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1933: Micropolitics and Segmentarity

Deleuze and Guattari first discuss segmentarity in “Several Regimes of Signs.” In that plateau they distinguish the relative deterritorializing line of subjectification from the absolute deterritorializing line of flight. As it turns out, it’s precisely the segmentation of the line of subjectification that relativizes its deterritorialization. The line of subjectification is segmented into “proceedings” or “processes.” Each point of segmentation marks a transformation of the subject. Thus, while a couple in love might escape the concentric layers of interpretation that organize a signifying regime, the couple might split up at some point or start a family. In either case a new subjectivity is created and a new segment or proceeding begins. This plateau complicates the notion of segmentarity by introducing multiple types: binary, circular, and linear. Furthermore, it uses these different types of segmentarity to rethink basic notions in ethnography in order to explode the facile distinction between “primitive” and “modern” societies. Every society is segmented. Every *thing* is segmented. The only issue for Deleuze and Guattari is the ratio among the types of segmentation. Ultimately, their goal is to give a new account of fascism.

Binary segmentation functions on the basis of a series of exclusive disjunctions. It is a flow chart that assigns us a discrete position in relation to other discrete positions. Are you male or female? Are you rich or poor? Are you an adult or a child? Are you straight or gay? The middle term is always excluded. There is always a price to be paid for deviance. Circular segmentation organizes us according to ever-larger circles of engagement. There is a private circle, a familial circle, a social circle, a community circle, a national circle,

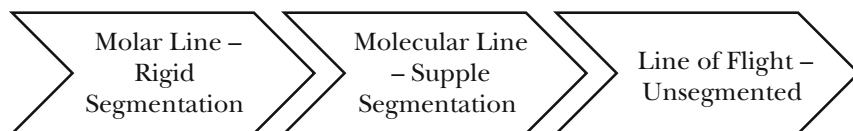
and a global circle. I belong to all of these, and yet they are distinct from one another. My loyalties can be divided among the segments. Different cultures may organize these circles differently. Linear segmentation is the type of segmentation that we saw in Deleuze and Guattari's discussion of the passionate line of subjectivity. This type of segmentation describes the way in which our lives are divided into discrete episodes. Think of all the rites of entering and exiting that we engage in throughout our lives: first day of school, first day of high school, graduation ceremonies, first day of a new job, orientation sessions that describe what it means to belong to a specific group, religious rites of passage, New Year's Eve, retirement parties, getting a drivers license, voter registration. These points of segmentation are nearly endless and mark all the points of transition from one proceeding to another.

Not only are there different kinds of segmentation, but Deleuze and Guattari deny the traditional ethnographic distinction between segmentation and centralization. The distinction itself is nothing more than a binary segmentation between the primitive and the modern. What Deleuze and Guattari show, though, is that the division here is not between the segmented and the non-segmented but between two kinds of segmentation, supple (molecular) and rigid (molar). Primitive societies are organized along a supple, molecular line, while modern societies rigidify segmentarity. The distinction between supple and rigid forms of segmentarity allows Deleuze and Guattari to reframe binary, circular, and linear segmentarity. In the case of binary segmentarity they note that while primitive societies abound in binary distinctions (man/woman, high/low, etc.), the source of these distinctions is not itself binary. Take spouse selection, for example. The strictures of exogamy are not founded on the male/female binarism but require at least three groups: 1) those within the kinship group, which as a result are not appropriate spouses; 2) those outside the kinship group, which for reasons of alliance are *not* appropriate spouses; 3) those outside the kinship group, which for reasons of alliance *are* appropriate spouses. Thus, in a primitive society the binary distinctions do not come first, but are produced on the basis of the supple segmentarity of alliance.¹ In modern societies this relation is reversed and rigid segmentarity dominates. The state assemblage overcodes the segments such that the binary distinction is primary. Any third terms must be thought in relation to the more fundamental binarism. Thus, for example, the transgendered are thought on the basis of (and as deviant with regard to) a prior gender binarism.

By the same token circular segmentarity can be either supple or rigid. Both primitive and modern societies display circular segmentarity. What makes circular segmentarity supple or rigid is the degree to which the circles are concentric and the degree to which the segments resonate with the center. Concentricity and resonance are the hallmarks of rigid segmentarity. On the one hand, the rigid arborescence of the modern state is warded off by the multiple and overlapping supple segmentarity of the primitive society. This is illustrated by the animism of some primitive societies that diffuses power rather than concentrates it. The realms of different spirits and powers may overlap, may cooperate at times, and may conflict at other times. What does not happen, though, is a fusion through which a single spirit or power dominates. The diversity of spirits and powers actively prevents this. On the other hand, the concentric and resonating circular segmentarity of the modern state prohibits the rhizomatic connections that would blur the lines between the circles and set up nodes of rival power. The rigidity of the state-form lies in the fact that concentric circles continually reinforce the importance of the center. The center organizes the other segments hierarchically, and the other circles resonate with the center. The difference that Deleuze and Guattari point to here is the difference between the faciality machine that lies at the intersection of the despotic and passional regimes (rigid) and the presignifying regime (supple).

Deleuze and Guattari's discussion of rigid and supple linear segmentarity returns us to some of the issues that were raised in the Introduction regarding geometry. As we saw, geometry has two competing conceptions of itself, axiomatic and problematic. The axiomatic conception is Euclidean and begins with discrete, rigid figures. The problematic conception is Archimedean and begins with the continuous, supple becoming of lines that never produces discrete figures. For Archimedes "there is 'roundness' but no circle, 'alignments' but no straight line, etc." (TP 212). The state-form privileges the Euclidean conception as it seeks to overcode its territory by drawing boundary lines. The state divides its domain into rigid segments. It builds walls to mark the boundary between inside and outside, civilized and barbarian. Colonization is the overcoding of supple linear segmentarity with rigid linear segmentarity. Private property is only conceivable on the basis of rigid segmentarity. We can understand the confusions that must have arisen in the wake of First Contact, as the colonists sought to impose rigid segmentarity on the land by buying it.

Chart 5



What conclusions can we draw here? We've already seen that the rigid (molar) and the supple (molecular) do not correspond to size. It is rather an issue of organization. Molar organization is more calcified; it describes the relations among discrete objects. Molecular organization is more fluid; it describes the relations among flows of intensities. These two types of organization are distinct but inseparable. Everything is both molar and molecular at the same time. What distinguishes things is the ratio of the molar to the molecular. The more molar something is, the more it resists change. The more molecular something is, the more it is open to change. That is, the more molecular something is, the greater the possibility that some of its lines will become lines of flight. Deleuze and Guattari thus place the three lines (and their concomitant segmentation) on a continuum (see Chart 5). There is no priority of line or segmentation. As we'll see there's also no moral judgment attached. Each line has its own benefits and dangers. Deleuze and Guattari are giving an account of two things here: 1) the stability and change inherent in all things; 2) the conditions of the new. Their claim is that the molecular line occupies the middle place between the molar and the line of flight because it can flip in either direction. That is, intensities sometimes cross a threshold and become extensities (molar) or they become completely deterritorialized and escape (line of flight). Schizoanalysis or pragmatics unfolds all three lines to see not only the promise but the danger in each.

It is at this point that Deleuze and Guattari turn to fascism. The primary outcome of their analysis of fascism is that it is distinct from totalitarianism, and that this distinctness arises precisely because of fascism's molecular composition. The obvious foil for their analysis here is Hannah Arendt, who argues that fascism is a species of totalitarianism that submits the state to the iron clad law of nature. Communism is structurally identical, but the law that the state is submitted to is the law of history.² For Deleuze and Guattari, in contrast: "The concept of the totalitarian State applies only at the macropolitical level, to a rigid segmentarity and a particular mode of totalization and centralization. But fascism is inseparable from

a proliferation of molecular focuses in interaction, which skip from point to point before beginning to resonate together in the National Socialist State" (TP 214). It is this molecular aspect that makes fascism particularly insidious. Fascism as a political movement connects all the tiny fascisms of self, of race, of control and makes them resonate together.

The concept of "resonance" first arises in "The Postulates of Linguistics" where Deleuze and Guattari define it as one of the two forms of redundancy, the other being "frequency." "Frequency" concerns the redundancy of signs in a signifying regime, while "resonance" concerns the redundancy in the subjectivity of communication (TP 79). As we further saw in "Faciality," the white wall of the face machine is the signifying regime, and the black hole of the face machine is the postsignifying regime. Thus, when Deleuze and Guattari speak of resonance, they are concerned with the way that the black holes of subjectivity interact with one another. As we've seen, subjectivities can be individual, a couple, or a group. The potential for fascism arises when the black holes of several subjectivities begin to resonate with one another. The most straightforward way to think about resonance is to think about viral videos on YouTube. The video for "What does the fox say?" by Norwegian comedy duo Ylvis has been watched over 400 million times. It's a catchy song, but it had no music label behind it to promote it. It spread through other social media until it reached wide exposure through major media outlets. The song resonated through different subjectivities, sometimes as irony, sometimes as entertainment, sometimes as confusion. As a result, the song was able to connect various far-flung subjectivities, not by passing information but by communicating at the level of intensities.

The phenomenon of this song's popularity contains the potential for fascism but is not fascist. Deleuze and Guattari write that "every fascism is defined by a micro-black hole that stands on its own and communicates with others, before resonating in a great, generalized black hole" (TP 214). Fads do not generally tip over into fascism because they do not resonate in a generalized black hole. The generalized black hole that Deleuze and Guattari speak of here is a national subjectivity turned suicidal. As both the Russian and Allied forces closed in on Germany, Hitler ordered that everything be destroyed. If Germany could not win the war, it did not deserve to live. According to Albert Speer's account, Hitler ordered officers and party officials to ensure that the destruction was carried out.³ We'll discuss this more fully below in the "Nomadology" plateau,

but Deleuze and Guattari's contention is that these resonating black holes become fascist "when a war machine is installed in each hole, in every niche" (TP 214).

Deleuze and Guattari are thus quite adamant that supple segmentarity is in itself not the remedy for rigid segmentarity. Molecular segmentarity is not inherently better than molar segmentarity and can, in fact, be much more dangerous. It is also not the case, as we've seen, that the molecular pertains to the realm of the individual and imaginary. The molecular is found on the level of desire, but desire is never individual. "Desire is never separable from complex assemblages . . . never an undifferentiated instinctual energy, but itself results from a highly developed, engineered setup rich in interactions . . ." (TP 215). Deleuze and Guattari are not reproducing the old dichotomy between society and the individual. In fact, they are overcoming it by arguing that both have rigid and supple segmentation and that both have lines of flight. The task of schizoanalysis is to uncover the multiple competing segmentations and draw their lines of flight. Furthermore, the fact that the lines are segmented differently does not preclude them from interacting with one another. As we've already seen, a fascist state necessarily has both molar and molecular components, and its power is derived from its supple segmentarity.

Up to this point we've only discussed the molar and the molecular in their separation. It should be clear from everything we've seen, though, that these two types of segmentation are always found in some combination. Deleuze and Guattari propose that the ratio between the molar and the molecular can be either directly proportional or inversely proportional. In the case of direct proportionality, the more rigid a molar organization is, the more it molecularizes its elements. What they mean by this is that the more an organization controls every aspect of life, the more life fragments into obsessive concerns with petty fears. Here we can imagine the kind of office politics that arise in a highly regimented organization. Everyone ostensibly follows the rules, but that makes what is not governed by the rules take on such outsize importance. The movie *Office Space* is a veritable catalogue of such insecurities. Where is my cubicle in relation to the other cubicles? What kind of stapler am I allowed to use? Why doesn't our printer work? Why doesn't anyone notice how hard I'm working?

In the case of inverse proportionality, the molecular is at odds with the molar. The example that Deleuze and Guattari give here is from the Cold War. The world at the time had a great binary

molarization between East and West. The more balanced these two powers became, the more likely it was that some regional conflict would destabilize the molecular segments. Palestine, Korea, Afghanistan, and countless other regional conflicts threatened the balance of powers precisely because each side sought to overcode the conflict. This attempt at overcoding, though, caused a shift in the balance that destabilized it. When the molecular is at odds with the molar, it can be very difficult to understand what's happening. Deleuze and Guattari think that this was the case with the May 1968 riots in France. If one only thinks in macropolitical terms (class, race, gender) then one will miss micropolitical movements. These micropolitical movements are affective and not amenable to analysis on the basis of molar aggregates. It's the kind of thing one tries to grasp in phrases such as, "Things are different now"; "Times have changed"; "Values have changed." In the case of May 1968, the Left in France completely missed the boat because their analysis of class showed that the proletariat had not sufficiently achieved class-consciousness. People on the Right, like de Gaulle and Pompidou, could sense the change. Young people no longer had the same respect for their elders. Their values were different. A change was coming. It was the same with the French Revolution. Following Gabriel Tarde, Deleuze and Guattari say that "what one needs to know is which peasants, in which areas of the south of France, stopped greeting the local landowners" (TP 216). The molecular flow of courtesies that accompanied the molar segmentation of land, landowners, and peasants, began at some point to turn against the molar segmentation and interrupt it. It is on this level that the revolution began and spread.

At the border between the molar and molecular one finds a "power center." The power center is defined by the adaptations it makes between the flows. Here Deleuze and Guattari give the example of money. Money can be seen from either the molar or molecular perspective (perceptual semiotics). From the molar perspective money is segmented into denominations and can be used to purchase goods and services, which are themselves molar aggregates. Molecular money is the great, indivisible flow of finance capital that follows the sun all over the globe as each major market opens up. The power center that effects the conversion of molecular finance capital into molar money and vice versa is the bank. The bank is continuously negotiating between these two perspectives on money. The dominant trend over the last several decades has been to increase the flow of finance capital through financial

instruments, often at the expense of molar money. The most recent example of this occurred in the mortgage crisis of 2008, when a financial instrument (mortgage derivatives) decoupled financial value from the asset and allowed it to flow into the world financial market. The result was what Deleuze and Guattari would call a “cancerous body” but what popularly became known as the “housing bubble.” The solution was for the various world governments to pump molar money back into the system in the hopes of segmenting the flow and at the very least diversifying the financial capital. Thus, the power center is not absolute. It only maintains relative control over the boundary between the molar and molecular. As Deleuze and Guattari say, “something always escapes” (TP 217), but there’s never a guarantee that what escapes will be beneficial.

Deleuze and Guattari go on to argue that every power center has three “aspects or zones” (TP 226). The first zone is the zone of its power, what the power center actually has control over. This zone relates to the molar, rigid segments of a line. Thus, in the example of above, what the bank really has control over is the segmentation and distribution of money. The second zone is the “zone of indiscernibility.” In this zone the boundary between the molar and molecular becomes blurry. We can think about this in terms of a classic experiment in physics. The corpuscular theory of light supposes that light is made up of discrete particles called “photons,” but this theory doesn’t fully account for our experimental evidence. Given this theory, for example, we would expect shadows to always be sharply defined. We expect them to be sharply defined because what is casting the shadow completely blocks some of the photons and lets other pass. What we discover in controlled experiments is instead of two discrete bars of light, we get one dark bar with a fuzzy border in the center with the increasingly fuzzier bars gradually fading as they move toward the edge. This suggests that light is a wave rather than particles, since the light is distributed statistically, rather than discretely. Here, in Deleuze and Guattari’s terms, the light has both a molar (particle) side and a molecular (wave) side. “The molar segments are necessarily immersed in the molecular soup that nourishes them and makes their outlines waver” (TP 225). The zone of indiscernibility, then, is the relation between the molar and molecular for any given assemblage, which, as we’ve seen, may be either directly or inversely proportional to one another. The third zone of power centers is their impotence. If their power lies in converting the molecular into the molar, there is always something that escapes this conversion. It’s not always possible to understand

light as a particle. The wave, the flow, the molecular is not fully totalizable. If we return to the example of the mortgage crisis, it was precisely the banks' impotence with regard to the flow of financial capital that led to the collapse. Molar assets (real estate) were converted into molecular capital in the hopes of increasing the value of the molar assets. This actually worked for a while, but ultimately as more and more capital became unmoored from molar assets, the banks were no longer able to control it, and the market went into a suicidal collapse.

Segmentation is thus the molar appropriation of a molecular flow. The segment cannot fully dominate the flow. Something always escapes. Furthermore, Deleuze and Guattari argue that "segments (classes, for example) form at the conjunction of masses [packs, multiplicities] and deterritorialized flows, and that the most deterritorialized flow dominates the segment" (TP 226). Here they give a great example of what they have in mind. The US dollar is a segmentation of the global flow of capital. Of all the world's currencies, the US dollar is the most deterritorialized. What Deleuze and Guattari mean by this is that the US dollar has spread all over the world, not only as a unit of exchange, but as a standard by which to measure other currencies. It is also the world's reserve currency. That is, major countries keep a certain amount of US currency on reserve. This ensures not only the stability of their own currency, but of US currency as well. Here we see all three zones come together. The central banks segment the molecular flow of capital into currencies. The standard currency is the US dollar, which is precisely the currency most difficult to control. The central banks' point of control is also the point of their impotence. Deleuze and Guattari redescribe this relation among the molar, molecular, and the central power in terms of abstract machines and assemblages:

Segments, then, are themselves governed by an abstract machine. But what power centers govern are assemblages that effectuate that abstract machine, in other words, that continually adapt variations in mass and flow to the segments of the rigid line, as a function of a dominant segment and dominated segments. Much perverse invention can enter into the adaptations. (TP 226)

As we saw in our discussion of the "Geology of Morals," the abstract machine articulates, stratifies, into content and expression. These articulations (segments) are actualized by assemblages. The stratifications are never complete. Furthermore, there is something like a "genetic drift" inherent in the process of articulation. Mutations

get introduced into the process. Even segments, though resistant to becoming, are subject to it.

Deleuze and Guattari conclude this plateau by discussing the dangers associated with each of the lines: molar, molecular, and line of flight. They call the danger associated with the molar line “fear.” “Clarity” is the danger of the molecular line. “Power” concerns both the molar and the molecular, and “disgust” is the great danger of the line of flight. Why might fear be associated with the molar line? Let’s be honest: segments are safe; segments are certain. The molar line provides us with something solid that we can rely on. Molar lines have truth, universals, order. If we’re surrounded by a sea of chaos, why wouldn’t we cling to the first solid thing to come along? Furthermore, wouldn’t we be loathe to give up our little piece of flotsam no matter how storm-tossed? Sure we could abandon our certainty and swim away in a line of flight, but to what end? It’s possible we could find something new, but isn’t drowning even more likely? Fear keeps us attached to our molar lines, and sometimes rightly so.

Let’s say that we’re willing to abandon the certainties provided by the molar segments. We dive headlong into the molecular. Instead of discrete dimensions and sharp outlines, we find fractals splitting and dividing everywhere. The closer we look at these fractals the more we see (really see!) that everything is fractalized all the way down. Now we have achieved clarity, the danger associated with the molecular line. How is this dangerous? Isn’t this what Deleuze and Guattari have wanted us to see all along? Yes and no. They have certainly argued that thought has historically privileged the molar over the molecular, but they are not arguing that the molar is illusory. Neither the molar nor the molecular can be eliminated. Both are needed to account for the tendency of every assemblage toward stasis and change. The danger of clarity, then, comes in several forms. The first form is re-installing the certainties of the molar in all the crevices and black holes of the molecular. Microfascisms crop up everywhere. The molecular becomes just as blocked as the molar. Molecular organ-ization replaces molar organ-ization. Black holes resonate with one another. Another form that this danger takes is viral. Here there is no resonance among the black holes. “Instead of the great paranoid fear, we are trapped in a thousand little monomanias, self-evident truths, and clarities that gush from every black hole” (TP 228). The danger of clarity arises when we eschew the fear of losing certainty and embrace the molecular at the expense of the molar.

If the singular embrace of either the molar or the molecular entails a concomitant danger, then surely the answer is to embrace both the molar and molecular? No, since a danger lurks even here, the danger of power. "Power" is an ambiguous word in English and can mean "power to" and/or "power over." "Power to" has connotations of "ability," "capacity," or "potential." Thus, a bird has the power to fly, while I do not possess that capacity. "Power over" suggests "domination" or even "violence," particularly in the political sphere. Thus, when we say, "the politician gained power," we usually mean more than "the politician gained additional capacities." We usually mean that the politician gains some measure of power over a given constituency. Power over is a controlling power. The distinction between "power to" and "power over" is maintained in Spinoza's *Ethics*, where he seeks to increase our "power to" (*potentia*) and delimit our "power over" (*potestas*). Deleuze takes up this distinction in his writings on Spinoza by speaking about ways of affecting and being affected (*potentia*). It's even possible to make this kind of distinction in French, though it is not always rigorously observed. "*Puissance*" can be used to translate "power to," while "*pouvoir*" can be used to translate "power over." The third danger that concerns the molar and the molecular is "power over" (*pouvoir*). This kind of power, as we've seen, exists on both the molar and molecular lines, precisely because the power center (*centre de pouvoir*) straddles them both. This power is exceeded on every side by mutations and lines of flight that exceed it, and yet in its impotence it seeks to block the lines of flight in order to segment them. Or, barring that, it insinuates itself in the black holes of the molecular in order to make them resonate. The danger of power on the molar line is totalitarianism, and the danger of power on the molecular line is fascism.

The final danger, disgust, concerns the line of flight. Here Deleuze and Guattari admit that they may have given the wrong impression that all lines of flight are good and that the worst thing that can happen to a line of flight is that it gets recaptured, reterritorialized. On the contrary, they state that lines of flight "themselves emanate a strange despair, like an odor of death and immolation, a state of war from which one returns broken: they have their own dangers distinct from the ones previously discussed" (TP 229). There are lines of flight away from all forms of segmentation both supple and rigid, but there is no guarantee that a line of flight won't end in a suicidal collapse. It is telling at this point that they bring up the German Romantic writer Heinrich von Kleist. On the one hand, they will go on to laud Kleist's depiction of the "war machine"

in his writings. On the other hand, they will continually remind us that Kleist ended his life in a murder-suicide pact. The line of flight can easily become a line of death. The reason that Deleuze and Guattari call this danger “disgust” is that following Nietzsche the great danger that faces humanity is disgust with life itself. We might become so enamored of our lines of flight and so disgusted with any form of segmentation that we gleefully follow the line of flight to our own death. This certainly seems to be Kleist’s attitude. He is practically giddy in his suicide note. Of course, not only individuals but nations can follow this path. Deleuze and Guattari follow Paul Virilio in claiming that the state in fascism is not totalitarian but suicidal.⁴ In fascism the state installs a war machine in every black hole, but importantly a war machine that seeks only destruction, a war machine that only has war as its object.

It was this reversion of the line of flight into a line of destruction that already animated the molecular focuses of fascism, and made them interact in a war machine instead of resonating in a State apparatus. *A war machine that no longer had anything but war for its object* and would rather annihilate its own servants than stop the destruction. All the dangers of the other lines pale by comparison. (TP 231, translation altered)⁵

Suicide and fascism (the suicidal state) are lines of flight that fall prey to disgust. Through disgust they take the power of creation and turn it into the power of destruction.

In this plateau we learn several important things about the lines that are introduced in the “What Happened?” plateau. First, the lines are only separable in principle. In reality they always come mixed in a particular ratio. Second, the lines are ways of talking about tendencies toward stasis and change that we’ve discussed from the very beginning. Thus, the molar and molecular are the two sides of a perceptual semiotics. In precisely the same way that Deleuze and Guattari’s goal is not to divide the world into trees and rhizomes, their goal is not to divide the world into the molar and molecular. It’s always possible to see the molecular in the molar and vice versa. Third, the molar and molecular do not encompass all the possibilities. There is always something that escapes, the line of flight. It is here that Deleuze and Guattari are at their most subtle and most cautious. It simply will not do to valorize any one of these lines at the expense of the others. Every line has its value and its danger. Finally, in this plateau we see the way in which Deleuze and Guattari think through the issue of fascism in terms of lines and

segments. Fascism is distinct from totalitarianism, and it is distinct in the unique way that it takes up not the molar but the molecular and the lines of flight.

NOTES

1. The distinction between alliance and filiation is discussed at length in *Anti-Oedipus*. The basic point is that alliances between groups are negotiated and subject to change, or supple.
2. Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism*, p. 463.
3. Speer, *Inside the Third Reich*, p. 440.
4. See Virilio, *Speed and Politics*.
5. The French for the italicised phrase reads, «*Une machine de guerre qui n'avait plus que la guerre pour objet*» (MP 283). The difficulty here lies with the “*plus*,” which is ambiguous. It seems clear from the context of the plateau, though, that the war machine becomes destructive precisely when it takes war as its object. Normally, as “Nomadology” makes clear, the war machine does not have war as its object and is a force for change or mutation. The current translation doesn't acknowledge this difference.