

Machine/Flow/Territory

Abstract

In his lecture of 14th March 1979, within the series, *The Birth of the Biopolitical*, Michel Foucault discusses in some depth the American form of neo-liberalism, contrasting it with the development of neo-liberalism in Germany before and during World War Two. With respect to the radical approaches to neo-liberalism of Theodore Schulz and Gary Becker, Foucault offers a succinct shorthand understanding of the notion of self as human capital within neo-liberal economic rationality. This self is an “ability-machine” and an “income-stream” or “flow.” The English translator of *The Birth of the Biopolitical*, Graham Burchell, offers a curious footnote on this succinct abbreviation, machine/flow: “The word “machine” seems to be Foucault’s, an allusion or wink to *L’Anti-Oedipe* of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari”. Indeed the machine/flow couple is a crucial territorializing and de-territorialising ensemble of relations for Deleuze and Guattari in both volumes of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. That “wink” to D & G, suggested by Burchell, opens the space for a compelling engagement with an ongoing understanding of Foucault’s critical philosophical writings and Deleuze’s own work. But here we are afforded an opportunity to engage the extent to which the machinic/flows ensemble in Deleuze and Guattari, or their political concerns with capitalism, are an allied diagnostic to Foucault’s writings on the governmentality of neo-liberalism, particularly in relation to the radical notions of the movement of freedom in a self’s relation to herself, that is opened in an analytics of the political rationality of neo-liberalism. This paper approaches an understanding of “territory” in relation to the emphasis given by both Deleuze and Foucault to fundamental transformations, particularly since the second half of the twentieth century, to sovereign juridical understanding of subject-rights, to neo-liberal understandings of entrepreneurial self-enterprise as inequity of competition: territory becoming milieu, becoming flow.

Machine/Flow/Territory

Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari published *Anti-Oedipus* in 1972 with its short “Preface” by Michel Foucault. Foucault had previously written on the work of Deleuze in 1970 with “Theatrum Philosophicum,” an extended review of Deleuze’s two books *Difference and Repetition* and *Logic of Sense*, both published in 1969. And Foucault and Deleuze engaged in a recorded conversation, transcribed and published in 1972 as “Intellectuals and Power.” It is

to *Anti-Oedipus* that I want to turn in this presentation, though in a very specific context that asks us, perhaps, to again work through this extraordinary text according to a regime of reading at once heterogeneous to the desiring production now normalized within the circuits of its recording-inscriptions. The context is this: in 1978-79 Foucault delivered his *Collège de France* lecture course, titled *The Birth of Biopolitics*. He initially revises and summarises the content of the previous year *Security, Territory, Population*, concerned with a fundamental transformation in the mid-to-late eighteenth century from disciplinary mechanisms to apparatuses of security coincident with the emergence in European States of a crisis of sovereignty and governmental agency with the development of modern forms of economic order and a governmentality of the State concerned more with the aleatory, with the management of risk than with the confinement of populations and definition of territory. At stake was no longer a Mercantilism that ordered and confined but a liberalism that managed flows. However, for most of this lecture course Foucault discusses the appearance in the twentieth century of significant developments or mutations of a liberalism that emerged towards the end of the eighteenth century and that he had discussed previously in its nineteenth-century developments in terms of bio-politics and State-racism.

There are two moments in the development of twentieth-century neo-liberalism discussed by Foucault. One has its emergence in Germany in the early 1930s, coincident with the development of National Socialism, and vehemently opposed to the economic order developed under Nazism. This is the Freiberg Ordoliberal movement, associated with Eucken, Böhm, Müller-Armack and von Hayek. With the second moment, Foucault analyses American neo-liberalism, referencing Schultz and particularly the work of Becker in the 1970s. I will return to discuss briefly aspects of neo-liberal theory, as my aim is to bring into discussion aspects of the work of Becker and the concerns of Deleuze and Guattari in *Anti-Oedipus*, as two moments of a common project that seemed to be emerging for Foucault by the end of the 1970s and into the early 1980s. We see that Foucault made one of his abrupt changes, after he had completed the 1978-79 course. His lectures in the 1980s, until his death in 1984 concerned a hermeneutics of the self and a turning of the questions developed with respect to the State and Civil society, the governmentality of the State to a question of the governmentality of the self. These lectures do not engage the contemporaneity of 1970s American economic policy, as did his work at the end of the 70s.

Rather, they turn to Greek and Roman texts on *parrhesia*, on the art of truth telling as an ethics of existence.

There is something perhaps incomplete in the break Foucault makes between a searching questioning of neo-liberalism in contexts of asking how the movements of freedom and domination find their new rationalities and normalizations, as well as their new articulations of sovereign right. There has been criticism of Foucault's last work on the care of the self, or on the self as a work of art, as so much romantic hubris and abrogation of political responsibility. Certainly we did not find Foucault himself bridging these two arenas of concern that seem to be destined to such different archival repositories: twentieth-century economic reason and Classical Greek or Roman texts on governing oneself. Though I suggest that if we look to an important 1982 essay by Foucault we see a curious resonance if not direct reference to Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus*, that perhaps infers an important role for that 1972 text to, in a sense, and somewhat after-the-fact intimately engage in just how Foucault intended to pursue his far-reaching enquiry into *parrhesia* and his concerns with an analytics of the governmentality of the State. The 1982 essay was written and published in English as the "Afterword" to Dreyfus and Rabinow's *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*. What was that resonance or reference? Have I simply imagined it or wished it into existence?

The 1982 essay is titled "Why Study Power: The Question of the Subject." Just as in a 1977 interview when he transformed his concerns from archaeology to genealogy Foucault asks what after all was he studying all this time if not power, so here Foucault suggests: "I would like to say, first of all, what has been the goal of my work during the last twenty years. It has not been to analyse the phenomena of power, nor to elaborate the foundation of such an analysis. My objective, instead, has been to create a history of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made into subjects. ... Thus it is not power, but the subject, which is the general theme of my research."

Foucault then goes on to note that the human subject is placed in three essential relations, those of production and of signification, and that of power relations which we now encounter as the producing of subjects as effects of a freedom of a self as immanent cause of power's relations. While there are disciplinary fields of economics and linguistics to engage

the first two, there is no theory of power to define the third, outside of juridical legal frameworks or institutional models of the State. Foucault then asks: “On what basis would we claim that we now need a theory of power, and how would we proceed with its conceptualisation?” It is here I want to make my connection with *Anti-Oedipus* on two counts: firstly in relation to this triple register of production, signification and power and, secondly, in relation to Foucault’s more detailed engagement with the governmentality of the State in the neo-liberal theories of Gary Becker and the resonance with Becker’s human-capitalist as self-enterprise and the desiring-machines of *Anti-Oedipus*.

We note in *Anti-Oedipus* that Deleuze and Guattari determine three characteristics of the machine, three modes of functioning, which is to say three modes of its relational assembling: production, signification and producing a subject, or connective syntheses, disjunctive syntheses and conjunctive syntheses. The first characteristic suggests desiring machines slice off and break flows, producing partial objects, producing production; they also not just slice off matter to produce things but, as a second characteristic, detach heterogeneous chains of signifying material, producing the codes of desire; and there are, thirdly, residual breaks, producing subjects alongside the machine, a share that falls to the subject as a part of the whole, income coming its way as something left over. The subject is a surplus.

Are Deleuze and Guattari using the word ‘machine’ metaphorically? They insist they are not. *Anti-Oedipus* offers a radical encounter with understanding the existent in its existence in terms of a turmoil or irreconcilability between two modalities of the existent, as striating desiring machine or machines that function to produce flows and cut flows, machines that couple with machines ad infinitum. And there is, irreconcilably, the smooth surface of a body-without-organs. They suggest: “The body without organs, the unproductive, the unconsumable, serves as a surface for the recording of the entire process of production of desire” (11). Hence, they suggest, capital is the body-without-organs of the capitalist-being. It is matter, continuous flow making the machine responsible for producing a surplus, for producing productions, significations and subjects. *Anti-Oedipus* attacks all of the doxas concerning Marx and Freud, and a few others, such that from the formation of an individuated self to the formation of the State, we have to negotiate the triangulated and unassailable institutions of the Oedipal family (daddy, mommy and child) and Capital

(relations of production, forces of production, means of production or capitalist, labour time and surplus value). At once, *Anti-Oedipus* invents another ontology of the self in relation to individuation and totalization. The self is a singular multiplicity. We already have encountered Foucault discussing such a notion in *Theatrum Philosophicum*, with his modal doubling of the phantasm and the event. Indebted to Klossowski and Blanchot in this engagement, Foucault suggests that the two series of phantasm and event are brought into resonance. They do not converge into a phantasmatic event, just as desiring machines and bodies without organs do not constitute a unity but a univocity—a being recognised as difference without any difference in the form of its expression. Thinking requires the release of the phantasm in the mime producing it, making the event indefinite so as to repeat itself as a singular universal. The phantasm constitutes the object of thought; the event is thought itself. Opposed to the event is knowing, which aims to determine the event on the basis of a concept. Opposed to the phantasm is judging which measures the phantasm against reality by searching for its origin. We would want to recognise in the modal capacities of desiring machines something of the producing apparatus of phantasms and with the body-without-organs something of the recording surface of an event. On the side of desiring machines/phantasms is the *objet a*, of Lacan, object cause of desire, immanent to the production capabilities of the material products of partial objects, but also a knowledge about which the subject knows nothing, unconscious knowledge of the heterogeneous signifying chains, so many detachments of desiring codes, and the surplus income in production constituting the phantasmatic subject. On the side of the event/body-without-organs are the drives, without aim, constituting a peculiar understanding of truth-event as pure difference. Between knowledge and truth, between the symptom and the drive there is no relation.

In his lecture of 21 March, 1979, Foucault discusses in some detail the neo-liberal economic theory of Gary Becker. Both Becker and Theodore Schultz published at about the same time (1971) significant works on the economic theory of human labour, more or less developing the notion of human capital as human resource. In brief, neo-liberalism radically reconsiders Classical economic theory, which has three fundamental elements, land, capital and labour. The reconsideration focuses on a fundamental understanding of what constitutes labour in economic terms. Labour was either ignored or, for Marx, it was converted to labour time. That is to say, labour was abstracted. Neo-liberal economics

begins with the concretization of labour, as a real product of capitalism: “The fundamental, essential problem, anyway the first problem which arises when one wants to analyse labour in economic terms, is how the person who works uses the means available to him. ... we will have to study work as economic conduct practiced, implemented, rationalized, and calculated by the person who works.” The worker is not an abstracted object with respect to supply and demand but “an active economic subject.”

In this sense, wages, as income, are now considered as return on capital investment, where that capital is one’s own capacities but also the source for future income. Hence this capital-self is something that needs to be invested in as well, in order to accrue a greater return on capital. The self is a set of abilities, a skill, a “machine,” as well as an “earning stream”: “We should therefore view the whole as a machine/stream complex ... at the opposite extreme of a conception of labour power sold at the market price to capital invested in an enterprise.” Rather, each individual self is its own enterprise, its own self-enterprise. Economies are ensembles of enterprise-units. This is somewhat different to Classical economics understanding of economic-man, as that equal partner in exchange. With neo-liberalism, *homo oeconomicus* is an entrepreneur of herself. Human capital is an assemblage of innate elements, hereditary, and what can be called educational investments, “investments that form an abilities-machine”:

This means that we thus arrive at a whole environmental analysis, as the Americans say, of the child’s life which it will be possible to calculate, and to a certain extent quantify, or at any rate measure, in terms of possibilities of investment in human capital. ... In the same way, we can analyse medical care and, generally speaking, all activities concerning the health of individuals, which will thus appear as so many elements which enable us, first, to improve human capital, and second, to preserve and employ it for as long as possible. Thus, all the problems of health care and public hygiene must, or at any rate, can be rethought as elements which may or may not improve human capital. (229-230)

We recognise this “abilities-machine” and income-stream constitutes the human more so as a desiring-machine that breaks the flows of capital’s body-without-organs, so many productions as partial objects, so many signifying chains determining the heterogeneity of the codes of desire whose surplus is a self’s relation to itself. In his 1982 essay on the subject and power, where Foucault presents the triple register of production, signification and subject, he also introduces something new in his thinking developed in his lectures on governmentality and neo-liberalism—an essential freedom that necessarily precedes an

exercise of power: “A power relationship can only be articulated on the basis of two elements which are indispensable if it is really to be a power relationship: that “the other” (the one over whom power is exercised) be thoroughly recognized and maintained to the very end as a person who acts; and that, faced with a relationship of power, a whole field of responses, reactions, results, and possible interventions may open up.” Such recognition of a preemptory freedom-to-act does not exclude either violence or consent as modalities by which relations of force are engaged, separately or in unison. Though crucially, the exercise-of-power itself is constituted in neither violence nor consent, but via action on the actions of others: “Power is exercised only over free subjects, and only so far as they are free.” Hence power and freedom are not in confrontation, are not directly opposed.

Freedom is not the elimination of power but rather its supposition, its point of articulation and possibility. Freedom is in this sense power’s immanent cause, recognised by power’s effects. Power relations are not a phenomenon to be encountered in addition to the formation of social relations or a social nexus. They constitute, in their diffuse and capillary circulations, the very relationality of the social. But how do we understand this “subject” whose freedom is an immanent cause to any relations of force? And how is such thinking not seemingly utopic in the context of the kind of capillary-like flows of the self as enterprise we saw in the work of Becker? Foucault recognised the radicality of neo-liberalism in the manner whereby it demanded that a self determine a relation with itself, constituting an ethico-political imperative that asks not so much what we are but how we might resist what we are. It is, perhaps, the very formulations by Deleuze and Guattari that precisely approach the self as an abilities machine and income stream but a self whose formation is constituted in an essential freedom that at all points enables a capacity to become other than what one is. The very relations of desiring machines to the inscription surfaces of bodies without organs antagonize the territorialising institutions of Oedipus and the State.