Marxist theory perpetuates, for Adorno, the myth that there is a rational logic to the progression of history, and that the forces for emancipation lie within this society.

It is naïve to unify and integrate history into a narrative of progress and freedom. Moreover, it is untrue to the materialism which Marx is committed to, since it is subject to the illusory belief “that capitalist forces of production, when unfettered from capitalist
relations of production will generate a free society.” Adorno uses the commodification of culture as an example of capitalism's tendency toward integration and domination rather than freedom. Specific commodities become part of the instrumentalized reason of the market — there is no interpretive role involved in the consumption of culture beyond the consumption itself. The culture industry is a manifestation of the commodity fetishism seen in Marx, an endless repetition of the same commodified form which creates identities that are subject to consumption rather than creation or freedom. Since commodity exchange has become the central organizing principle for all sectors of society, it permeates all social institutions (e.g., law, administration, media) as well as academic disciplines and political decisions.

"Reification" refers to "the structural process whereby the commodity form permeates life in capitalist society. With its emphasis on marketability, the culture industry dispenses entirely with the "purposelessness" that was central to art's autonomy. Once marketability becomes a total demand, the internal economic structure of cultural commodities shifts, and instead of promising freedom from societally dictated uses, and thereby having a genuine 'use value' that people can enjoy, products mediated by the culture industry have their use value replaced by exchange value; "Everything has value only in so far as it can be exchanged, not in so far as it is something in itself. For consumers the use value of art, its essence, is a fetish, and the fetish—the social valuation [gesellschaftliche Schätzung] which they mistake for the merit [Rang] of works of art—becomes its only use value, the only quality they enjoy." Hence the culture industry dissolves any "genuine commodity character" that Adorno sees as a basic requirement of

24 Ibid, pp. 124.
art and culture in general. This uncompromising point of view “has served for the proponents of postmodernism as a negative image against which their claims for a democratic transformation of culture may be secured.” Many of Adorno’s modern critics argue that this point of view is elitist and critical to the point of excluding any emancipatory potential within mass culture. Gramsci, for example, would see his vision of authentic culture as exclusive and bourgeois, but nonetheless, would agree with Adorno’s analysis of the way capitalism is linked with reification and instrumentalization.

While the critique of Adorno as nostalgically projecting authenticity onto tradition and past modes of high art has some validity, in economic terms, many seem to miss the main point to his critique of the culture industry. His central argument is that cultural-industrial hypercommercialization evidences a fateful shift in the structure of all commodities and therefore in the structure of capitalism itself. The way in which the ‘spirit’ of capitalism permeates beyond the workplace and the market and becomes a determinant of culture, thus excluding any alternative mode of engagement with the political and economic system through culture. It is not necessary to accept Adorno’s understanding of high art as a ‘free’ form of culture to see that his depiction of culture within late capitalism as a totalizing industrial force holds much merit. Seeing culture as an industry that simply serves the ends of economy through the mediation of false consciousness and identity thinking, much of today’s consumer culture seems hollow and regressive. Adorno does not see popular culture as tricking or manipulating people directly, but rather as ‘cement’ that reconciles them to their social dependence by

25 ibid, pp. 11.
mirroring the patterns of and appealing to those qualities which the nature of capitalist labor habituates them to. “It is catharsis for the masses, but catharsis that keeps them all the more firmly in line.”

Modern cultural theorists like Raymond Williams and Fredric Jameson, following this critical line of thought, depict racial, ethnic and sexual norms as determined and manipulated according to the needs of the market by normative messaging and homogenous representations in mainstream film, television and music. Culture is understood as first and foremost a sphere of economic activity, shorn of authenticity and inherently working towards capitalist totalization. This very totalization takes the form of ‘free choice’ despite being ideologically supplanted and evolved within a society, and leads to a closing of political and cultural engagement. For another Marxist perspective on the cultural critique that Adorno presents, Herbert Marcuse, a critical political theorist with ties to the Frankfurt School, can speak to the question of class difference and culture with regards to late capitalism.

Writing on the evolution of capitalism a few years after Adorno (mid-late 20th century), Marcuse argued that the organization of society in late capitalist and state communist societies produced "surplus repression" by imposing socially unnecessary labor, unnecessary restrictions on sexuality, and a social system organized around profit and oppressive relations. For Marcuse, ideology was not imposed directly but systemically and societally, through the ways that "means of mass transportation and communications, the commodities of lodging, food, and clothing, the irresistible output

---

26 Adorno & Horkheimer, _Dialectic of Enlightenment_, pp. 313

27 Following the dialectic of regression in late capitalism, Jameson argues that culture serves the ends of shaping individual ideology in terms of positioning subjects as consumers and foreclosing the genuine possibility of political opposition.
of the entertainment and information industry carry with them prescribed attitudes and
habits, certain intellectual and emotional reactions which bind the consumers more or less
pleasantly to the producers and, through the latter, to the whole.28 Whilst not renouncing
the concept of ideology as false consciousness, he places much more emphasis on
ideology as a context of lived experience and inseparable from cultural processes and the
production of reality.

Theorizing that the decline of revolutionary potential in capitalist societies was
tied to the development of new forms of social control through democracy and culture,
Marcuse argued that "advanced industrial society" created false needs which integrated
individuals into the existing system of production and consumption; Mass media and
culture, advertising, industrial management, and contemporary modes of thought all
reproduce the existing system and attempt to eliminate negativity, critique, and
opposition. The result is a "one-dimensional" universe of thought and behavior in which
the very aptitude and ability for critical thinking and oppositional behavior fades away in
favor of the instrumental reason of the market. Updating Marx's understanding of class
relations in terms of modern media and society, Marcuse argues that the working class is
seduced by images to fetishize commodities as extensions of themselves. But what is new
about Marcuse's understanding is the role that the seduction of the image plays in terms
of mediating identity and causing the working class to understand themselves as objects.
Connecting culture and commodity fetishism to identity and the political and economic
realm, he attempts to show how this creates a domination of the working class through
alienation and control of the 'norm' – "the absorbent power of society depletes the artistic

dimension by assimilating its antagonistic content. In the realm of culture, the new totalitarianism manifests itself precisely in a harmonizing pluralism, where the most contradictory works and truths peacefully coexist in indifference.29

What Marcuse touches upon is the ways in which alienation becomes incorporated into identity, and a saleable part of art, literature or culture, deprived of its revolutionary potential by the system in which it is created, since alienation mediated through technology and culture is a part of the structure of contemporary society rather than something that can be rejected within it. As art and forms of culture become commodified, their subversive and critical power is nullified, essentially reducing them to "commercials – they sell, comfort, or excite."30 Traditionally culture has had transcendental goals that anticipated the possibility of freedom or alternatives, but technological (and even more so digital) civilization tends to destroy these goals of culture because of the manner in which culture is integrated within and tied to economic production. This results in an assimilation of labor and relaxation, failing and enjoyment, art and household, psychology and management. So culture becomes affirmative, in that it eliminates negativity and opposition – Marcuse points to in particular the ways that capitalist integration alienates the individual through 'cultural imperialism', the control of forms of technology and media that are crucial to the shaping of identity and interpretation of the political. Societies of repressive tolerance, voluntary mass control and surveillance that place value upon life as an aggregate and alienate individuals have become dominant – societies that nullify opposition by cultural homogenization and the narrowing of the autonomous and critical voice within other spheres of life.

29 Ibid, pp. 64.
In contemporary society, the ways in which identity, norms and relations are portrayed via mass culture certainly seem to reflect particular elements of Marcuse and Adorno's criticisms. In consumer culture, you express yourself intelligibly only through your consumption, through your purchases; your identity is tied up in the products you buy; your very self is merely another "package" on display. Not excellence, but the appearance of excellence counts. What you watch, read and listen to are no longer evaluated on the basis of their content but rather in relation to culture and the media. The goal of life is to become an image, a shadow self — to be seen a certain way, but never to see things differently. Marcuse paid particular attention to new forms of culture and the ways that culture provided both instruments of manipulation and liberation. The proliferation of new media technologies and cultural forms in the past two decades also demands a new perspective to capture their potential and nature with regard to production, culture and politics.

Particularly interesting is the nature of new media in which images, ideas and beliefs can become commodities just as easily as physical products might, and the ways in which this affects the consciousness of labor. Similarly, how can we understand class in the context of the economic homogenization of culture? The politics of identity formation, of the changes, intended and unintended, in culture, ideology, and our relations to the conditions of production and existence become central, and the commercial and cultural are inherently a sphere of political contestation. The individual's view of self is not materially determined, but mediated by culture, ideology, social relations, and various forms of interaction, shaped to ensure the continuation of the existing political, financial and social order. Marx's belief in the transformative power of
class solidarity is evidence of his inherent presupposition that critical and real interactions with fellow workers and community members are the primary determinant in the shaping of political identity and self-awareness. In a society where an individual’s primary source of interaction is no longer the social but just as conceivably derived from technology, media and culture without any grounding in the local, the materiality and relationships upon which community is founded can no longer be presupposed, and are continually eroded and transformed.

Consciousness, Alienation and Transformation

A society of mass alienation in which our very identities are commodified as soon as we become part of the social may appear a starkly negative view, yet, following the rise of German fascism and the failure of communist experiments, Adorno and Marcuse were disillusioned with the revolutionary capacity of the working class, and instead understood it as the subject of economic, technological and cultural domination. But while Adorno more or less forecloses the possibility of emancipatory change, arguing that since consciousness within advanced industrial society was always a false and mediated consciousness, there would need to be a major systemic shift for any authentic forms of cultural or political engagement. Marcuse, on the other hand, is much less certain, instead stating in One Dimensional Man that he would “vacillate throughout between two contradictory hypotheses: (1) that advanced industrial society is capable of containing qualitative change for the foreseeable future; (2) that forces and tendencies exist which may break this containment and explode the society.”31 While Marcuse does

not ever affirm one of these points of view, this understanding of the ‘poles’ of future possibility as thesis and anti-thesis recalls Marx’s understanding of class struggle as the dialectic of history, with socialism being the synthesis arising from their contradiction. Marcuse does not offer a particular synthesis for these oppositions, but he frequently uses the categories of technology and culture to stress their potentially liberating aspects within repressive post-Industrial society. Repression and exploitation by image, by history, by subjectification — this is where Marx fell short — in terms of understanding the degree to which state and market power coupled with the ‘false consciousness’ of the subject would engineer societies of control and alienation.

In drawing from and criticizing different aspects of Marx’s understanding of ideology in political economy and society, Gramsci, Althusser, Adorno and Marcuse all present different ways to understand the production, distribution and functioning of ideology with relation to society, the state and the capitalist economy. Engaging with Marx from different positions, what must be emphasized that any modern understanding of ideology, base and superstructure must understand these entities in terms of “the specific activities of men in real, social and economic relationships, containing fundamental contradictions and variations, and, therefore, always in a state of dynamic process.” But at the same time, their interpretations of Marxism feel limited in some way to theory and abstraction in that they adopt the same categories of analysis, using

---

32 Marcuse, *Counter Revolution and Revolt*, 1972. For Marcuse, culture, democracy and technology all possess different types of emancipatory and revolutionary potential — culture in that it invokes a transcendent freedom or alternative vision as an imagined possibility, democracy in terms of collective social action and organization, and technology has the capacity to be used in a revolutionary and non-totalitarian manner. However, he by and large considers this potential to be as yet unrealized and in fact, moving further away within the current organization of capitalist, post-industrial society.

concepts like ideology, modes of production, class and commodities whose meanings and implications have no doubt been radically altered by the course of history and economy.

At some level, these readings indicate that Marx's understanding of the class struggle, dialectic, history and commodity fetishism as acting upon material relations in society can only be understood, today, at the level of individual consciousness and relations to the economic. Maybe it is the immediacy of the horrors of the 20th century, their material and ideological scars, that render societies of control, domination and repression more bearable than those of chaos, conflict, transition, but the possibility of mass revolution seems theoretically distant, because of the ways in which capitalism impacts the patterns and prejudices of society, culture and consciousness, as well as because of the faceless global nature of its bourgeoisie and its perpetrators.

Despite the many diverse frameworks that the 20th century thinkers provide in terms of understanding Marx, ideology, societal organization and the nature of individual consciousness, they fall short in terms of sufficiently explaining or providing alternatives to the totalizing nature of capital and production. By and large, they can provide no practical politics that works toward effectively shifting and resisting cultural and ideological control: Althusser and Adorno more or less abandon this possibility in favor of negation/anti-humanism, whilst both Gramsci and Marcuse are at best limited in terms of the ways in which they see theory as relating to practice and the possibilities of resistance, even at the level of individual consciousness. Not only is a revolution blocked by the current mode of social production, but also by the historical weight of its uncertainty, its ultimate idealism.
Capital does not only mediate the economic, but also the behavioural, the
personal, the institutional, but social relations and what appears as natural. If there is a
bleakness to this perspective on production and culture, it is reflected by the real and
apparent manifestations, functions and relations of capital in the contemporary age. The
processes and networks of global production and consumption are not distinct from but
tied to domination, exploitation and repression when seen in terms of the individual, local
and global effects of capitalist production. Not just the ecological crisis, the financial
crisis, the failure and misdirection of politics, but also the crisis of the family, of identity,
the death of authenticity, the repression of the self. Critiques of the global North-South
divide and exploitative conditions of neoliberal development in third-world countries are
widespread, but the accumulative powers of capital, the exploitation of labor, the
reification of culture and identity, the fragmentation and alienation of society are still
unavoidable realities, in terms of their material (Third-world?) and psychological
(ideological?) consequences. The child soldier, the radical terrorist, the drug dealer, the
marginalized minority — all of these cannot be seen as separate from (or wholly caused
by) the global system of material and ideological production — it is “only the violence we
can see, the tip of the iceberg”\(^3^4\). Even more pertinent is the theoretical shifts linked with
this amorphous global system of production in terms of the acceleration, diffusion and
dynamics of capitalism and its nature and structures. The already ambiguous questions of
how class and consciousness are determined at the level of the individual, and how
identity and subjectivity are tied to ideology/materiality become globalized, magnified,
进一步 complicated and altered.

\(^{3^4}\) Zizek, Slavoj. *Violence*. pp. 14
How, then, can today's capitalism be understood in terms of Marx's categories and critiques? We have many understandings of the ways in which ideology is tied to production and political economy, but little understanding of how to alter our consciousness, to retrace our steps and clarify our positions; few means of acting consciously, authentically – few modes of empowering and resistance that are not influenced, suppressed or absorbed by the market. The task for Marxism in its many varieties is now one of finding new alternatives to the revolution, new modes of struggle, new means of altering oppressive conditions – to challenge categories, create new ones and expose contradictions within post-modern capitalism and culture.

How is this possible? How can we understand culture and is there authentic consciousness or subjectivity within or beyond capitalism? In the next chapter, I plan to engage with the radical ideas of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari to attempt to answer this question, or at least map out the ways in which their thought refers to and conceptualizes these problems, as well as the ways in which it provides a new framework for thinking about culture, capitalism and politics and reimagines the complex vagueness of postmodern global capitalism. Moreover, in expounding their thoughts and putting them in conversation with the debates explored in this chapter, I hope to demonstrate the ways in which their perspectives on questions of politics and consciousness generate new possibilities for thought and action.
"Life on earth maybe will end, but somehow capitalism will go on."

- Slavoj Zizek\textsuperscript{35}

3. Desire, Machines and Production

Deleuze, Language and Politics

What metamorphoses has capitalism undergone since Marx's time, and how can his ideas be used in a contemporary context to illuminate political economy? How can culture and ideology be understood and categorized, and how can theory be applied to practice and related to political and cultural realities? Following the stark and critical positions adopted by Adorno and Marcuse in terms of understanding culture and capitalism, and in particular the controlling and inauthentic nature of industrialized culture, how can we evaluate the ways in which political economy and society are organized by and related to culture? How can these categories be applied or upgraded?

To me, the question of false consciousness and the links between political, economic and cultural are at the heart of the thought of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. Based upon the synthesis of Freud and Marx, unconscious and conscious investments, and the centrality of desire in society, as well as the nature of the social as it exists rather than as it is represented or idealized, they offer a number of interesting ways to think about Marx's understanding of ideology within the capitalist framework, as well as about the nature of capitalism and being. Focusing on the questions of the nature of capitalistic production and the functioning of ideology, culture and commodification within this

\textsuperscript{35} Zizek, Violence, pp. 60
system that were discussed in the previous chapter, I plan to provide a brief introduction
to the concepts that Deleuze uses and the ways in which they reimagine the social as
being tied to desire and production. Starting with an exposition of the concepts and
techniques that he uses, I plan to compare his ideas regarding ideology and the
functioning of capitalism with the interpretations of Marx offered by Althusser, Gramsci,
Adorno and Marcuse. Consequently I argue that a Deleuzian understanding of capitalism
is most useful for the current system of global financial and communicative capital, and
explain why this is the case.

Deleuze does not often speak directly about culture or even politics or economics,
and when he does, it is not in a straightforward manner. His writing style is highly
allusive and complex, and he frequently refers to abstract historical, cultural and
philosophical ideas in diverse and unexpected ways to explain his own positions and
metaphysics. The task of thought, for him, is not to provide definitive answers but rather
to raise new questions and problems, and create new concepts. Rejecting much of
Western thought as bearing the dogmas of representation and negativity or reactivity
(based on dualistic oppositions and images of thought\(^\text{36}\)), he proposes a philosophy of
desire, immanence and multiplicity, where thought is a starting point that creates and
differentiates reality in many ways. One basis of the difficulties that arise in reading
Deleuze relates to the way he incorporates his critique of language into his writing style.
Tracing the ways in which language is linked to the development of consciousness and
social relations, he frequently uses the same terms in different contexts to demarcate

\(^{36}\) Briefly explained, the image of thought is the presupposition of what it means to think that organizes
ideas reactively and posits them as transcendental, based on the privileging of identity over difference.
Such thinking assumes that there is an ordered and differentiated world, which we then dutifully
represent; it does not allow for thought itself to make a difference, and it does not see difference as a
positive and creative power to differentiate rather than a rejection of the Other.
different concepts and relations or types of objects/ formations. He believes it is essential to stretch the limits of language and sense by constantly recontextualizing and questioning existing usage and meaning, subverting the ‘regime of signs’ that mediates social relations. Language, for Deleuze, is about the production of sense rather than the conveying of meaning, and is tied to the nature of content, matter, form and expression. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to go extensively into Deleuze’s philosophical vocabulary, I will explain a few of his concepts – what is particularly interesting is his understanding of capitalism and its relation to society and subjectivity. His theories are linked to and problematize Marxist thought and interpretation; using the language of machines, territories, bodies and social codes, he creates a view of the social that attempts to depict empirically the complexity and multiplicity of material being and phenomena. Combining insights from various academic disciplines in a rigorous manner, what Deleuze’s thought looks to do is expand the possibilities for what politics is concerned with, to affirm the power of thought itself, privileging difference over identity, engagement over self-referential association, and providing a unique approach to conceptualizing and effecting social relations. Within the context of ideology, this is related in particular to how we understand production, desire and machines.

Deleuze (along with Guattari) argues that any productive contemporary politics cannot be considered in terms of established and essentializing categories: politics as

37 In the Althusserian (structuralist) understanding of language, which ties into ideology, difference is what divides, ‘cuts up’ or organises some supposedly pre-linguistic real. The ‘real’ is therefore out of reach, other, lost, lacking. Reality is now constructed, ideology interpellates us as subjects. Against this negative understanding of difference, Deleuze insists that difference is positive. It is not that there is some undifferentiated real that we then differentiate through language. There are real differences and becomings that are far greater (or smaller) than the differences we mark in language. We cannot enclose difference within structure or even organic life, since life itself is difference and synthesis. While Deleuze’s philosophy of language is far too expansive and complex to do justice to here, it is relevant to note the way in which he understands language as expressive and concerned with sense and differentiation rather than meaning. (Language as the history of modes of thought?)
limited to the study of government, institutions and non-state actors is already based upon
the existence of an ideal function and a particular social order for amorphous and abstract
categories, which it works within and in service of, rather than creating anything new.
Drawing upon the reading of Marx that sees consciousness and culture as tied to social
organization and production, Deleuze describes politics as that which transverses the
social: it is the constant regeneration and evolution of the existing order based on social
relations, identities and dynamics of space, inseparable from the processes of desire and
production. It is the idea of ‘affirming difference’ and moving beyond oppositional
duality that lies beneath Deleuze’s understanding of the social, political and economic as
processes of becoming that are closely tied with desire, and the machinic functioning of
contemporary society. When Deleuze says that “every politics is at once a micro-politics
and a macro-politics”\textsuperscript{38}, it reflects his position viewing politics as an ongoing process,
with shifting sites of engagement and forms of expression that are an aggregate of beliefs,
forces and movements at the molecular level. But a Deleuzian politics adequate to the
complexity of life is not the same thing as a simple affirmation of chaos – instead, it is
concerned with the creation of new concepts that can lead to new forms of political
engagement and political becomings. Underlining the tension between molar and
molecular, group and individual, politics in our times can best be understood in terms of
the movement of molecular entities combining and relating to produce molar formations
and aggregates that consequently effect in different ways the molecular entities through
the coding and flow of desire. It is the constant state of evolution, differentiation and
mutation that Deleuze is most concerned with in Marx’s understanding of capitalism as
well as in terms of understanding society at large.

\textsuperscript{38} Deleuze, Gilles and Guattari, Felix. \textit{Anti-Oedipus}. pp. 213
With relation to ideology, social reproduction, and culture in contemporary civilizations, Deleuze and Guattari attempt to formulate concepts that allow for the evaluation and reterritorialization of these ideas, explaining Marxist concerns in a definitively innovative manner that itself must be elaborated upon. “Understanding all history in the light of capitalism”39, evaluating and categorizing more accurately the dynamics of society and individual is their focus of sorts – posing new problems, understanding the workings of desire, and its repression, appropriation and investment within the social. How then, can culture be understood in modern capitalism, in their terms? How do Deleuze and Guattari understand the class struggle, class-consciousness, and the functioning of capital within society? Starting with a brief discussion of the concepts of desire, production and machines as these thinkers present them, I will look at the ways in which their analysis of the functioning of capitalism and the nature and role of culture relates to Marx and other Marxist perspectives.

Flows and Bodies, Desire and Machines

An essential starting point in Deleuze’s thought relating to capitalism is the centrality of desire. Drawing from Marx in terms of focusing on the coincidence of desire, subjectivity and production, he rejects Marx’s base and superstructure model for not taking into consideration the complexity of molar formations and the importance of desire. Synthesising the ideas of Marx with psychoanalytic theory, he sees what is commonly understood as libido, desire, as being the basis of the system of representation, thus directly linked to production. Speaking of the absence of the revolution that Marxism has frequently prophecied, Deleuze adopts a position that runs counter to the

39 Ibid. pp. 140.
strands of Marx emphasizing cultural or ideological dominance, instead focusing on social relations, networks and machines. In one of the rare times that he mentions ideology, he argues that “it (exploitation) is not a question of ideology... That is why, when subjects, individuals or groups act manifestly counter to their class interests – when they rally to the interests and ideals of a class that their own objective situation should lead them to combat – it is not enough to say: they were fooled, the masses have been fooled. It is not an ideological problem, a problem of failing to recognize or be subject to an illusion. It is a problem of desire, and desire is part of the infrastructure.”\(^{40}\) The reason that Deleuze rejects the infrastructure/superstructure model of understanding political economy is because of his understanding of production as inseparable from desire and social dynamics. While some of Gramsci and Adorno’s ties to Marx move away from his understanding of production and tend toward civil society and cultural reification or hegemony, Deleuze’s engagement with Marx is built upon the concept of production itself and the synthesis of production and desire within capitalism.

While the immediate coincidence of production and desire in Deleuze and Guattari’s materialism contradicts Marx’s base/superstructure model of society and economy, Marx’s work also offer other options for thinking about the connection of production and subjectivity. In the notebooks of *Pre-Capitalist Economic Formations*, Marx advances an expansive theory of the mode of production that does not limit the modes of production to a particular economic or technical manner of producing things, but recognizes a mode of production to constitute a particular form of life. Deleuze is particularly interested in the historical Marx, adapting his ideas within his own philosophy. While he does not exactly articulate the ‘mode of production as mode of life

\(^{40}\) Ibid, pp. 104.
and subjection' argument, which Althusser also discusses, he uses it as origin to examine the dynamics of production and the functioning of social groups at every scale, consequently making the bold claim that desire, social and real are indivisible.

That is to say, "social production is purely and simply desiring-production itself under determinate conditions...the social field is immediately invested by desire, it is the historically determined product of desire." The assertion here is that desire produces reality, and is inseparable from production – thus the real question that is raised relates to the nature of desire, and production. Returning to Marx’s understanding of the stages of development before capitalism, Deleuze and Guattari focus in particular on how subjectivity within these formations is collectively social and tied to particular 'codes' that ensure the reproduction of the social itself. Every mode of production is tied to a particular territory, inscribed by codes and ordering desire in the service of “the full body that functions as a socius". The ways in which desire is controlled, channeled, repressed, within different societal formations –is thus a major political concern, tied to societal reproduction. Desire itself, in their view, is positive and productive, but we turn against life when we imagine one form of desire—rational or ‘Enlightened’ man—as the origin and explanation of desire.

Similarly, desire cannot be understood on the basis of its object but rather its productivity – desire in Deleuze’s thought is similar to the concept of Nietzsche’s will-to-power, a nomadic, positive and immanent force that is central to life. Seen as such,
“desire does not lack anything, it does not lack its object. It is, rather, the subject that is missing in desire, or desire that lacks a fixed subject; there is no fixed subject unless there is repression. Desire and its object are one and the same thing: the machine, as a machine of a machine: the objective being of desire is the Real in and of itself.” Distinct forms and bodies—such as the human—emerge only in the organisation of desire: that is, the coding of flows of desire into distinct organisms. At the limit, all life is therefore a desiring flow towards ever-proliferating differences and productions. What is originally desired, desire in itself, is always replaced by an object and enters into relations of production from which it is irreducible; “Desire is never separable from complex assemblages that necessarily tie into molecular levels, from microformations already shaping postures, attitudes, perceptions, expectations, semiotic systems, etc. Desire is never an undifferentiated instinctual energy.” There is, in Deleuze’s thought, just one immanent plane of life as flows of desire, organized machinically in different configurations. Man cannot be separated from world on this plane, nor from the ‘assemblages’ and machines which he emerges from and constitutes – he is not a subject set against an inert and lifeless ‘object’ world but a body produced by desire and inseparable from desiring-production and social production.

Returning to Marx, what is noted in terms of desire is that pre-capitalist formations subordinate the mode of production to social reproduction of the community, the codes and relations of power, thus repressing desire and appropriating production according to these codes. That the earth itself is not produced but is the precondition of all productive activity would seem to be a simple and banal fact hardly worth mentioning.

45 Deleuze and Guattari. A Thousand Plateaus. pp. 215
Marx argues, however, that this basic condition of all production never appears in its pure form—it is always-already mediated by the particular social relation, the particular community that one enters. What is presupposed, placed at the origin is not simply the earth, and the fact of biological existence, but the social conditions which assume the responsibility for this ‘divine’ gift, the codes and inscriptions related to social production. Thus such codes or inscriptions precede any notions of identity and the question of how they are tied to flows of desire and other configurations and breaks is central to Deleuze’s thought. The development of these codes and regimes is linked to machines, as we can see in the accounts of machinic pre-capitalist forms of organization which show the different codings of desire.

_Anti-Oedipus_ begins with the assertion that “Everywhere it is machines – real ones, not figurative”46. We are misled by considering a machine a single thing or entity, a unity created by one process, rather than a collection of parts that form a mechanical system. Machines are not metaphorical but instead functional, working toward the channeling and organization of flows of desire based on the syntheses of connection, disjunction and conjunction. Production as social process whose reality is linked with flows, breaks and territories, cannot be understood as simply economic or political but necessarily traversing the social in a machinic fashion. Within this system of machinic flux, “there is no such thing as relatively independent spheres or circuits: production is immediately consumption and a recording process [enregistrement], without any sort of mediation, and the recording process and consumption directly determine production, though they do so within the production process itself. Hence everything is production: production of productions, of actions and of passions; production of recording processes,

46 _Anti-Oedipus_. pp. 1
of distributions and of co-ordinates that serve as points of reference; *productions of consumptions*, of sensual pleasures, of anxieties, and of pain. Everything is production, since the recording processes are immediately consumed, immediately consummated, and these consumptions directly reproduced."47 What is essential here is that machines are not simply technical or technological, but also human and social. What defines these machines is the way they are plugged into the social, and make it function, the coding and overcoding by which they can ensure relations of production.

All life is act, event and flow, but we never experience life in all its infinite difference and production. The whole is never given. We order, synthesise or organise life into organisms, subjects, systems, categories. We do not think difference immanently but instead ground difference on some being. Politically and socially, this necessary illusion takes the form of a production of a ‘full body’. The codes of the Territorial, Despotic or civilized ‘full bodies’ or social machines are different historical regimes of control defined by Deleuze and Guattari on the basis of the way in which desire is organized and tied with production. In what can best be understood as an ironic and inverted take on Marx’s understanding of pre-capitalist socioeconomic formations, they explain the ways in which machines affect the body and subjectivity under different formations. Through the functioning of these machines, desire is repressed and encoded, and so they ensure the continuation of the socius, that appropriates production and channels desire to the service of “the body of the earth, the despot, or capital”48, which can be understood as different formations of power. Deleuze’s entire oeuvre of concepts

47 Ibid, pp. 4
48 Ibid, pp. 39
and his understanding of the functioning of society is organized according to desire and production, and how they work in the service of power.

Using ideas and language from diverse disciplines such as geology, physics and art, he sees the organization/production of society through various frames of reference as connected to territories and relations. Everything, from bodies to societies, is a form of territorialisation, the connection of forces to produce distinct wholes, but “alongside every territorialisation there is also the power of deterritorialisation. The light that connects with the plant to allow it to grow also allows for the plant to become other than itself: too much sun will kill the plant, or perhaps transform it into something else (sun-dried leaves becoming tobacco or grapes becoming raisins). The very connective forces that allow any form of life to become what it is (territorialise) can also allow it to become what it is not (deterritorialise).”49 The world is understood as a production of forces, desires, machines, recreated in new terms rather than represented or essentialized. Desire assembles into tribes, states and persons; through synthesis and production it forms assemblages. But it is after the event that we imagine that there must have been some substance or ground which was assembled, some substance in itself. In the contemporary era, this is the myth of capital. We imagine some homogenous quantity that was divided up by synthesis, explaining all social life as having emerged from the need to exchange. In fact, it is the opposite is the case; production and desire form matter into bodies, units, and then imagines that these bodies are instances of some general substance (capital, civilization or humanity).

In contrast to theories that understand ideology as effecting or effected by material conditions and production, this perspective instead can be understood as the

49 Colebrook, Understanding Deleuze, pp. xxii
social being directly tied to desire and fetishism. Just as the fetishized commodity obscures the oppression involved in its production by its social value, which is appropriated surplus value, a particular mode of organization and social production constructs its own image, its representation, the "apparent objective movement" which allows for the fetishized reproduction of the social as seemingly natural or objective.

What Althusser understands as ideology — the reproductive utility of social mechanisms and institutional apparatus — is instead delineated by Deleuze as a function of desire and machines, forces acting upon territories. Ideology is replaced by codes and inscriptions — rather than a culturally determined totality, the reproduction of social conditions in this account is not linked to groups or cultural perspectives, but is more akin to an unconscious synthesis of past actions, relations and flows. Deleuze dispenses with ideology precisely because it is mired in and tied to a politics of identity and subjectification — it presupposes desire as subordinate to a fixed consciousness, and sees it as negative or repressed rather than productive. Consciousness is preceded by materiality and networks, shaped by desire. Even if it rejects the term ‘ideology’, a ‘materialist psychiatry’ such as the one that Deleuze and Guattari propose thus sees codes, territories and machines replacing the role that ideology plays for some Marxists. Ideology is a projection, a part of the relationship between desire and production, which is for him the very foundation of the social and the way in which bodies relate. This is linked to the way in which Deleuze inverts and reconceptualizes the social, human behavior and psyche, understanding politics as desire, flowing through society. By using this language of codes, machines, desire and territories, we can begin to examine how the vast range of

50 The 'apparent objective movement' in Marx's writing refers to the illusory ways in which social conditions of production are recreated, which Deleuze ties to image fetishism, by which men live their lives and actions as social and desire is subjected to social production.
Deleuze’s ideas on capitalism and societies of control are tied to his ontology, and how these ideas can be linked to Marx’s discussions of alienation and the nature of the capitalist mode of production.

*The Capitalist Axiomatic, or, how does Capital work?*

In describing the various formations of society that emerge from the bodies of earth, despot and capital, as well as in understanding capitalism itself, Deleuze and Guattari turn to sources as diverse as Marx, psychoanalysis, mechanics and materialism, particularly following the strand of Marx’s thought that sees capital as productive, powerful, a sort of inevitability. What is the nature of capital, as Deleuze understands it? Where does class come into desire, production and interest? How does capital work and how has it changed? What is the role of culture in terms of shaping desire? What are the components of the global-capitalist machine, the localized culture-machines and social machines? For Deleuze and Guattari, a social machine can be understood as a *socius*, or full body that codifies the flows of desire in different ways, inscribing them and channeling them in its interest.

The capitalist machine arises out of the previous formations, the territorial and despotic machines, and “finds itself in a totally new situation: it is faced with the task of decoding and deterritorializing the flows. Capitalism is born out of the encounter of two sorts of flows: the decoded flows of production in the form of money-capital, and the decoded flows of labor in the form of the ‘free worker’.”\(^5\) What is unique about capitalism is that it substitutes for intrinsic social codes an ‘axiomatic’ of abstract

\(^5\) *Anti-Oedipus*, pp. 33.
quantities in the form of money. Instead of coding and overcoding, the function of earlier social machines, it decodes the flows and deterritorializes. This is not to be understood as the absence of any social coding of desire but rather, as the replacement of the previous codes by an axiom, a set of rules rather than beliefs or values. Axioms do not require belief in order to function, nor do they relate to other spheres for justification, but instead lay down a particular set of equivalences, a particular relation that is quantitative. Taking Marx’s critiques of the functioning of production and consciousness under capitalist production further, the shift from codes to axioms can be seen as the way in which, under capitalism, as Marx says, we are “ruled by abstractions”\textsuperscript{52}. Capitalism operates through the abstractions of money and labour, such that its logic pervades the social and machines, dispensing with belief, “transforming the surplus value of code into a surplus value of flux.”\textsuperscript{53} Flux here refers to what Marx understands as the constant mobility and everlasting uncertainty at the heart of capitalism — it continuously breaks down cultural, symbolic and linguistic barriers that create territories and limit exchange, decoding flows in the service of production.

But the decoding of flows does not, it must be remembered, mean the loss of all code value, but rather the displacement of limits. Codes continue to exist, but as archaisms, folklore, made to fit the axiomatic of capital. Flows of desire are decoded only insofar as they are organized differently and rendered productive to capital. The functioning of the axiomatic is not simply economic, or at the level of production — rather, it is machinic, systemic, scientific, technical — flows are decoded and organized to serve production and continuation of the societal order. Tradition is replaced by

\textsuperscript{52} Marx, Karl. \textit{Grundrisse}, 1857, pp. 164 in \textit{Collected Works}.
\textsuperscript{53} \textit{Anti-Oedipus}, pp. 228.
‘rationality’, belief by subjection – money and the market act upon desire and the social, money and the commodity form become “the global object of the investment of desire…the productive essence of capitalism”\textsuperscript{54}. It is thus at the level of flows, not of ideology, that desire is subordinated to production. Just as Marx sees the capital-labour relation as oppressive because the surplus value generated by the worker is absorbed into the product, Deleuze understands capitalism itself as based upon this kind of differentiating relation in terms of its functioning. The surplus value of codes is put into the service of capital, decoded and deterritorialised, reproduced, transformed into surplus value of flux. Flows of knowledge, of technology, of matter – all are displaced and decoded. Desire, which was bound up in codes, is channelled into money and the commodity form – the apparent objective movement of capital, by which desire is made to act counter to its interest, is in this way tied to the capitalist axiomatic, the basic functioning of capital itself.

For Deleuze and Guattari, ideology comes after this inherent shift in terms of producing subjectivity, this decoding and deterritorialisation that is bound up with the very functioning of capitalist production, the money fixation. Ideology and belief explain after the fact the shift in subjection that is manifested through the functioning of capital. This is the revolutionary element in capitalism – that “in order for capitalism to function, one does not need to believe in anything, \textit{even in it}\textsuperscript{55} – only follow what is dictated by the quantitative flows and axioms. While territorial and despotic machines were concerned with the reproduction of forms of life and social order in their entirety, capitalism is concerned only with the reproduction and expansion of capital. Its apparent

\textsuperscript{54} Ibid, pp. 239.
\textsuperscript{55} Buchanan/Thoburn, \textit{Deleuze and Politics}, pp. 146.
indifference to the beliefs and desires of subjects, its capacity to tolerate everything, to
turn every scandal, taboo and value into commodities—these qualities point to a general
social subjection to the axioms of capital. Being ruled by abstractions of capital opens up
a gap related to the shift from codes to axioms, from belief to uncertainty, and creates its
own particular form of subjectivity, that is born out of the coincidence of political
economy and psychoanalysis. But what is this form, and how does it work? How is the
nature of capitalism, understood in this way, tied to state and civil society?

The Schizophrenic Process & Deterritorialisation

This question can be approached in terms of the nexus between state and
capitalism. In most capitalist formations, the state declares all citizens equal before the
rule of law. Yet, distinctions of property, education, rank and ethnicity, to name a few,
are all determinant factors within the social—the state simply privatises or diverts these
inequalities, by declaring itself indifferent. Similarly, in terms of capitalism, the market is
supposedly free, determined by supply and demand, while in reality supply and demand
and rationality are contingent upon the social and the dynamics of desire. To return once
again to Marx, it appears that the dualism of the capitalist subject is linked to these gaps
that capital effects. Under conditions of capitalist production, “man—not only in thought,
in consciousness, but in reality, in life—leads a twofold life, a heavenly and an earthly
life: life in the political community, in which he considers himself a communal being,
and life in civil society, in which he acts as a private individual, regards other men as a
means, degrades himself into a means, and becomes the plaything of alien powers. The
relation of the political state to civil society is just as spiritual as the relation of heaven to
earth.\textsuperscript{56} This splitting of the subject, between public and private, individual and citizen, is a fundamental division that is essential within modern capitalism in many ways and it can be understood as an essential feature of the capitalist machine, reflective of the differentiating, schizophrenic identity of capital. This split is discussed in a new way by Deleuze and Guattari, who extend Marx's understanding beyond its traditional applications and in doing so, pointing to new ways of thinking about cultural and social realms. Marxist theory that privileges the role of ideology or class struggle automatically presupposes identity, fixity, rather than the chaotic, mechanic production of the capitalist subject. But because of the way such a theory fails to recognize the role of desire and the degrees of complexity of consciousness and experience, it is necessarily inadequate, and must be re-conceptualized in terms of machines, flows and territories. In traditional terms, what Deleuze and Guattari are directly pointing to is the role of the unconscious as an alternative mode of problematizing and analysing the social. The unconscious is not a derivative of conscious thought, nor should it be simplistically understood as drives that require socialization, but rather as desires which are already organized and encoded in an abundance of ways by society, and in contemporary life, by the flows of capitalism. The unconscious is productive in that, through desire, it is intimately linked to reality and our conception of it. The structure of the social and the unconscious are tied to one another; capitalism can be seen as a massive privatization of the unconscious, a fragmentation which is, at the level of the unconscious, effected by the decoding and deterritorialization of flows, and their subsequent reterritorialization. To translate this back to the language of Marx, the conditions and relations of production are not ideologically enforced but constituted by desire.

\textsuperscript{56} Marx, \textit{Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy}. pp. 212 in \textit{The Marx-Engels Reader}. 
Culture cannot be understood as a fixed sphere outside of production, social relations and most importantly, desire – it is embedded within these, machinically produced, via bodies, practices, becomings, constantly in motion and synthesis.

As Adorno observed, the functioning of capital is closely tied to that of identity – the ways in which identity is ‘produced’ by and related to ideology and culture, its psychological and political components in terms of splitting subjects’ consciousness, as Marx explicates. On these grounds, Deleuze rejects identity politics, which does not get to the matter of desire, of the wants of the unconscious that are affected by social organization and composition. The categorization of contemporary times as ‘the age of cynicism’ by Deleuze is based upon this split; the capitalist axiomatic begins by imposing itself upon pre-existing technical and social configurations, but consequently transforms and subordinates to production the technical and social conditions of a society itself, which are also subordinated to the axioms of profit and money. The split between man and state, molar and molecular, mental and manual, particularity and abstraction, is interpreted by Deleuze as effecting an unconscious split. Through the commodity form and the nature of wage labour, two of Marx’s key areas of critique, this split is linked to the double movement of the deterritorialisation and decoding of flows on the one hand, and their reterritorialisation on the other, the functioning of the axioms. In decoding the flows, giving up belief, scrambling the codes – something Marx draws attention to as well – capitalism is able to synthesise desire and production, while foregoing stability and continuity, instead creating new means of mobilizing and conjoining flows of money and flows of labour. Because of the forces of deterritorialization central to the dynamics of the capitalist machine, it is necessarily always in flux, producing, becoming, evolving,
while also simultaneously reterritorializing. In this manner, the “social axiomatic of modern societies is caught between two poles, and is constantly oscillating from one pole to the other.”

These two poles, for Deleuze and Guattari, comprise at one end social subjection, the deterritorialised “free worker”, and at the other machinic enslavement, in the sense of desire becoming coincident with production. The capitalist axiomatic is governed by this synthesis, of deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation, lines of flight and capture, cynicism and piety. One structural effect of the capitalist machine is the emergence of cynicism, “the point at which it is not just the world, but subjectivity, human existence itself is reduced to its market value”, but at its other pole lies a piety, by which particular codes and values are clung to as determinants of ‘self’ even as they conflict with reality. This is the schizophrenic character of the capitalist machine – in opposition to identity thinking, which is tied to subjection and continuity, it is characterized by the constant revolutions of production, the restlessness of capital that fascinated Marx as well as the modern world.

Effected by what Deleuze and Guattari call flows-breaks or ‘schizzes’, decoded and deterritorialised flows that form images upon coming together but do not maintain any unity of identity, schizophrenia is understood by them as a process that is inherent to capitalism, the coincidence of desire and production; “Our society produces schizos the same way it produces Prell shampoo or Ford cars, the only difference being that the schizos are not salable.” The schizophrenic flows are a part of the functioning of capitalism, part of the process of deterritorialisation that is linked to production but unique in that the content and expression are aligned with flows of desire. This mode of

---

57 Anti-Oedipus, pp. 260
58 Deleuze and Politics, pp. 151.
59 Anti-Oedipus, pp. 245
thinking about the culture of capitalism and its emergence cuts to the heart of questions of ideology and culture, providing an entirely new lens from which to view them. Rather than focus upon contradiction and dysfunction, and remain mired in opposition, it is important to understand the functioning of desire and the machines that it is tied with, i.e. the ways in which the unconscious and social machines are constitutive of one another and tied together. Understanding the flows of desire and production as such, social machines are tied to the structures of society and its constant state of process and transformation.

The vectors of power, flows of desire and forces of deterritorialization that compose the whole of the capitalist social machine "make a habit of feeding on the anxieties they engender, and on the infernal operations they regenerate. Capitalism has learned this, and ceased doubting itself, while even socialists have abandoned belief in the possibility of capitalism's natural death by attrition. No one has ever died from contradictions, and the more it breaks down, the more it schizophrenizes, the better it works, the American way." The 'culture' or essence of capitalism lies in the constant revolutionizing and very uncertainty that animates it, the schizophrenia that lies at its heart. The duality between representation and experience, desiring-production and social-production — this is what sustains the continuous deterritorialization and reterritorialization and permeates different spheres of life within the capitalist order. *Everything divides, but into itself.*

This kind of analysis of capitalism is drastic, but also indicative of a tendency of capital that is evident around the world today. What can be understood as the

---

60 Ibid, pp. 151.
61 Ibid, pp. 76.
“hypercommodification of space-time”, the way that capitalism and the money fetish permeate different spheres of life is evident and documented in many different ways. Particularly in the age of new forms of media, networks and communication, there are many effects that this has on economics and politics. Discussing the problem of fictitious capital and credit crises, Anna Kordela demonstrates this, arguing that in “a large range of professions born of advanced capitalism, the means of production, the ‘object’ is language and communication, which have increasingly become the fabric of production. The ‘object’ in the educational, informational, entertainment or other sectors is the signifier, whether in the form of oral or written language, or visual images...which is why the control over linguistic sense and meaning and the networks of communication becomes an ever more central issue for political struggle.”

Here the question of the use and subversion of language and the links between language and representation that Deleuze brings up are again reflected.

The societies of control operate through self-subjection – capital itself is the despot, the king, the body. Moreover, the profusion of reterritorialized flows of desire, images and simulacra is itself a totalizing issue. Again, this is based in the contemporary notion that “the intense circulation of content in communicative capitalism forecloses the antagonism necessary for a democratic politics.” Again, the question is how to overcome reactive and representational thinking, and deterritorialize flows of desire to action. Deleuze and Guattari see this problem in terms of the schizophrenic, fluctuating and productive nature of capitalism, and for them, revolution is only possible via lines of flight, becomings. So how do lines of flight work? How is it related to the understanding

---

62 Kordela, Marx’s Update of Cultural Theory. pp. 48
63 Dean, Communicative Capitalism, pp. 54.
of revolution in terms of class struggle and identity? Looking at how Deleuze’s understanding of capitalism is related to Althusser, Gramsci and the Frankfurt School theorists, I will look at how lines of flight and becoming-revolutionary are related to revolution in Marx’s terms.

_Culture, Revolution, Lines of Flight_

How does Deleuze and Guattari’s creative conception relate to the ideas of culture, ideology and political economy that we discussed earlier? Given the Marxist orientation for looking at ideology in terms of determination, base and superstructure, which we have observed at in Althusser as well as Marx, there is a presupposition of a structural functionality, an ultimate instrumentalization of culture that undoubtedly occurs when attempting to understand culture as a distinct sphere or structurally determined rather than something that grows out of society. If we instead understand culture as a product of and traversed by desire, an amalgamation of machines and desiring-production, it is possible to avoid cases where “a _structural unity_ is imposed upon the desiring-machines that joins them together in a molar aggregate; the partial objects are referred to as a totality that can appear only as that which the partial objects lack”\(^64\).

This is what Deleuze insists upon, an anti-essentialism which he sees as a crucial element of thought and analysis. Despite Althusser’s thorough scientific approach, his understanding of ideology as a totality is based upon this dynamic of lack – the institutional state apparatus and power of economic and cultural conditions are ‘partial objects’ that serve to function within a machine, yet they are understood as molar

\(^{64}\) Ibid, pp. 306.
aggregates. Agency is ignored or misunderstood precisely because a structuralist explanation still relies on representation, and thus upon dogmatic and totalitarian thinking. But alternatively, a mode of explanation that relies on agency and focuses on the dynamics of class struggle, such as Gramsci’s writings explaining social hegemony, would also be seen by Deleuze as problematic in a different way. Gramsci understands culture and ideology as generated by society, but he ignores the centrality of desire and the unconscious. Instead, Gramsci’s thought remains fixed within ideas of identity and class consciousness, which are a part of the framework of the axiomatic of capital. Civil society, as Gramsci understands it, the sphere of struggle for cultural hegemony, is, for Deleuze, a representation of the real antagonisms of desire as it is invested in the social.

Civil society, political activity and forms of labor are not distinct realms, as they are molar aggregates, composed of partial objects and bodies. Put simply, this emphasizes the passivity and difficulty associated with resistance to cultural hegemony, and all but rejects the possibility of the emergence of an organic working class consciousness, based upon the mode of composition of these theoretical spheres. Hegemony, if there is such a thing, manifests itself for Deleuze at the level of desire and machines—Gramsci is pointing to the way ideology and culture are manifested in identity, whose functioning is tied to that of the capitalist axiomatic, and organizes desire in the service of production. But how does desire function within the modern forms of capitalism, where information and communication have become part of the functioning of the axiomatic? What are the machines that create ideology and culture? While it is relatively easy to understand the differences and shifts that Deleuze brings about with regard to traditional Marxist, structuralist and Gramscian views of the functioning of
ideology and culture, it is much more nuanced and applicable to global capitalism as it exists today, as well as to Adorno and Marcuse’s perspectives.

The reification of society, the process by which other spheres become fetishized, part of a discourse of economics, and the ways in which this represents a totality, are all points that resonate with Deleuze’s ideas. Adorno was absorbed by the problem of the culture industry, and his rejection of identity politics and commitment to dialectic can be seen as influencing the politics of desire and machines, almost as a pre-cursor. Adorno writes of the totalistic character of capitalist society, stressing that the “defiance of society includes defiance of its language”\(^{65}\), a point that is emphasized in Deleuze’s philosophy. The ways in which commodification and instrumentalization are effected under the capitalist system, and its influence on other spheres of life, is bonded with the constant deterritorialization and reterritorialization that characterizes the axiomatic of capital.

Adorno’s aesthetic is concerned with the inability of culture, and particularly art, to remain autonomous – the commercialization, institutionalization and banalization of the works which formerly were radical and subversive. Like Adorno, Deleuze and Guattari invoke the kind of art which resists or defies representation – works which force the audience to see the categories with which they read, perceive, and experience the world around them as categories, and in this way aid in the schizophrenic process of deterritorialization, unchaining the dogmas that seek to bind us to certain ways of thinking. There are many resonances to be found in the work of the Frankfurt School and Deleuze and Guattari’s views, but they are opposed in that Adorno and his contemporaries still valued dialectics and the subject, and did not consider the primacy of

---

\(^{65}\) Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, pp. 225
desire, which produces the real. Rather than attempting to find autonomy within culture or the dialectics of society, Deleuze and Guattari argue for an anti-culture of sorts that is tied to the functioning of capital itself. Adorno had recognized that the development of an autonomous culture against the influence of industrial or global capitalism was unfeasible, but still attempted to oppose it as an external subject rather than from within. But for Deleuze, it is the schizophrenic process at the heart of modern capital that holds the potential for revolution, that can decenter the system by “stretching its poles to their limits...and taking deterritorialization to its limit.”\textsuperscript{66}

The idea of two poles across which society is ordered returns to Marcuse, whose understanding of the functioning of modern capital was closer to that of Deleuze than any of the other theorists we have discussed. Marcuse’s idea of surplus repression in society is one that reflects the rechanneling of desire into the service of production; Seeing the society of control in terms of its power of commodification, he understands technology and culture as potentially emancipatory, but subject to societal and capitalistic repression. Here the idea of lines of flight are relevant again, as Marcuse sees technology and culture as potentially transformative elements within society – but does not develop a process, as Deleuze does, to explain the schizophrenic character of these transformative elements, and the ways in which they are tied to desire and the profusion of capital. It is the very notion of an affirmative capitalist culture as Marcuse describes it that Deleuze is rallying against when he champions lines of flight and minorities. Capitalism continually “institutes or restores all sorts of residual and artificial, imaginary or symbolic territorialities” that serve to “rechannel persons who have been described in terms of

\textsuperscript{66} Anti-Oedipus, pp. 39
abstract quantities.” But the inherent flux, change, instability and uncertainty that Deleuze and Guattari see as a component of capitalist functioning, the process of deterritorializing and decoding flows of desire and matter, is what can be taken to the limit to destabilize the system of signs and machines. For Deleuze, culture and the breakdown of ideology is possible from within, because “everywhere capitalism sets in motion schizo-flows that animate ‘our’ arts and ‘our’ sciences, just as they congeal into the production of ‘our own’ sick, the schizophrenics.” What he is emphasizing is that in modern capitalism, the very same processes and forces of desire that are responsible for production of commodities and the economy are inseparable from the production of the unconscious and the way in which the social is organized.

Deterritorialization operates through lines of flight or transformations, becomings – but these are immediately reterritorialized. In our age, every flow of knowledge, desire, and matter is deterritorialized from its context and serves as capital, applied or reterritorialized in the service of production. So what does this mean in terms of revolution in the Marxist sense? We must understand desire, the systems of mechanical control and reproduction that operate in the social, and the nature of production, understand the capitalist machine, and its breaks and flows, to answer this question. To Deleuze and Guattari, the void in the work of Marx is the absence of a dynamics of class-consciousness, its production, its revolutionary potential, which hinges upon the miscategorization of class. To them, classes are not a historical flow, with a unity or a consciousness, but instead formed related to the axiomatic of capital. Classes are “the negative of castes and statuses; classes are orders, castes and ranks that have been

---

67 Ibid, pp. 34.
68 Ibid, pp. 245.
decoded." What this means is that the theoretical opposition, and the difficulty of revolution, that Marx sees in the antagonism of the classes is misplaced.

The proletariat, as much as being produced by and linked with bourgeois code and a component of the very processes of capitalism that it produces, is not against the dominant class as Marx or Gramsci would see it, but rather against the axioms of capital and against parts of themselves, as affected by the splitting of public and private, abstract and concrete. In reality, the opposition lies "between class and those who are outside the class...Between the social machine's regime and that of the desiring-machines." The question of revolution and class is one that thus returns to desire — in order to develop class solidarity as Marx theorizes, a revolution must occur at the level of consciousness, a becoming-revolutionary.

The revolution does not consist in overturning formations of the social machine, but in becomings at the level of the molecular, affective shifts that function to resist and escape the axiomatic of capital, that can gradually engender new configurations and relations of the machine. But the difficulty is not only that such becomings are actively blocked by the functioning of capital: decoded flows and desire are all subordinated to the reproduction of the machine, the surplus value of code is absorbed, desiring-production becomes a force of social production. The problem is also that such a becoming requires the death of the ego, a turning against the subjective and against oneself. What this means is that today, the question of class and struggle is not based on materialism or cultural/ideological beliefs but rather upon desire, which is already invested in the social. Desire contains within it revolutionary potential, transformative

---

69 Ibid, pp. 254.
70 Ibid, pp. 255
lines of flight and escape, through which it can activate new becomings as its flows are
deterritorialised, separated from identity and the service of capitalist machines. Marx’s
understanding of class already buys into the politics of identity, into the mechanical
reproduction of the entire order, rather than understanding the complex nature of class as
being a decoding of the previous formations in itself. Becoming revolutionary is a
process of inaction, of effecting a break, an escape from the universe of capital.

What is ironic here is that capital is itself revolutionary, able to derive an
infinite number of new theorems from its axiomatic, decoding everything according to
the laws of the market. While totalities such as the global capitalist system and the social
machine are seen as essentialized abstractions, their reality is in their logistics, their
mechanics, organization and grouping from the level of the molar to the molecular. The
problem with revolution is related to the image of ideal, the belief that revolution must
presuppose a unity, an ideal. Following Marx’s claim that “even radical and revolutionary
politicians seek the root of the evil not in the essential nature of the state, but in a definite
state form which they wish to replace by a different state form”\textsuperscript{71}, revolution is prevented
by the image of this ideal, the idea that competition promotes creativity and we have to
strive to attain an ideal. There is no ideal, only desires and multiplicities that are
enveloped or excluded. Capital is able to incorporate disaffection and revolt into its
functioning, so capitalism is considered in a sense as being the end of history, the only
revolution possible within its axiomatic is deterritorialisation — the unchaining of desire
from territories and identities, the effecting of breaks, the subversion of control —
schizophrenic and minor becomings.

\textsuperscript{71} Marx, Karl. \textit{Collected Works}. pp. 197.
Schizophrenia is a part of deterritorialisation – it is the model for the production of a human being capable of expressing productive desire, of revolutionary becoming, but it is an active process and not a medical or clinical entity as it is delineated within the machinic system. The way markets, social relations and practices, the entire system of production, are interconnected with the unconscious, desire and subjectivity relates to the ways in which capitalism replaces beliefs with abstractions, and incorporates into itself other spheres, always deterritorialising and reterritorialising in the service of production. How can this process, this system of global abstraction and exploitation, be combated?

As we have discussed, ideas of class or ideology are limited by totalities, effecting a break between intention and effect, and already part of the system of representation. They are faulty in that they interact with the social in terms of representation, rather than expression, ignoring the centrality of desire. The way in which capitalism functions in terms of ordering desire, producing consumption, subjects, machines; the synthesis and revolution that lies at the heart of capital, its ‘subjective essence’ is the schizophrenic character, that undoes object representation and replaces it with “images, nothing but images.”72 The effect of this subjective representation returns to identity, the double alienation that Deleuze uses to explain what Gramsci or Althusser would consider ideological and cultural function, which for Deleuze is better understood as ‘the privatization of desire’. The difference at the heart of capitalism between “abstract labor alienated in private property” and “abstract desire alienated in the privatized family”73 is linked to this same schizophrenic character – this is why capitalism is always expanding its limits, increasing inequalities and accumulating extremes.

72 Anti-Oedipus, pp. 305.
73 Ibid, pp. 337.
Put differently, the essence of capital is that it continually sets free its lines of flight—its mad scientists, its countercultures, its schizos—in order to open new territories for production. For Deleuze and Guattari, the becomings that these lines of flight effect holds revolutionary potential. This points firstly to the impossibility of revolution in terms of class struggle that fails to account for desire, as well as to the shift from setting up alternatives or ideals to that of affecting an escape from within. The idea of escape replacing revolution, flight replacing struggle, has been seen by some as misguided; but what it points to most definitively is the power of the capitalist axiomatic, the way in which desire and production are conjoined such that the only mode of subversion is from within, stretching the extremes of capital’s two schizophrenic poles to allow for new possibilities and altering the ‘full body’, rather than creating an ideal outside of capital that would already be subject to representation.

Thus only a form of culture that takes desire to its limit, that brings about deterritorializations while escaping reterritorializations, can bring about revolutionary becomings. Art and science, which are based upon the deterritorialization of knowledge as they function in the order of capital, can also liberate flows of desire that can stretch this system to its limit. “Why this appeal to art and science, in a world where scientists and technicians and even artists, and science and art themselves, work so closely with the established sovereignties—if only because of the structure of its financing? Because art, as soon as it attains its own grandeur, its own genius, creates chains of decoding and deterritorialization that serve as the foundation for desiring-machines, and makes them function.”74 Within the culture-machine, despite its appropriation by capital, there are

74 Ibid, pp. 368.
elements that can create new becomings, effect new lines of flight that can set the flows in motion; effect breaks in the functioning of the social machine.

Creating a line of flight does not mean to flee but to re-create or act against dominant systems of thought and social conditions. Thus Deleuze and Guattari maintain that a “line of flight” ‘never consists in running away from the world but rather in causing runoffs; “There is nothing imaginary, nothing symbolic, about a line of flight.”’\(^7\) Instead, it is tied to what I interpret as Deleuze’s most radical claim – that there is no future outside of capitalism, that lines of flight or shifts in terms of desire are only possible and validated through the system of capital itself, so the challenge is not one of revolution but of negotiation, exploration, unchaining and expressing, molding the axiomatic. To celebrate difference, rather than understand it in terms of lack or other, is a challenge that involves the schizophrenic process and the overturning of representation and the traditional image of thought. An entire system of economic and social dependences, the social machine of production itself, is tied to desire within the capitalist subject; When they ask “which is the revolutionary path? Is there one?..might it be to go in the opposite direction?” The answer, apparently, is to “go further still, that is, in the movement of the market, of decoding and deterritorialization, for perhaps the flows are not yet deterritorialized enough...to go further, ‘accelerate the process’, as Nietzsche put it: in this matter, the truth is we haven’t seen anything yet.”\(^7\) The only way of becoming revolutionary is to deterritorialize, take on productive aspects of the schizophrenic character and challenge the existing order. Or perhaps it means to use capital itself, to

\(^7\) A Thousand Plateaus, pp. 204
\(^7\) Anti-Oedipus, pp. 239-40
join with the axiomatic to produce new means of emancipation, new becomings, open new possibilities. New connections and conjunctions, a politics of affect.

**Becomings and stretching limits**

Part of the project that Deleuze and Guattari are striving toward is creating new expressions that provide new understandings of processes, new ways of looking at phenomena that are, in their view, no more than shifting investments of desire within the social. But is this genuinely doing more than creating new terms for processes? How does it enhance our understanding of capitalism, or ideology and culture within it? I would argue that Deleuze engages with Marxist ideas in a productive manner, by putting into practice the subversion and transportation of language in new ways, creating concepts that explain reality and derive from it rather than theorizing, he exposes the presuppositions and errors upon which much of our analysis is based. The understanding of the schizophrenic character of capitalism and its mechanisms of image, fetish and territorialization allows us to adopt new frames of reference to understand global phenomena, and to return to understanding the production of desire, the role of the unconscious, and its social and political investments. As Jameson argues, it might be preferable to view the antagonism between schizophrenic, nomadic thought and the state form in the age of the global capitalist axiomatic as ‘a return of myth’, and the call for utopian transfiguration. Using language and thought as conceptual tools, they attempt to diversify the way that we can understand questions of political economy and

---

77 Jameson, Fredric. *The Political Unconscious*. pp. 92. Jameson sees Deleuze and Guattari’s project as opening up possibilities for ways of imagining political change and the synthesis of desire and production, and is extreme so that it can alert us to the controlling and extreme nature of the global system of production, if there is such a thing.
psychoanalysis, and in doing so, I would argue, unearth a major new way thinking about capital, politics and society. Prior modes of thought presume frames of reference, or essentialize the modes of production and see society as totalities, particularly because of the totalizing nature of language itself. Desire must be expressed not through the dominant modes of speech of representation, but as production, channeled directly into creating something active rather than reactive.

It seems that if ever the axiomatic of capital has been thoroughly dominant, it is in the current global era of networked communication and globalized production that reactivity is at its peak. The massive deterritorialization effected by capital leads to the profusion of images, the emergence of cynicism, the fetishization of money and the commodity form can be seen in many spheres today, particularly the political. It is not rare to hear the view that “(R)ather than actively organized in parties and unions, politics has become a domain of financially mediated, professionalized practices centered on advertising, public relations and means of mass communication...more and more domains of life seem to have been reformatted in terms of market and spectacle.”\footnote{Dean, Jodi. Communicative Capitalism and the Foreclosure of Politics. pp. 55.} So how can lines of flight effect new becomings that combat phenomena of reification and commodification? For Deleuze and Guattari, it is precisely through the capitalist axiomatic — by injecting creativity and effecting new breaks by taking deterritorialization to its limit, that becomings can be effected.

In the case of technology, for example, a paradox of the modern technology fetish is that “the technology acting in our stead actually enables us to remain politically passive, instead fulfilling the fantasy of participation and delivering market share to
corporations." But technology can also be deterritorialized and put to use in different ways, that can be emancipatory or revolutionary in that it can allow for new becomings, new experiences of creativity or productivity that do not repress desire. It is between the poles of the network, of relations, of repression and expression, desire and production, that capitalism derives its character, its culture, its ideology – the functioning of machines that are historically, intellectually and socially derived and constructed from partial objects.

Thus the goal of politics understood in these terms is to bring bodies into action, to generate lines of flight and forms of becoming that are resistant to the overcoding of state apparatus and the axiomatic nature of capital, becomings embodied in shifting, resistant practices. More significantly, it is at the level of the body, of desire and the nature of relations and flows that politics must be understood, a politics of affect that works towards the liberation of desire and the stretching of limits. Again, such a conception is not concerned with ideology or overarching unities, but with becomings at the molecular level, and the synthesis of the molecular into the molar as well as the complexities involved in evaluating molar aggregates.

In terms of understanding the functioning of ideology and culture, Deleuze and Guattari shift the question of why the revolution is not inevitable from superstructure to desire. Marx’s class struggle is replaced with desire at the level of the body, matter, the machines – a complex and rigorous understanding of capitalist production and its dynamics. A majority of the Marxist interpretations discussed earlier are modified or criticized as reactive, ignoring the primacy of desire and the machinic character of modern capitalism, and continuing to see things in terms of representation rather than

79 ibid. pp. 59.
desire itself. Ideology is not enforced through some state apparatus, nor is it determined by economic or cultural activity, but rather at the level of production, and through the relationship between desire and the social. I argue that this represents an understanding of capital as a fundamental framework of society, one that has already infiltrated the social and desire, and thus cannot be approached from the outside but rather must be considered immanently.

Culture, ideology — they are machines of desire, networks of images and reterritorializations that are effected by the nature of capital and the axiomatic. There is no revolution outside the stretching of the limit, the loosening of the axiomatic through lines of flight and deterritorialization. Their philosophy sees capitalism at the end of identity and representation, but also at the end of society, a fragmentation and redistribution of desire that cannot be subverted precisely because capitalism will package and sell the revolution. We are enslaved by the very axiom of capitalism, and yet for Deleuze and Guattari this also signals transformative and utopian potential. Both capitalism and psychoanalysis have the radical power of decoding; they allow us to see that authority and power are strictly questions of desire, the organization of molecular into molar.

As Claire Colebrook succinctly explains, “It does not matter who or what is in power—the despot, the king, the State or ‘man’—what does matter is the production of these authorities through the syntheses of desire. The syntheses are used illegitimately when one of the synthesised units is placed outside the chain and used to explain or govern the whole. What makes capitalism so insidious and so inescapable is that we no longer posit some external authority that would organise the process of coding; we allow
the abstract and uniform process of decoding to operate as an immanent limit and subjection.80 Updating Marx's understanding in terms of psychoanalysis, the unconscious and desire, further evolves our view of ideology and the reproduction of conditions of production. Moving beyond representations that see capital from the frame of reference of structure, hegemony or dominance, Deleuze and Guattari pose an entirely new vocabulary and mode of engagement when analysing the social, cultural and economic dynamics of capitalist production, and particularly such production in modern society. Culture can effect lines of flight from within capitalism, but the system remains characterized by the schizophrenic nature of production, machines and culture. But what kind of culture is it? How does revolution work and relate to culture, lines of flight and ideology?

I will conclude by attempting to answer these questions, summarizing and synthesizing the discussions in which I have traced the relationship of ideology to production and socioeconomic order, and suggest that any global conception of politics today must necessarily be focused on the actions of bodies and the schizophrenic character of capital rather than reinforcing relations of domination or exploitation through representation.

80 Colebrook, Understanding Deleuze, pp. 129
“A diagram is a map, or rather several superimposed map...a map of relations between forces, a map of destiny, or intensity.”

- Gilles Deleuze

4. Diagrams

If capitalist culture is networks, communication, images, an ordering of desire in accordance with the needs of production, then the diagram plays an essential role in understanding links and raising new questions. Whereas most treatments of diagrammatic thought or reasoning utilize diagrams for problem solution or representation, Deleuze’s diagram is a technique of posing problems rather than solving them. Since life itself is taken to be “problematic,” the diagram is only adequate to life if it can construct a concept of the problem. The thought of the diagram is thus linked to Deleuze’s disavowal of the dogmatic “image of thought” which subsumes thought to the categories of representation. From the viewpoint of representation, the actual world is reduced to a model, and thought to an image. The diagram reverses this hierarchy insofar as it is itself productive of the actual. With the diagram, the actual world is not reproduced or represented (as in a figure, form, icon, index, or symbol) but rather expressed, aimed at or extracted from. What the diagram expresses is not a sensible being but “the being of the sensible,” not the given, but “that by which the given is given.” In Deleuze’s ontology, that by which the given is given is difference itself, or life in its continuous

81 Deleuze, Gilles. *Foucault*, pp. 43
82 Deleuze, Gilles. *Difference and Repetition*, pp. 222.
Diagrams can clearly take the form of graphic representations, but what makes these representations diagrammatic is exactly their non-representational, non-formal aspect. If the diagram assumes a form, the form is a map of relations between forces. Deleuze develops Nietzsche’s idea that “any form is a combination of forces,” which means that every relation is a relation of relations rather than one of opposites \((dx\) rather than not-\(x\)). This is not merely to say that everything is related but that things are selectively or differentially related. To construct a diagram is to map out tendencies or vectors of relation. Insofar as it contains potentialities that have not-yet been actualized, the diagram is governed not only by the possible but also by the virtual. The diagram is thus understood as an *expression* that is complicit with chance, rather than as a representation or even a creation.

Thus, diagrams can allow us to conceptualize relations and understand their functioning in a manner that subverts the usual representational mode of thought. Here, I have followed the sequence of my discussion of Marx, Gramsci, Althusser, Adorno, Marcuse, Deleuze, in mapping different ways that they understand forces of production and the links between economy, politics and ideology, as well as the role of other spheres and their relations in terms of larger systems. The diagrams focus on the way in which Marx understood the capital-labor relationship with respect to ideology, and how these theorists understood the forces acting upon the social and the molar unities governing molecular units. Consequently, as I have discussed different understandings of the culture-ideology-capital nexus, I hope to demonstrate the problematics of depicting molecular aggregates as totalistic spheres. The complexity of the relation between capital

---

and labor, and the ways that these spheres are tied to other parts of society and at the level of the individual indicates the progression of understanding culture as derived from the social and historically contingent.

4.1. Marx's dynamic of wage labor and capitalist production, and the base and superstructure model where ideology is seen as being determined in the last instance by the functioning of the mode of production. Such an understanding is rarely adopted by theorists today, but they continue to treat these spheres as autonomous rather than as embedded parts of the social.
4.2 Gramsci’s understanding of the hegemony of the dominant group as the nature of capitalist negotiations and dynamics. Class struggle is understood as a constant and not a linear process, and it is based in real economic and civil activity and interaction within the social rather than some conceptual or delineated sphere.

4.3 Althusser’s structural Marxism, which sees ideology as interpellating us through language and our position in society, thus recreating conditions of production and naming us as subjects to capital and the state.
4.4 The Culture Industry as the sphere of identity and the politics of domination and reification, which in real terms is cultural regression.

4.5 Marcuse's view of society as one-dimensional and polar, with potential antitheses of culture and technology having both emancipatory and exploitative capacities. The seduction of the image and the affirmative culture that he critiques are both products of culture and technology as it is controlled by capital, but at its other pole he argues that is possible to use culture and technology to effect emancipatory change as well, though he is negative about the possibility of real change.
4.6 Desire is central to production but channel in its service through the axiomatic of the full body or capitalist machine, which gives the impression of ideology and culture but works through subjectification.

Figure 4.7 below is my synthesis of different Marxist approaches to understanding ideology and culture in relation to the social, from within and without, from the individual to the global level. Based on the ideas of the theorists that I drew from in chapter one, I attempt to locate the ways in which culture in capitalism is tied to identity, individual and state.
4.7 Synthesis of different theories of ideology – organization of molecular and molar.
4.8 Deleuze and Guattari's diagram of the progression of the process of deterritorialization; The different 'bodies' or modes of production and the related investments and territories of desire i.e. the psychological effects of economic and social production that accompany each regime as deterritorialization proceeds.
4.9 The ‘Deleuzian Square’ of Active and reactive, proceeding along lines of
deterritorialization and reterritorialization.

4.10 Different ways of conceptualizing the territories of production, and the difference
between real and virtual production (with virtual being in the sense of potential territories
or flows of labour that could materialize from within the social.
“Writing has never been capitalism’s thing. Capitalism is profoundly illiterate. The death of writing is like the death of God or the death of the father: the thing was settled a long time ago, although the news of the event is slow to reach us, and there survives in us the memory of extinct signs with which we still write.”
- Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari

5. Conclusions

Returning to my original concern – the question of how culture is configured within the social as well as in global capitalism, what becomes clear is that politics, economy and ideology cannot be considered distinct spheres, nor can they represented or considered determined by a single element. As I have pointed out, the ways that we think about culture, and understand it in terms of the social, the political, production and desire, the clearer it becomes how the aggregate of individual actions and desires at the molecular level forms a molar totality.

The question of culture for Marx evolves based upon his understanding of the relations of production in capitalism, the fetishization of products, and the ways in which it infiltrates other aspects of life because of the dynamics of ownership and division of labor. Although his perspective has been interpreted in different ways, what is clear is that Marx saw the economic and class consciousness as spheres that determine political, ideological and cultural factors, based on a symbiotic understanding of base and superstructure, where economic conditions determine ideological and cultural views in

84 Anti-Oedipus, pp. 240
the last instance. Modern commentaries on the question of the role and proliferation of ideology focus on its inseparability from the dominant mode of production and state and social functioning in general, considering different aspects of Marx’s critiques to address the lack of a revolutionary consciousness in modern capitalism.

Althusser and Gramsci both provide influential readings of Marx based upon his perceived economic determinism and materialist approach. For Althusser, ideology is tied to the institutions of society and the state, linked with language and subjectification. Rather than economic or cultural determinism, it is the structures of society and our position within these structures that determine prevailing ideology and incorporate us into the organization of the social. Gramsci approaches Marx’s inattention to ideology in a different manner, seeing the social not as determined by positions and institutional structures but rather a constant site for hegemonic struggle between different social groups and classes. The dominant culture is hegemonically disseminated, based upon the use of coercion against some groups and a domination by negotiation and consent over others. In both cases, ideology is seen as an essential component of the capitalist order, because it is tied to the reproduction of the social conditions of production. But Gramsci and Althusser’s positions on ideology can be considered outdated in the sense of privileging political and class dynamics over the spheres of production and culture. Adorno points to the complex way in which ideology is suffused into individuals in society; how capitalist relations of commodification and the fetishization of social value cause reification in other spheres, and the relations of fetishization and exploitation are externalized into the culture industry, so that culture tends toward homogenization and economization. Again, culture is understood as reinforcing the configuration of the social
production and consumption are tied to identity, which is linked with cultural experience — culture is seen as creating a false consciousness by reinforcing modes of composition of the social as natural, when in fact social organization is contingent upon a number of factors. Marcuse also follows Adorno in seeing capitalism as tending towards totalization and one-dimensionality, pointing to the emergence of an 'affirmative culture' that does not contain any elements of antagonism, and instead constitutes a seduction by images, a narrowing of the aesthetic and intellectual horizons of society. Culture serves to reinforce alienation and fetishization, serving as an essential component of the system of production. The possibilities for culture to develop autonomously or functioning outside of the system of production are thus seen as bleak, and culture becomes totalizing within the new global order precisely because of what Adorno and Marcuse would understand as its reification. WhileMarcuse, Adorno, Gramsci and Althusser all offer different ways of categorizing and interpreting culture in the context of conditions of production, they are still only clarifying different possibilities within the dominant language. That is to say, their critiques of ideology, capital and culture, as well as identity, still use the categories and frames of reference that are totalizing and tie to capitalism. Moreover, their response to political impotence and domination of neoliberal capital seems to be a lament about the lack of a revolution, a perpetration the idea that we have come too far from emancipation or transformation and are ruled by false consciousness.

Given the bleak interpretations of the role of culture in radical thought, as well as the instrumentalizing nature of language itself, Deleuze and Guattari’s synthesis of Marxism and psychoanalysis is all the more significant because of the way in which they create ‘a new language’ of production and the unconscious, subverting existing
understanding and effecting a schism in the capitalist machine. Seeing capitalism in terms of flows of life, constant uncertainty and an axiomatic that functions at the level of the social, they stress the primacy of desire along with the schizophrenic nature of capitalist production. Rejecting cultural and ideological analysis on the basis of its links with identity and the totalizing character of technoculture in modern capitalism, they tie Marx’s dynamic of production to the unconscious, desire and the social, to demonstrate how capital functions machinically, through difference. In particular, the movement of deterritorialization and reterritorialization, that links desire with production, is understood as determining culture, forming the basis of capitalist accumulation and expansion, and ‘producing’ schizophrenia by deterritorializing and reterritorializing flows of content, expression, knowledge and desire.

Following Marx’s understanding of capital as radically new and constantly revolutionizing, Deleuze and Guattari identify the nature of capital within the flux and schizophrenic character of production itself. Capitalism will not be overthrown, because it is the revolution, it incorporates and markets the revolution just as easily as it does other commodities. The profusion of information and communicative capitalism, where increasingly it is signs, flows and ideas that generate material value and are the objects of production and consumption. By rejecting representation and embracing deterritorialization as the only means of effecting lines of flight within the body of capital, I contend that Deleuze and Guattari thus point to new frames of reference from which to understand culture, as well as to the importance of the political unconscious. Despite the controlling and oppressive nature of the global system of capital, it is important to understand the capitalist machine as a synthesis of partial objects rather than
a whole, and to thus see the ways in which it is traversed by desire. The functioning of
the axiomatic of capital refers to a set of quantitative relations and conditions, and
ideology must necessarily be understood in the context of these relations, inseparable
from cultural processes and the production of reality. Rather than seen as a separate
sphere or in representational terms, culture and capitalism must be understood in terms of
the investment and ordering of desire. New becomings, lines of flight and
deterritorializations, taken to their limit, can be revolutionary in that they liberate flows
of desire – culture and ideology are representational in that they are produced by desire,
and can only be considered effects of desire at the molar level.

Taking Marx’s critique to the extreme, inverting the very bases of Marxist
thought, Deleuze basically points to the impossibility of revolution in Marxist terms,
emphasizing the accumulative and infiltrating power of capital, and the fragmentation
and capture of desire effected by it, as well as the social and contingent nature of
production. Rather than create new ideals or fight capitalism, becoming revolutionary
instead entails the unchaining of desire, the effecting of flows and forging of new
connections while displacing old ones, reversing the totalizing signs and symbols. The
position of culture evolves from a sphere of the social, to a produced sphere to a
collection of ‘reterritorialized’ images of capital, but its ability to effect new becomings
from within, to deterritorialize, at the level of the body and molecular or individual, is
essential in terms of understanding it politically.

How we interpret culture and the degree to which the links between reality and
theory is ultimately, again, a question of desire and socialization, and one that is
evidently tied to the functioning of the mode of production and the composition of
societal unities. Understanding capitalism as appropriating new territories and incorporating and colonizing other spheres of the social, the task of culture then is to create new *becomings* that recreate the flux and revolutionizing that lies at the heart of the axiomatic — to liberate desire and tie it directly to production. In analyzing capitalism today, adopting a contrarian or representational view is flawed; we must engage with it immanently and ask new questions, understand mechanisms of control and the way desire is tied to the social. The role of thought is not to provide solutions or criticize culture, but to provide new points of departure, frames of reference, experiences and expressions — new lines of flight. Using the ideas of Deleuze, we can work toward the creation of new concepts and categories; against totalities, unities and accumulation, towards a better understanding of machines, production, and the organization of desire and power.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books


91


---

**Collections & Commentary**


Essays and Articles


