



Rethinking Marxism: A Journal of Economics, Culture & Society

Publication details, including instructions for authors
and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rrmx20>

The Economy of Joyful Passions: A Political Economic Ethics of the Virtual

Joseph T. Rebello

Published online: 22 Aug 2006.

To cite this article: Joseph T. Rebello (2006) The Economy of Joyful Passions: A Political Economic Ethics of the Virtual, *Rethinking Marxism: A Journal of Economics, Culture & Society*, 18:2, 259-272, DOI: [10.1080/08935690600578935](https://doi.org/10.1080/08935690600578935)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/08935690600578935>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Taylor & Francis makes every effort to ensure the accuracy of all the information (the "Content") contained in the publications on our platform. However, Taylor & Francis, our agents, and our licensors make no representations or warranties whatsoever as to the accuracy, completeness, or suitability for any purpose of the Content. Any opinions and views expressed in this publication are the opinions and views of the authors, and are not the views of or endorsed by Taylor & Francis. The accuracy of the Content should not be relied upon and should be independently verified with primary sources of information. Taylor and Francis shall not be liable for any losses, actions, claims, proceedings, demands, costs, expenses, damages, and other liabilities whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with, in relation to or arising out of the use of the Content.

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly

The Economy of Joyful Passions: A Political Economic Ethics of the Virtual

Joseph T. Rebelló

This paper draws an ethics of theorizing and representing the economy from Gilles Deleuze's concept of the virtual. Using Deleuze's work with Félix Guattari, I propose that social representations correspond, in mutual constitution, with modes of subjective investment. This implies that the problem of subjectivity, in particular the subject's relation to economy, is critical for those interested in the production and effects of economic discourse. After outlining what this ethics demands from theories of the economy, I show how antiessentialist class analysis provides a way of producing a Deleuzian political economy in line with these demands.

Key Words: Deleuze, Guattari, Political Economy, Economic Representations

My ideal, when I write about an author, would be to write nothing that could cause him sadness, or if he is dead, that might make him weep in his grave. Think of the author you are writing about. Think of him so hard that he can no longer be an object, and equally so that you cannot identify with him. Avoid the double shame of the scholar and the familiar. Give back to an author a little of the joy, the energy, the love of life and politics that he knew how to give and invent.

—Deleuze and Parnet, *Dialogues*

In his preface to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus*, Michel Foucault refers to their work as a "book of ethics" (1983, xiii). It is an ethics that takes subjectivity as its primary object. We should take note of those whom Foucault lists as Deleuze and Guattari's enemies: the 'sad militant' and the 'terrorists of theory.' These 'enemies' are not theorists with particular opinions on the proper periodization of capitalism or some other empirical detail. Rather, they are types of theoretical-political subjects. That many continue to read Deleuze and Guattari for totalizing narratives of capitalist subjectivation, instead of an affirmative ethical subjectivity that transforms our theory/politics, says much about the continued prominence of the *sad* and *terrorist* subjects—and the importance of reading Deleuze (and Guattari) *ethically*.

Following the manner in which Deleuze approaches Spinoza, an ethical reading's aim is to "arrive at a maximum of joyful passions" and "manage[s] to form adequate ideas" (1988a, 28). Speaking ethically, in this precise sense, joy is not simply utility or happiness. A passion is joyful if it is the product of a relation that increases "our power of acting" (28). This is opposed to the sad passions, such as those of the sad militant, that impede this power or capacity to act. In turn, adequate ideas are those that help produce and enable the joyful passions. It is worth emphasizing, even if it

risks belaboring the obvious, that this specific understanding of ethical joy cannot be represented through particular acts. This is what Deleuze and Guattari mean when they claim: “schizoanalysis *as such* has strictly no political program” (1983, 380). Less concerned with the specific actions of social subjects, this ethical aspect of Deleuze and Guattari’s thought that I want to emphasize does not presuppose, but rather, hopes to produce subjects that actually can/will act.

This paper explores what it is we find when we read Deleuze and/or Guattari ethically, and how this relates to political economy. In the first section I introduce Deleuze’s notion of virtuality and its logic of actualization to propose a particular ethical relationship to theory/knowledge in general. Next I make use of Deleuze’s opposition between repetition and reproduction to illustrate how such an ethics would affect our theory of economy in particular, and to suggest a set of political economic acts that differ from those we often consider available to us. To conclude, I discuss why the ethical reading of Deleuze, and its application to political economy, is useful for a noncapitalist politics.

As Foucault puts it, Deleuze and Guattari teach that one doesn’t have to be “sad in order to be militant” (1988, xiii). Considering the continued prominence of essentialist and totalizing representations of the economy that reproduce, and are reproduced by, passions of sadness that thwart our capacities to act politically, I hope to show that one does not have to be sad in order to be militant . . . or a subject of economy.

The Power of Falsity

There is an ethical choice in favour of the richness of the possible, an ethics and politics of the virtual.

—Guattari, *Chaosmosis*

In one of his most charming short pieces, Deleuze advocates “the power of falsity” in opposition to “representing things in a way that manifests a lamentable faith in accuracy and truth” (1995, 11). How should we understand this privileging of falsity over accuracy? Clearly, Deleuze is not proposing (nor am I) a methodological principle of ignoring the “real” world by resorting to one of fantasy where things are better. The key is to recognize that the falsity in question is that which is false from the perspective of what Deleuze defines as “representationality,” which produces its rigorous truth through the subsumption of difference to overcoding essences and metanarratives. Falsity is the theoretical refusal to assume a fixed universal that could contain all eruptions of difference/desire.

This point can be clarified, or at least specified, through Deleuze’s distinction between the *virtual-actual* and the *possible-real*: “While the real is in the image and likeness of the possible that it realizes, the actual, on the other hand does not resemble the virtuality that it embodies. It is difference that is primary in the process of actualization” (1988b, 97). Deleuze, through Henri Bergson, or vice versa if you’d like, then asks us why the real resembles the possible.

[W]e give ourselves a real that is readymade, preformed, pre-existent to itself, and that will pass into existence according to an order of successive limitations. Everything is already completely given: all of the real in the

image, in the pseudo-actuality of the possible. Then the sleight of hand becomes obvious: If the real is said to resemble the possible, is this not in fact because the real was expected to come about by its own means, to 'project backward' a fictitious image of it, and to claim that it was possible at any time, before it happened? In fact, it is not the real that resembles the possible, it is the possible that resembles the real. (98)

The possible is therefore not constitutive itself, but merely a representation of the given constitution. Deleuze's notion of possibility has a retroactive, derivative, and functionalist character. It is merely the projection of a given outcome. Within the logic of the possible-real, our imagination is dominated by a series of categories from a *real* empirical experience that have been elevated to totalizing and transcendental representations that delimit the *possible*. The possible then presents itself as the realm of possibilities (past, future, and present) whereby things could have been, or will be, different. However, these possibilities are politically limited because they have been produced within a logic that accepts the given real as necessary and that subsumes the past and future to this necessity.

Different from the possible-real relation, the virtual is not subsumed to the actual. First, while the possible is realized in a mechanistic and determinist fashion, the actualization of the virtual is a process of radical differentiation. The virtual is actualized through the repetition of difference, not the reproduction of the same. Second, the field of the virtual is one of pure potentialities that resist any attempt at historicization. Even prior to its actualization in historical time, the virtual exists in a perfectly real form in philosophical time. "Philosophical time is thus a grandiose time of coexistence that does not exclude the before and after . . . Philosophy is becoming, not history; it is the coexistence of planes, not the succession of systems" (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, 59). The virtual is never yet to come. It is everywhere and always only yet to be actualized.

The tendency of cultural studies obsessively to "deconstruct" (even if this isn't the technically appropriate term) any social and cultural activity into manifestations of a totalizing racist, sexist, or capitalist order exemplifies this 'faith in accuracy'. This deconstruction is often guilty, in Deleuze's terms, of basing its veracity or readability simply on how well one can render everything and anything into a 'possibility' that is derived from a presupposed evil 'reality'. Interestingly enough, the same deconstructive practice, often with respect to the same social-cultural objects (such as mainstream media), takes place on the Right, where conservatives reductively condemn everything as part of a feminist, flag-burning, liberal conspiracy. These arguments are convincing to the extent that the conclusion (X is in service of some reality Y) is already presupposed and *desired*. The argument is then only a clever way of showing how.

The power of falsity is the power of virtuality, whose actualization is always a process of difference, opening up the "possibility" of a truly meaningful *politics of the possible*. Falsity, however virtually true, is false in that it refuses to produce such rigorously narrow possibilities in the service of a fleeting and unfixed universal: a despotic universal that gains consistency only through paranoid investments that presuppose its existence as necessary. Here we see a linkage between Deleuze's

earlier writings that dealt with the ontological and epistemological features of virtuality and his later work with Guattari with its theorization of paranoid and schizophrenic organizations of desire.

Paranoia operates within the logic of the possible-real. It “invests the formation of central sovereignty; overinvests it by making it the final eternal cause for all other social forms of history; counterinvests the enclaves or the periphery; and disinvests every free ‘figure’ of desire” (1983, 277). The “overinvestment” in a central sovereignty (represented by a person, group, social logic, etc.) and subsequent disinvestments is the production of a given real that subsumes all potentialities to the realm of the possible within the social imaginary.

In turn, schizophrenia as a revolutionary mode of investment operates within the logic of the virtual-actual.¹ When Deleuze and Guattari claim that the “schizorevolutionary type . . . breaches the wall” (277), we should think of this breach in terms of the actualization of the virtual. Instead of investing in a central sovereignty, as a paranoid way of producing a possible/real in order to domesticate the traumatic potentiality of the virtual, the schizo subject invests the eruption of the virtual that breaches the constraints of the possible-real to change history—without being subsumed to it.²

In this sense, an epistemology of the virtual (what Deleuze refers to as transcendental empiricism, although it is neither traditionally transcendentalist nor empiricist) is both an ethics of theory and the theoretico-epistemological component of an ethical (schizorevolutionary in the language of *Anti-Oedipus*) subjectivity. In other words, theory that takes as its object the virtual/actual is best suited for the production of adequate ideas and joyful passions. Of course, this production is not unidirectional because it is also true that given subjectivities determine which kinds of theory are successfully produced and deployed. As Deleuze’s work shows, given subjectivities (be they paranoid or schizophrenic) both presuppose (are products of) and perpetuate (are producers of) a theoretical ethics. To advance an ethics of joyful passions invested in the virtual and power of falsity, and to militate against sad passions overinvested in the real through a “lamentable faith in accuracy,” one must not only introduce new modes of thought, but also address the social modes of subjective investment that give them life.

The Actual Economy

‘the economic’ is never given properly speaking, but rather designates a differential virtuality to be interpreted.

—Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*

The joyful investment in the virtual, and its actualization, suggest a particular relationship to economic theory. Instead of trying to reduce social potentialities to

1. Deleuze and Guattari try to make clear that they are not necessarily referring to clinical schizophrenics. There are undesirable and nonrevolutionary schizophrenic processes. This is clearest in *A Thousand Plateaus* although it is to be found in *Anti-Oedipus* as well.

2. As the reader may have noticed, the possible/real I’ve discussed is remarkably different from the Lacanian Real. Deleuze discusses the relationship between his notion of the virtual and psychoanalysis in *Difference and Repetition* (1994, 70–128).

the possibilities given by Post-Fordism, Globalization, the Capitalist World System, or some other totalizing real, theory should be a process of resisting such totalizing logics in order to map micropolitical virtualities. What are those nondenumerable social potentials that resist, escape, and undermine exploitation?

In order to ask such questions, we must break from representations that domesticate the heterogeneity, undecidability, and contingency of the economy through the use of notions such as Globalization or the logic of Capital. In other words, we must operate within a specifically noncapitalocentric imaginary. Gibson-Graham labels as capitalocentric those types of economic representation in which “other forms of economy (not to mention noneconomic aspects of social life) are often understood primarily with reference to capitalism: as being fundamentally the same as (or modeled upon) capitalism, or as being deficient or substandard imitations” (1996, 6). In many of these representations, “Capitalism exists as a unified system or body . . . governed by a telos of reproduction. Integrated, homogeneous, coextensive with the space of the social” (8).

A number of authors have challenged this capitalocentric image of the economy.³ Gibson-Graham (1996, 2002, 2003) have shown how the capitalocentric discourse of Globalization delimits avenues for political change. Richard McIntyre provocatively asks, “is there capitalism in America?” and concludes that the “effective prevalence of capitalism has not been established” (1996, 248). His point is not that capitalist class processes do not exist within America. Instead, he addresses the difficult issues and problems that arise in any attempt to determine the prevalence of a class process—issues that received little previous theoretical attention because of a capitalocentric presumption of the dominance and self-sufficiency of capitalism (232–3). Enid Arvidson’s postmodern mappings (1995, 1996, 1999, 2000) present “diverse class relations” as “socially and spatially ubiquitous” (1999, 138) across Los Angeles. These maps are in stark contrast to modernist representations of a social space structured and dominated solely by capitalist dynamics.⁴

In the language we have used in this paper, capitalocentrism is indeed a paranoid imaginary that subsumes the field of political economic possibilities to the real of Global Capitalism. To apply Deleuze’s ethics to the object of economic representations, we must therefore breach the walls of capitalocentric discourse to make visible events of economic difference that resist subsumption to global and idealist categories. Certainly capitalocentrism is not the only way in which the economy may be presented in a homogeneous, deterministic, and/or paranoid fashion.⁵ I focus on the obstacle of capitalocentrism here because I see it as a general problem on the Left and see capitalocentric features in many attempts to apply the work of Deleuze to political economy.

3. The discussion below of literature that directly challenges capitalocentrism is of course partial and incomplete. See also Gibson-Graham and Ruccio (2001) and Chakrabarti and Cullenberg (2001, 2003) who challenge capitalocentrism in development discourse.

4. See Arvidson (1995, 1996) for discussions of these modernist trends in the study of Los Angeles.

5. I am indebted to Jack Amariglio for making this point clear to me.

Commonly, Deleuze and Guattari's references to a capitalist social machine (1983) have been used in such a way as to imply that they were early theorists of the supposedly unified and global capitalism of today.⁶ For example, Ian Buchanan attempts to align Deleuze with Robert Brenner's work on the global economy (1998, 2002). According to Buchanan's reading, Deleuze presents a "model of capitalism" that predicted "remarkably prescient things about the way the economy would change as late capitalism progressed" (2001, 112). This reading presupposes that Deleuze's concepts are meant to correspond to particular historical stages, including, most importantly, global (or late) capitalism. This articulation of Deleuze's philosophy with political economy resembles the recent and widely read work of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2000), who use many of Deleuze's concepts in their representation of global capitalism as a planetary machine subsuming the entirety of society.⁷

These deployments of Deleuze in political economy, and political economy within Deleuzian theory, can be contested on two levels. On the first level, the political economic theory that is used by Buchanan, Hardt and Negri, and others can be criticized itself. For example, although Buchanan claims at the outset that he will not attempt to "judge the soundness of Brenner's economic arguments" (2001, 104) in linking them to Deleuzian thought, he soon thereafter relies on the presupposed soundness of Brenner's empirical and theoretical arguments to banish most strands of Marxian theory as Malthusian. This view of Marxian political economy taken from Brenner surely can be challenged.⁸ On another level, one can also critique the attachment of this political economic approach to Deleuze on the grounds of its theoretical compatibility with the logic of the virtual/actual.

It is without doubt that those who want to theorize a unitary and (at least asymptotically) omnipotent global capitalism may find something appealing in Deleuze and Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus* does indeed reference a global capitalist social machine with a "sole external world market" that renders all state forms isomorphic (1987, 464). Still, we must problematize the epistemological status of Deleuze and Guattari's social machines and resist the temptation of strictly empiricist

6. See Patton (2000, chap. 5) for a discussion of Deleuze's 'machinic' concepts.

7. For example, Hardt and Negri regard machinic, global capitalism as "the new phase of political history: the subsumption of the entire society under capital in the process of capitalist accumulation" (Negri 1996, 149). Similar to Hardt and Negri in presenting Deleuze as the theorist of late capitalism's real subsumption of society are Kenneth Surin's writings: "Here the work of Negri, Deleuze and Guattari is very significant in its efforts to provide a new and more productive theoretical armature for the description and analysis of late capitalism. Especially relevant here is the question of the constitution of the worker in the phase of real subsumption: if the limits of capital are coextensive with the limits of social capital and of subsumption" (1996, 205). Although this is not the place for a serious discussion of the particularities of Hardt and Negri, on one hand, and Surin, on the other, I find Surin's use of the term 'real subsumption' more nuanced and plausible. Hardt and Negri take this term used by Marx to describe capitalist control/manipulation of the labor process (1976, 1023–5) and use it to theorize social ontology in general, Surin seems to stay on the level of real subsumption's effects on labor processes and in turn the labor process's effect on society without taking as large a theoretical leap as Hardt and Negri. See also Surin (1994).

8. See, for example, Carchedi (1999), Crotty (1999), and Duménil and Lévy (2002).

and/or historicist readings of Deleuze and Guattari. In my reading, Deleuze's concepts (with or without Guattari) do not correspond to determinate historical stages. As Paul Patton has been kind enough to warn Deleuze and Guattari's audience, "Their aim is not primarily to describe particular societies but to present concepts... which may in turn be applied to the analysis of concrete social formations" (2000, 88).⁹

Without doubt, some of Deleuze and Guattari's work makes an empirical-historical reading tempting and even seemingly obvious. *Anti-Oedipus* even offers a universal history. That they call this universal history "retrospective... contingent, singular, ironic, and critical" (1983, 140) does not seem to take away from the fact that it is indeed an attempt at history.¹⁰ Nonetheless, I choose (and it is a choice) to read this as a historically influenced exercise within a greater philosophical project. As Deleuze himself comments, "[a] philosophy is what Félix and I tried to produce in *Anti-Oedipus* and *A Thousand Plateaus*" (1995, 136). The references to historical and anthropological literatures (be they good or terrible sources) and events are part of a process of conceptual production. For Deleuze and Guattari that is philosophy: "the art of forming, inventing, and fabricating concepts" (1994, 2).

If we return to an earlier quotation, we see how far the historicist reading of Deleuze and Guattari is from the ethical reading I have proposed: "Philosophy is becoming, not history; it is the coexistence of planes, not the succession of systems" (59). Transcendental empiricism, Deleuze's name for an epistemology of the virtual, is not only incompatible with historicism, but is designed precisely to break from history as either an empirical real determining possibilities or an idealist mediation of a totalizing logic.¹¹ As the virtual cannot be historicized, the virtual/actual economy cannot be reduced to the logic or successive stages of a system. The problem, then, is to resist the seemingly 'historical-historicist' language of Deleuze's work (particularly

9. Deleuze's universal history can only be understood as a Marxist history provided we recognize that the Marx in question is that of Louis Althusser (1996, 1997). Patton recognizes this indebtedness to Althusser, as he should, considering that he translated *Difference and Repetition*, in which Deleuze comments:

Althusser and his collaborators are, therefore, profoundly correct in showing the presence of a genuine structure in *Capital*, and in rejecting historicist interpretations of Marxism, since this structure never acts transitively, following an order of succession in time; rather it acts by incarnating its varieties in diverse societies and by accounting for the simultaneity of all the relations and terms which, each time and in each case, constitute the present: that is why 'the economic' is never given properly speaking, but rather designates a differential virtuality to be interpreted. (Deleuze 1994, 186)

10. In fact, it is on this historical plane, in particular the historical transition from a precapitalism to capitalism, that Jason Read (2003) finds the critical link between Marx and Deleuze.

11. "[O]n the contrary, transcendental empiricism is the only way to avoid tracing the transcendental from the outlines of empirical" (Deleuze 1994, 144).

his later work with Guattari) and give it a properly philosophical, antihistoricist reading.¹²

In assuming the existence of the economy as a structured and consistently reproduced whole, or as a real social machine subsuming society, one does not only miss the epistemological character of Deleuze's concepts, but one also fails to recognize the related social ontology implied by these machinic tropes. In a way, Deleuze is a functionalist, but a molecular, as opposed to a molar, functionalist (1983, 288). The opposition between molar and molecular is not analogous to, and is in fact opposed to, the typical distinction between macro and micro in terms of scale, or as it is used in traditional social science. Whereas molar signifies unified and totalizing aggregates (such as a class in the orthodox and identitarian sense) of any size, the molecular refers to processes and relations that cut through the supposed unity of both subjects and structures. Unlike common microlevel social science, which explains phenomena through isolable and stable individuals, Deleuze's molecular approach operates on the level of "mobile and non-localizable connections" (1988c, 74). Society is constituted by interdependent and decentered *machines* (processes without centered subjects) operating on this molecular level that do not aggregate into a consistently functional (molar) machinic totality: "We are misled by considering any complicated machine as a single thing . . . to assume that there can be no reproductive action which does not arise from a single center" (Deleuze and Guattari 1983, 285).

In this light I couldn't be happier, for both theoretical and political reasons, to see Hardt and Negri (2000) displace the locus of power in their notion of Empire. If there is anything undesirable with their approach, it is rather that they posit this decentered quality as the effect of a logically centered, if cartographically diffuse, unitary global machine—namely, the worldwide capitalist economy.

For political reasons, and for its ability to map the economy in a nontotalizing fashion consistent with the ethics I'm proposing here, I propose using the entry point of class to suggest a different way of linking Deleuze and Guattari's work to political economy. Because traditional notions of class have been molar and identitarian, class, understood in this way, has been marginalized within and in relation to the work of Deleuze. The antiessentialist Marxian concept of class, as developed by theorists in the *Rethinking Marxism* tradition, is far from a molar aggregate. It is in fact an adjective corresponding to a process of surplus production, appropriation, and

12. Slavoj Žižek's recent *encounter* with Deleuze in *Organs without Bodies* is welcomed as critique of much Deleuzianism of today. Yet, as someone with an investment in Deleuze, I wonder if Žižek is not critical enough of the Deleuzian he describes. Žižek asserts that there are two Deleuzes: the early philosophical Deleuze, and the later Deleuze with Guattari. Žižek criticizes those who have primarily read the political "'guattarized' Deleuze" (2004, 20), insisting that the early, antihistoricist Deleuze is the more genuinely radical work. The problem with this critique (a critique that is necessary, at least in spirit) is that it does not resist historical-historicist interpretations of *Anti-Oedipus* and, in particular, *A Thousand Plateaus* to produce a reading of the later Deleuze through the philosophical positions of the early Deleuze. This lets these Deleuzians off the hook too easily, attributing these less desirable interpretations to the "bad influence" of Guattari (20) instead of their own particular readings of *Anti-Oedipus* and *A Thousand Plateaus* that conflate the philosophical time of becoming with historical time.

distribution (Resnick and Wolff 1987, 2002) that would operate, in Deleuze's terminology, on a specifically molecular level. Class, then, is not something a subject *is*, but instead is a description of one of a multiplicity of overdetermined processes in which a subject is engaged, thus leading at times to a subject occupying multiple class positions. Not only is this notion of class compatible with Deleuze, but it is in some sense already present within his and Guattari's work. As Guattari claims, "one individual never stops shifting roles in the same day: exploited at the workshop or office, he in turn becomes the exploiter in his family ... Class borders, 'fronts of struggle,' have become blurred. Could one say that they have disappeared? No. But they have multiplied infinitely" (1996, 216–7). In this light, I find post-Marxist readings of *Anti-Oedipus* and *A Thousand Plateaus* that declare "class is dead" much too hasty.¹³

Synchronically, the economy comprises a variety of different and interacting circuits of not only capitalist capital, but nonexploitative (non)capital as well. Diachronically, economic reproduction is thus Deleuzian repetition—not the assured reoccurrence of the identical, but the contested eternal return of the different and multiple ways of organizing the production, appropriation, and distribution of surplus value.

If there is an essential relation with the future, it is because the future is the deployment and explication of the multiple, of the different and of the fortuitous, for themselves and "for all times." Repetition in the eternal return excludes two determinations: the Same or the identity of a subordinating concept ... [it] excludes becoming-equal or the becoming-similar in the concept, and being conditioned by lack of such a becoming. It concerns instead excessive systems which link the different with the different, the multiple with the multiple, the fortuitous with the fortuitous, in a complex of affirmations always coextensive with the questions posed and decisions taken. (Deleuze 1994, 115)

In other words the economy is actually reproduced through differentiation of the virtual, whereas most representations of economy consider its reproduction real and deduce its class possibilities in functionalist fashion. This distinction between reproduction and repetition maps well onto the opposition between possible/real and virtual/actual. Through the lens of the possible/real, the real economy is continuously reproduced through the good behavior of its functionalist possibilities. Through the logic of the virtual/actual, there is no presupposed real that subsumes economic possibilities. The economy's eternal return is the constantly differentiating actualization and articulation of overabundant virtualities: the multiple different ways to arrange the production, appropriation, and distribution of surplus value.

13. Jean-François Lyotard's reading (2001) is a classic example. There does exist a possible value-theoretic problem for the compatibility of Marxian class analysis and Deleuze-Guattari. It is beyond the bounds of this paper to deal with their scattered remarks on value, but for all the talk about machinic surplus value or surplus value of code, the concept of human surplus value does exist in *Anti-Oedipus*: "Thus the importance of human surplus value remains decisive, even at the center and in highly industrialized sectors" (Deleuze and Guattari 1983, 233). The basic Marxian class categories are then completely compatible with Deleuze and Guattari's work.

Opposed to paranoid tracings of the economy that reduce all difference to a single essentialist real, I hold that circuits/processes of surplus production are what Deleuze calls qualitative multiplicities—irreducible articulations of qualitatively heterogeneous processes whose interaction implies no a priori subsumption. There are, of course, what Deleuze refers to as *black holes*: decentered points of gravity or arborescent knots that attempt to overcode social flows. Yet, black holes are “defined much more by what escapes them or by their impotence than by their zone of power” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 217). These paths of escape are what Deleuze and Guattari call deterritorialization, a movement or liberation from a particular arrangement.¹⁴ Every overcoding fails in some respect. In its zone of power it reterritorializes (rearranges into particular forms or patterns) flows into segmentary lines, but it always has a “zone of impotence” in which a quantum flow escapes along a line of deterritorialization.

We can then understand class processes as so many decentered black holes in the economy. As value enters the process it is reterritorialized into capitalist capital and capitalist commodities, for example. But value is always deterritorialized: those moments in the process where value and surplus value are contestable, where they might be reterritorialized into nonexploitative class processes. Gibson-Graham cites this interesting remark from Gayatri Spivak: “Marx is not talking about the non-generation of capital but the non-utilization of capital for capitalism. It’s like the difference between dieting and starving” (1996, 204). I like to think of these as moments in which value (as socially necessary abstract labor time) is deterritorialized from exploitative class processes and reterritorialized into the nonexploitative as *lines of capital flight*, to put an economic spin to the well-known Deleuzian concept (line of flight)—as well as an affirmative and joyful Deleuzian spin to the well-known event economists love to worry about (capital flight).

All class processes depend on conditions of existence and are, therefore, intimately intertwined amongst various social processes. This embedded character has led many to downplay any significance given to nonexploitative class processes. For example, because communist enterprises exist within the so-called capitalist economy and are therefore articulated along with processes actually/supposedly tied to exploitation, this incident of communality is regarded as a mere perversion ultimately helping to reproduce the “system.” When we do not presuppose, and overinvest in the idea of, the reproduction of some system, the political economic significance and fate of nonexploitative economic events is not a foregone conclusion.

Deleuze’s distinction between *conjugations* and *connections* may be helpful here. Conjugations are instances where relations between processes involve overcoding—subsuming flows to dominant nodes of power. And connections are instances where relations between flows “accelerate their shared escape” (1987, 220). With respect to economy, I’d like to say that connections are those articulations that promote the continued existence (and expansion) of nonexploitative class processes

14. Although this is usually spoken of in territorial terms, the movement involved in deterritorialization is not necessarily spatial.

and/or desirable nonclass social outcomes that are also made possible. Carole Biewener provides an example of this when she argues that reformed (and perhaps to a degree even existing) bank financing may assist in the production of noncapitalist firms (presumably even if the banks themselves are not communal or collectivist). “[I]f money is lent to finance investment in a *noncapitalist* class process, then it ceases to function as capital in the process of production, though it may still function as capital for the bank” (2001, 139–40; emphasis in original). While the terms of such an agreement may ultimately ruin the noncapitalist firm and produce money for the bank to finance more capitalist firms, it also may not. In other words, instead of assuming the failure and impotency of the noncapitalist firm we should ask under what conditions these articulations might produce more noncapitalist and nonexploitative class outcomes. The work of the Community Economies Collective (2001; see also Gibson-Graham [2003]) is useful here. As I understand it, the collective’s notion of community economy is not necessarily about the small/local economy as such, but the recognition of the (often geographically relevant) embedded quality of any class process. In the language I have used here, the Project’s research has illuminated ways in *which this necessarily embedded character may help produce nonexploitative connections rather than exploitative conjugations*.

Conclusion

It is claimed that man does not know how to *play*: this is because ... he understands his affirmations as destined to impose limits upon it, his decisions as destined to ward off its effects, his reproductions as destined to bring about the return of the same ... This is precisely a losing game.

—Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*

Deleuze is quite clear that he doesn’t consider marginalized elements to be revolutionary in and of themselves.¹⁵ Similarly, my motivation in recognizing economic difference is not to cherish the marginal or locate places of refuge from a dominant global order. The point, rather, is that this diversity politicizes the economy, in a specifically Deleuzian sense, by presenting those virtual potentialities whose existence and impact are neither certain nor doomed. Instead, these potentialities are points of contestation provided we connect these lines of (capital) flight, from exploitative to nonexploitative class processes, with other flows and desires producing revolutionary subjectivities and organizations. This is what I understand to be the character of Deleuze and Guattari’s politics of escape. Escape is neither transcendental nor isolationist; it is an immanent process of articulation and superior deterritorialization that does not simply allow one to escape, but also contributes to making what one “is escaping escape” (1983, 341). This type of politics implies readings of the economy that do not gain a lamentable accuracy by endlessly enumerating the conjugations of global capitalism as well as subjects who do not constitute their identity with respect to such totalizing visions.

15. “I share ... horror of those who call themselves marginal: the romanticism of madness, of delinquency, of perversion, of drugs, is less and less tolerable for me” (Deleuze 1996, 192).

This paper addresses at least two specific audiences in addition to the general audience of the curious and interested. Hence, it has at least two sets of conclusions. The first includes those interested in antiessentialist class analysis and economic representations. A number of scholars in this tradition have argued against economic discourses that represent the economy in a homogeneous and/or strictly capitalist way based on the political effects of such discourse. For example, in her discussion of finance and class, Biewener concludes that an “alternative discursive space” in which “noncapitalist class relations or other alternatives are conceived and socially valued . . . will contribute to enabling progressive financing schemes” (2001, 149). The language of enabling is instructive. No discourse should be understood as either necessary or sufficient for any particular social change. Still, as those who hope to produce and reproduce instances of nonexploitation, we may want to consider a discourse in which nonexploitation is both an actual and potential aspect of society more useful and enabling than those in which it is marginalized.

In the spirit of the Subjects of Economy Project, the Deleuzian contribution is to suggest that the discussion of discursive production should be paired with a discussion of the production of subjectivity.¹⁶ In other words, the problem (of capitalocentrism, for example) resides not only on a symbolic level of discursive representation, but also on the level of subjective investment in the economy. Ways of situating one’s self (be it an individual or collective identity) and desire with respect to the economy are conditions that help overdetermine the reception and effects of economic representations. To borrow from Lacanian psychoanalyst Bruce Fink, “Representation without affect is thus sterile” (2002, 22).¹⁷ I’ve suggested that Deleuze and Guattari’s understanding of schizophrenia and paranoia can be helpful in understanding the set of affects that give particular economic representations their effectivity.

A second audience I had in mind included those interested in the work of Deleuze with less interest in or knowledge of class analysis in the *Rethinking Marxism* tradition. For this audience my aim is double. First, by speaking of the ethics of the virtual I hope to show that a theoretical approach emphasizing (economic) difference and the radical potential of the virtual are both politically desirable and theoretically consistent with Deleuze’s work—before and after Guattari. Second, I present antiessentialist class analysis as both compatible with Deleuze’s philosophical framework and a way to theorize the economy within this framework while maintaining fidelity to this ethics.

Acknowledgments

The motivation, comments, and editorial assistance I received from those involved in the Subjects of Economy project including the other contributors, participants in Julie Graham’s research seminars in the Department of Geosciences at the University

16. In general, it seems that this would also be an appropriate psychoanalytic response.

17. Yes, Deleuze and Guattari are often hostile to psychoanalysis, but the projects do have things in common. Deleuze admits indebtedness to Lacan and also considers his work with Guattari an attempt to offer Lacan some “schizophrenic help” (1995, 14).

of Massachusetts Amherst, and Jack Amariglio provided absolutely necessary and sufficient conditions for the initiation and completion of this paper. The usual disclaimer applies.

References

- Althusser, L. 1996. *For Marx*. Trans. B. Brewster. New York: Verso.
- Althusser, L., and E. Balibar. 1997. *Reading Capital*. Trans. B. Brewster. New York: Verso.
- Arvidson, E. 1995. Cognitive mapping and class politics: Towards a nondeterminist image of the city. *Rethinking Marxism* 8 (2): 8–23.
- . 1996. An economic critique of the 'Postmodern' city: Los Angeles. Ph.D. diss., University of Massachusetts at Amherst.
- . 1999. Remapping Los Angeles, or, taking the risk of class in postmodern urban theory. *Economic Geography* 75 (2): 134–56.
- . 2000. Los Angeles: A postmodern class mapping. In *Class and its others*, ed. J. K. Gibson-Graham, S. A. Resnick and R. D. Wolff, 163–89. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Biewener, C. 2001. The promise of finance: Banks and community development. In *Re/Presenting Class*, ed. J. K. Gibson-Graham, S. Resnick and R. D. Wolff, 131–57. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press.
- Brenner, R. 1998. The economics of global turbulence: A special report on the world economy, 1950–98. *New Left Review*, no. 229 (May–June).
- . 2002. *The boom and the bubble*. New York: Verso.
- Buchanan, I. 2001. Globalizing Deleuze and Guattari. *symptome* 9 (1–2): 102–13.
- Carchedi, G. 1999. A missed opportunity: Orthodox versus Marxist crises theories. *Historical Materialism* 4 (1): 33–55.
- Chakrabarti, A., and S. Cullenberg. 2001. Development and class transition in India: A new perspective. In *Re/Presenting class*, ed. J. K. Gibson-Graham, S. Resnick and R. D. Wolff, 182–205. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press.
- . 2003. *Transition and development in India*. New York: Routledge.
- Community Economies Project. 2001. Imagining and enacting non-capitalist futures. *Socialist Review* 28 (3 + 4): 93–135.
- Crotty, J. 1999. Review of Robert Brenner's "The economics of global turbulence". *Challenge* 42 (3): 108–18.
- Deleuze, G. 1988a. *Spinoza: Practical philosophy*. Trans. R. Hurley. San Francisco: City Lights Books.
- . 1988b. *Bergsonism*. Trans. H. Tomlinson. New York: Zone Books.
- . 1988c. *Foucault*. Trans. S. Hand. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press.
- . 1994. *Difference and repetition*. Trans. P. Patton. New York: Columbia.
- . 1995. *Negotiations*. New York: Columbia.
- . 1996. Desire and pleasure. In *Foucault and his interlocutors*, ed. A. I. Davidson, 183–94. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Deleuze, G., and F. Guattari. 1983. *Anti-Oedipus*. Trans. R. Hurley, M. Seem, and H. E. Lane. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- . 1987. *A thousand plateaus*. Trans. B. Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- . 1994. *What is philosophy?* Trans H. Tomlinson and G. Burchell. New York: Columbia.

- Deleuze, G., and C. Parnet. 1987. *Dialogues*. Trans. H. Tomlinson and B. Habberjam. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Dumenil, G., and D. Levy. 2002. Manufacturing and global turbulence: Brenner's misinterpretation of profit rate differentials. *Review of Radical Political Economy* 34 (1): 45–8.
- Fink, B. 2002. Knowledge and jouissance. In *Reading Seminar XX*, ed. S. Barnard and B. Fink, 21–45. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Foucault, M. 1983. Preface to *Anti-Oedipus*, by G. Deleuze and F. Guattari. Trans. R. Hurley, M. Seem, and H. E. Lane. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Gibson-Graham, J. K. 1996. *The end of capitalism (as we knew it): A feminist critique of political economy*. Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers.
- . 2002. Beyond global vs. local: Economic politics outside the binary frame. In *Geographies of power: Placing scale*, ed. A. Herod and M. Wright, 25–60. Oxford: Blackwell.
- . 2003. An ethics of the local. *Rethinking Marxism* 15 (1): 49–74.
- Gibson-Graham, J. K., and D. Ruccio. 2001. "After" development: Re-imagining economy and class. In *Re/Presenting class*, ed. J. K. Gibson-Graham, S. Resnick and R. D. Wolff, 158–81. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press.
- Guattari, F. 1995. *Chaosmosis*. Trans. P. Bains. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- . 1996. *Soft subversions*. Trans. D. L. Sweet and C. Wiener et al., ed. S. Lotringer. New York: Semiotext(e).
- Hardt, M., and A. Negri. 2000. *Empire*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard.
- Lyotard, J.-F. 2001. Energumen capitalism. In *Hatred of capitalism*, ed. S. Lotringer and C. Kraus, 229–41. New York: Semiotext(e).
- Marx, K. 1976. *Capital*. Vol. 1. Trans. B. Fowkes. New York: Penguin.
- McIntyre, R. P. 1996. Mode of production, social formation, and uneven development, or, is there capitalism in America? In *Postmodern materialism and the future of Marxist theory*, ed. A. G. Callari and D. F. Ruccio, 231–53. Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press.
- Negri, A. 1996. Twenty theses on Marx: Interpretation of the class situation today. In *Marxism beyond Marx*, ed. S. Makdisi, C. Casarino and R. E. Karl, 149–80. New York: Routledge.
- Patton, P. 2000. *Deleuze and the political*. New York: Routledge.
- Read, J. 2003. A universal history of contingency: Deleuze and Guattari on the history of capitalism. *borderlands e-journal* 2 (3).
- Resnick, S. A., and R. D. Wolff. 1987. *Knowledge and class: A Marxian critique of political economy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- . 2002. *Class theory and history: Capitalism and communism in the USSR*. New York: Routledge.
- Surin, K. 1994. Reinventing a physiology of collective liberation: Going "beyond Marx" in the Marxism(s) of Toni Negri, Félix Guattari, and Gilles Deleuze. *Rethinking Marxism* 7 (2): 9–27.
- . 1996. "The continued relevance of Marxism" as a question: Some propositions. In *Marxism beyond Marx*, ed. S. Makdisi, C. Casarino and R. E. Karl, 181–213. New York: Routledge.
- Žižek, S. 2004. *Organs without bodies: Deleuze and consequences*. New York: Routledge.