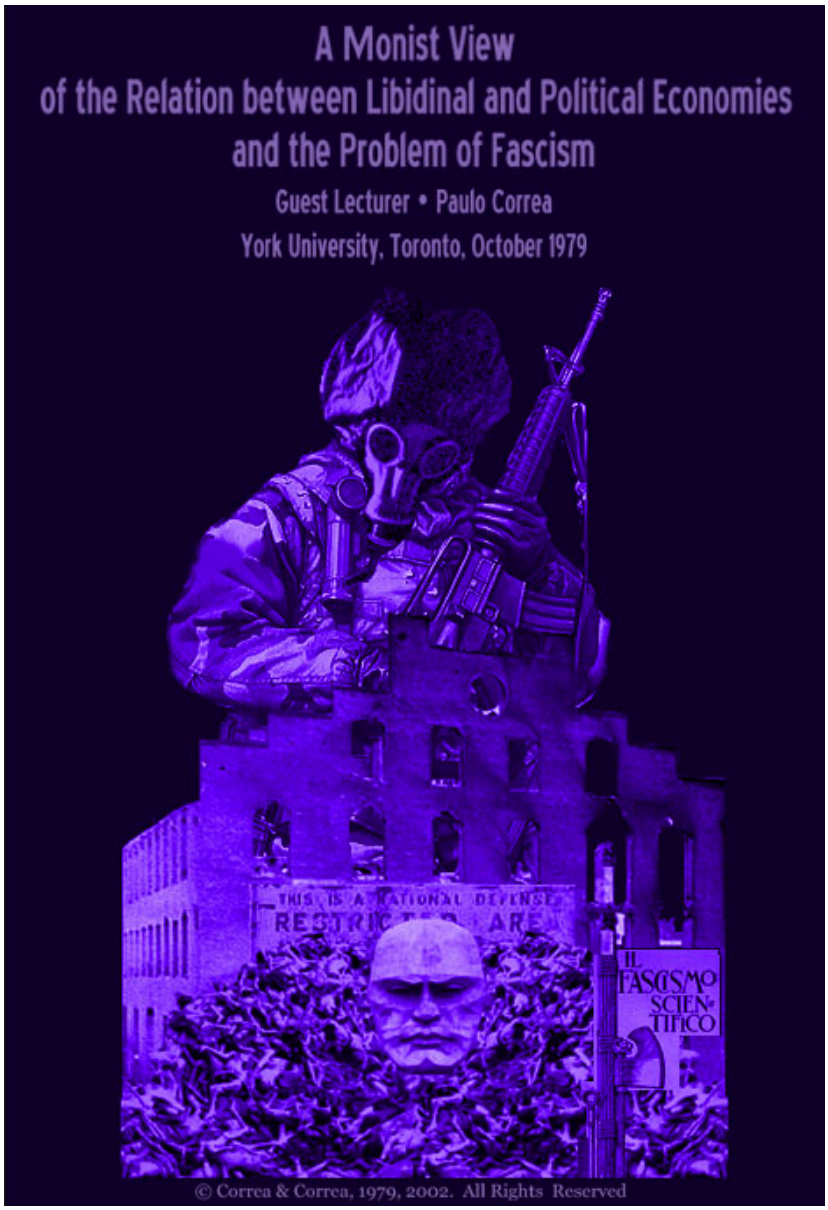


A MONIST VIEW OF THE RELATION BETWEEN LIBIDINAL AND POLITICAL ECONOMIES AND THE PROBLEM OF FASCISM

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I will focus today on the politics - or the micropolitics - of desire, or more specifically still, on the relation between what Reich called political and sexual economies. My view is that there is much one can object to, beginning even with the concept of economy - since it implies some reality to what one calls 'economy' tout court in current language. And I think that this 'economy' tout court is merely the dominant way of regarding the human activity that composes our modern society. So, by political economy I do not mean what economists or even Marx meant, though the concept undoubtedly relates to Marx's notion of Modes of Social Production. Let us say that there is a Mode of Social Production which is best described as a political economy - and that is the mode of our modern civilization. What I mean is that there are distinct types of society with characteristic cultural traits which cannot always be subsumed under this or that type of political economy. Only societies with a State know the politics of economy, likely because it was the State itself which invented an economy of the polis, or more properly speaking, an economy of the village. So, when I say political economy I am already referring to the modern mode of social production, to the mode of civilized peoples, the mode of capitalism in all of its variations and incarnations, where economy is now dominant. On the other hand, by sexual economy I mean something that is not quite the same as what Reich meant. I mean by it something that owes much to Reich's concept but also to the usage of the concept by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari: it is not an economy of sex - though that too is part of a sexual economy; rather, sexual economy refers to the energy regimes of unconscious sexuality, those that underlie all known societies, whether they were under the sway of a political economy or not, and those that might well be said to lie beyond any society or 'human' experience.

In understanding the nexus, the connection between these two economies, as well as their difference, lies perhaps our only chance to grasp the transnational phenomenon of fascism - and comprehend, perhaps, why the present social regime of affects holds the libido or desire of so many captive, even to their own destruction. We have to consider in this respect that there is a History to societies with a State - that this History is marked by subjugation, oppression, repression and coercion. That it is a History which produced great poverty, great misery - material, spiritual and sexual - and all the more so as it shamelessly embraced the values of retribution, vengeance and resentment. So, our immediate interest is to understand what happened in fascism - for here is precisely where Reich found the ultimate impetus to understand the connection between the desire of the masses and the logic of a social mode that induces the desire for death, self-abolition even, as a value above Life - in the words of the Phalangist General Mola, as Unamuno recorded it, "viva la muerte!" - as if the desire for death were the desire of Life! The whole challenge fascism presents to thought is whether the latter can comprehend why entire populations, from all classes of society and walks of life, merged into fascist movements - movements that precisely claimed abolition of class warfare and class division by means of a new social integration they called the New Order. We know only too well how this suppression of class-struggle was brought about and at what cost, racially and socially.

Reich placed his medical, psychiatric and political analysis within this world of rising fascism - rising Black and Red fascism, as he later put it - which was also a world where class-differences became the sharpest. Hence, it was not strange - for Reich - that, here and there, an individual steals, or that, here and there, workers strike; strange - for Reich - was simply that everyone who is hungry does not systematically steal whatever they can, wherever they are; or that workers, everywhere where they have organized themselves, do not systematically strike and make such strikes the basis of a permanent combat in their everyday lives against the social regime that enslaves their libido as Labour. It is from this very perspective that one must reach for the critical question he posed - why do workers, marginals, the oppressed and so on, desire fascism as if fascism were their very salvation? You see, fascism may well constitute an historical reaction, a condensate of reactionary and devolving tendencies - yet, it is neither the defender of the bourgeoisie, nor the friend of any other separate class, including the classical proletariat, the working class so-to-speak. Yet members of all classes - bourgeois no less than lumpen, petty bourgeois and just as easily proletarian - join in these plebeian and populist movements that are fascist. Why do people desire further oppression and subjugation - why do they desire the worst and thus choose fascism?

In posing this essential question, Reich was also trying to find an answer to an historical event of great importance in our recent History, the process that led to Nazism having attained power in Germany. Here was a country where the Communist party - a Stalinist organization - and other social democrats formed powerful mass organizations, large parties with affected and strong union centrals. So, then, why was it that when Hitler began his veritable assault to take over State power in Germany, these powerful mass organizations crumbled like so many houses of cards? We know how Stalin lied - to his own people and the rest of the world - when he claimed that fascism would never be able to succeed; and we know how, in a secret protocol with Hitler, he carved up Poland; how fascism passed, went ahead and succeeded - so completely that it grew inside the very institutions of bolshevik Russia!

But in trying to find an answer to his own critical question - why do the masses desire fascism? - Reich takes on an entirely different line of reasoning than the one which inspired the question itself.

Reich, in fact, ends up by telling us that fascism is possible because there is a particular type of dynamics to ideology. Unfortunately, this immediately places the question on the terrain of Marxism - for ideology is, in Marxist terms, a social superstructure. But if there were an internal dynamics to the superstructure of thoughts and affects, or - to use Reich's own expression - to the materialization of ideology, this would mean that the superstructure could no longer be regarded as merely the reflection of the infrastructure or its determination. This is what Reich was aiming at - getting this entire problematics detached from the rigid structural

scheme of Marxism. But, as we shall soon realize, this was far from being enough to accomplish the task at hand.

You see, by infrastructure, Marx meant the unity formed by the Mode and Relations of Production of a particular social formation. As Leninism made a battlehorse of it, the infrastructure was viewed as being all determinant of the superstructure, with the latter being but a mere reflection of the former. However, for Reich, there simply was no way that such reductionism could make sense - people make choices at all moments of their lives, and their choices are not always intelligent, or 'rational' as he would say. Moreover, these choices are based in affects, desires or sentiments that often do not coincide with one's best interests, or with one's rank and position in the rat race. Hence Reich sought to base the critical contribution of his thought to the problem at hand, upon the idea that his concept of sexual economy - strictly defined by the economic standpoint of psychoanalysis - holds the very dynamics of the superstructure, as the latter is conditioned by a political economy that is defined, in turn, as the dynamics of the infrastructure.

Now, I think that what is at stake here is not so much Reich's definition of sexual economy, as his dualistic view of the linkage between the two economies, sexual and political, irrational and rational. We can perfectly well define sexual or libidinal economy as the mode of regulation of unconscious biological energy, where the factors entering into composing whatever is the energy regime, are biological, social and psychological. Yet, when we connect the two economies, the dialectical scheme still forces us to see the object and the source of reason in the notion of a political economy, and the subject and all factors of irrationality in 'our' notion of sexual economy.

Moreover, it might well appear in capitalism that either the objectivity of money or the subjectivity of greed are the dominant and motor forces of our society. Yet, it is not true that savage or nomadic societies are conditioned by a political economy, whether State-based or commodity-based. It is not even a given that their systems of sign production or warfare ever constituted an economy rather than, as Artaud and Bataille saw it, an excess.

Yet, the dialectical Marxist scheme further fitted in with Reich's analytical investigation because this duality of economies could be seen as a duplication of a duality of biological and unconscious drives. As he postulates in Character Analysis, the two fundamental impulses are those of eating and sexuality, with the latter having the characteristic that it alone is a drive subject to psychosomatic repression, or what Reich called sexual repression. When I speak here of repression, I use it as Deleuze and Guattari did back in 1972, in the French sense of 'refouler', which - more correctly translated - means to 'draw back in' the impulse, to internalize it. In proposing such a duality, Reich effectively subscribed to the dialectical materialist and historical materialist worldview, what one can call dualistic Marxist thought. The basis for political economy and its unwavering rational development of the forces and relations of commodity-production was this

irrepressible instinct of hunger (greed could even be seen as merely its spiritualization) and libidinal economy was thereby destined, by the nature of its own dynamics, to merely double up the rationally produced object with the irrationality of dreams, desires, affects. A fundamental dualistic distinction between object and subject is repeated across the registers, as between the rational and the irrational, the commodity and its thought, a political and a libidinal economies.

In this scheme, then, sexual economy figures merely as the negative of reality. Its dynamics are seized only as the image of political economy. This dualistic approach is a way of thinking about these social and sexual problems which can be traced back to Marx and must most definitely be abandoned by any microfunctionalist thought.

Why is this so? First off, because, analytically speaking, sexual economy or libidinal economy cannot be seen as ultimately dependent upon a particular form of instinctual satisfaction; neither one that reduces sexuality to reproduction, nor one that reduces it to a biological model of pleasure, or a type of sexuality, as Reich did with respect to genitality. Secondly, because we barely understand the energetic nature of sexuality. We know that it cannot, in any way, be reduced to Human Sex, to human reproduction, or the molar divisions of sexes, any more than it can be reduced to genitality or seated in one organ, the genitals or any other. In fact, what Deleuze and Guattari teach us is that if we seek to understand the nature of sexuality, of its couplings and connections, of its communications and enjoyments, we must concern ourselves not with modes of sexuality, or sexual practices, but with the molecular interactions, the world of events and singularities, the world of energy and its biological and psychosomatic syntheses.

The entire activity of living systems is composed of singularities or micro- events. And the entirety of the energy regimes - of the libido or orgone - responsible for the pulsatory functioning of cells, organs and organisms is made manifest at a molecular level by these singularities. All allosteric processes of catalysis constitute such singularities. To understand the molecular world of the microcosmos, to grasp the very sense of energy regimes in biological arrangements, we must bring in concepts from other research disciplines - such as microscopic cybernetics, which addresses the existence of an ordered microfunctionality underlying all micro or molecular biology. I, for one, am convinced that one day we will come to understand that these singularities are but exact energy functions - and behind molecular biology we will find a microenergetics of the living. But since we cannot go that far in our present thinking of these problems, we should simply retain that the energetic nature of sexuality naturally qualifies the latter as a molecular activity.

If we thus refuse to understand sexual economy as merely the game of Human Sex and Reproduction, we also become forced to refuse the Marxist-Reichian linkage between sexual and political economies. In this respect, we should listen to what Deleuze had to say about Guattari's analytical approach to this problem: if we must

consider two economies, one political and the other sexual, it is not because they are two different economies that differ in nature; but because they are two regimes of the same economy. The two economies share in fact the same nature, for there is only one production, at one time social and desiring, collective and libidinal. What differs between the two economies is simply their regime. The energy is the same - libido or orgone - but, in the politico-economic regime, its flow is subject to the logic of large ensembles, whereas in the sexual-economic regime it is permitted to follow its own microfunctionalist logic. Desire is not a superstructure - desire is what moves a social infrastructure when desire subjects itself to the logicality of a social order.

Deleuze and Guattari pursued this insight by relating it to Riemann's theory of multiplicities. They proposed that there are two very different types of multiplicities in nature: discrete multiplicities which are infinitesimally divisible and of a quantitative nature; and continuous multiplicities of a qualitative nature that cannot be divided without changing their nature.

Following Bergson, Deleuze and Guattari argue that the multiplicities which constitute the object of science are essentially multiplicities of extension susceptible of being described by structural homogeneities. Division, measurement by an external unit and homogeneity are the essential properties of quantitative or discrete multiplicities. Conversely, if you divide a continuous multiplicity, you end up - not with the same qualitative elements, but with elements that have changed in nature. They are, therefore, heterogenous multiplicities that cannot be reduced by equalization or to homogeneity.

Bergson argued that Space may in fact form a natural multiplicity in extension - the basis for all discrete multiplicities; but that Time, in contrast - in its quality of Duration or Time of the living - could never or should never be reduced to a quantitative multiplicity, never be measured. Because Time, Time of the living, is - by dint of Nature - a continuous multiplicity. Hence, Bergson criticized - not so much Einstein himself for having invented the physical fiction of a Spacetime that spatializes Time - but his followers for having believed that Time really was flattened onto a spatial multiplicity, that Time could be treated as a multiplicity in extension, as a quantitative multiplicity, and that its direction was not inexorable and universal. Space alone is quantitative, and Time alone qualitative - that is Bergson's critical argument against the scientific treatment of Time.

The scientific approach should be compensated by the analytical approach where any real or actual ensemble always forms a mixed reality, a composite that must be dissociated in its two major tendencies, one corresponding to its quantitative multiplicities, and the other to its qualitative multiplicities. The fundamental approach is thus to divide the mixed in accordance with the difference in nature between the two types of multiplicities.

Why then can we not assimilate the object to Space and the subject to Time, in a dialectical fashion? First because these two tendencies in multiplicity do not constitute a dualism. They interpenetrate and coexist in every element of the Real. Together they form an assemblage, and it is the regimes of such assemblages that in turn can obey either the logic of the large ensembles or the logic of the microfunction. Statistical ensembles themselves are of different orders of degree - they may be organic ensembles (organisms), technical machines, social machines. All large ensembles, all molar machines present us with forms of organization - social, technical, organismic - that may be said to follow the logic of the mass; these ensembles are essentially ruled by inertia - the inertia of numbers, the inertia of mass, the inertia of the equipment, including one's genes. A mass behaviour can always be patterned and brought back to some standard of homogeneity. Essentially, all molar machines are statistical ensembles.

The domain of singularities is, however, beyond stochastics. It may even be that the modern failure of quantum mechanics stems from this stubbornness in using stochastic tools to understand the singular, the actual microfunctions associated with wave energy. At any rate, with stochastic tools we cannot understand the singularities of Life, how Life works, how it presents us with micromachines whose structure, form and formation are not separable from their function - and whose energy is likely to be massfree, devoid of inertial effects. Everywhere in a large ensemble where one seizes a breach, a rupture, and something happens along a line of escape that rids itself of the compulsory rules that uniformalize behaviour, a singularity has erupted. So, much like Bergson's distinction between macrocosmos and microcosmos as scopes or orders that coexist within the same and single reality, political and libidinal economies should be considered as but the two regimes, the two orders of energy flow that 'scope' the same energetic, affective and intensive reality. At the limit, one may well come to discern how statistical aggregates differ from molecular assemblages, how molar machines order their syntheses of production in the form of a biosocial organism, an organogram, whereas molecular machines order their syntheses on the basis of continuity, difference in nature and locality - the properties of a diagram.

To follow the thought of Deleuze and Guattari on this question, then, we must consider it one step further: for they also propose that not only are the two economies merely two regimes of the same economy, but also that, at the limit, libidinal economy itself emerges as what in fact limits or serves as boundary to every statistical ensemble, every social and technical machine. So we are simultaneously confronted with having to think sexual economy not as the subjective reflection of an object rationally produced by the work of History (or of Spirit), and having to think it as the subjectivity of every political economy - its limit, beyond which a change in the regime of energy occurs. Libidinal economy is neither the irrational that accompanies every object, nor the subject of any political economy. It is rather what every political economy subjects. As economy of flows, signs (including money) and objects, it is political economy which is unconsciously libidinal and represses its very limit. The crystallization of Oedipus,

of an Oedipal senti-mentality - what Reich used to call the 'character-reaction basis' - takes on the form of desire that desires its own repression, for it is this which constitutes the sine qua non of every political economy. In other words - when Reich asked how it was possible that masses of human beings were led to desire fascism, he was seeking an answer that went beyond the failed Marxist explanation, even if it remained bound by the structure of the latter. Indeed, he did not answer that 'the masses were coerced to accept fascism', or that 'the masses in fact wanted revolution but their class-interests could not be made victorious because their superstructure, the materialization of the correct ideology, was not strong enough'. No, Reich had an aversion for all these little explanations that only explain things away. He wanted, rather, to uncover the mechanisms by means of which repression of sexual economy maintains, produces and reproduces the capitalist model of political economy - and in doing so, he wanted to find out how desire can be led to desire its own repression. The masses were not obliged or forced to turn to fascism. People are not constrained to give reality to sexual repression. Undoubtedly society deploys a realm of coercion and enforcement, but when social structures break down - what then? What coerces them to repeat the past, ever more ferociously and with greater barbarity?

Who can, for example, begin to explain and describe the desire for the State and a Strong Man that appeared in the Russian Revolution even before the Bolsheviks took power? That very desire that led to the destruction of the revolution itself from within - who can explain it in terms of coercion? Were Lenin, Trotsky, Stalin ever coerced to create a new party-police machine, a new Gulag?

Obviously, in the failure of revolutions as much as in the triumph of fascism, we are confronted with a desire that turns on itself. The question hardly concerns sublimation of drives, as Freud also dialectically imagined. Freud always held that the libido could not directly invest society or the social field, that it could only do so indirectly, mediated both by repression and sublimation. We know how Reich remained prisoner of these concepts - as they were essentially compatible with the view that desire was merely superstructural. And the entire problematics is of interest to us because, ultimately, neither Freud nor Reich had a complete understanding of the transformations undergone by the unconscious energy of the living. And, without wanting to go into what Deleuze and Guattari called the "three passive syntheses of desire", I will simply point out that the first level of these syntheses addresses the primary characteristics of Life or the living, as the level of connection between a flow and a 'partial object'. Their very discourse throws us back to the early days of psychoanalysis, before the somatic complex of Oedipus intruded via auto-analysis. For Reich, the essence of the analytical method lay in understanding - dynamically and economically - the energetic reality of the so-called 'partial tendencies' or 'partial impulses' or 'partial objects' of the unconscious. Freud, who discovered their analytical concept, would finish his days saying that there are no 'partial objects' as such, only substitutes for complete objects - the figures of the father, the mother - in the unconscious, to the point where the figure of a general always gives back to the father, that of a nurse back to the mother, and

so on. Yet, these 'partial objects' are precisely, in an analytic sense, the molecular elements involved in the production of a thought, an action, a desire, an affect. They are hardly reducible to a logic of complete objects. Neither persons nor commodities, any more than pleasures, can in fact be said to be objects of desire.

Rather, it is the logic of complete objects, the logic of Oedipus, which prolongs the necessary illusion of an unbridgeable duality between sexual and political economies; and it is this very dualism that is reflected and further reduced to psychoanalysis and capitalism, sex and money, family and job. This is clearly how the molar scope relates the two economies. It is in the essence of the modern large ensembles that everywhere desire be split into two, that the libido be subject to a fundamental cut - as reflections of property, private property and propriety: the libido is split into Labour, as the defined activity of production (what Ricardo and Marx discovered as the abstract activity of social production), and into familial desire, Oedipus, as the defined activity of biological reproduction in the social context of the privatized family - and where Freud claimed he discovered the libido as the abstract energy of sexuality. It is the fiction of private property that anchors both sides of the split into the public and the private persona - the fiction that tells the labourer that he or she has the property of his or her labour force to freely sell in the capitalist market, and the fiction that considers man and woman as married by a contract whereby they exchange ownership of each other's genitals. Adam Smith and Kant. The split constitutes therefore a double movement of privatization: one occurring within the sphere of the family, leisure-time and 'entertainment', and the other within the sphere of 'the world where you live and work', the factory, the school, the office, the agency, and so on.

Shirking off this illusion of two economies is therefore the first act that can rupture the double-pincer which History has placed all around every one of us.

Deleuze and Guattari's concept of a libidinal economy that serves as limit to every political economy, that constitutes an absolute subjectivity beyond every political economy, raises - from the depths of thought - the problem of the limitations of culture, specifically of historical culture, or what Castaneda has more recently described as the problem of the 'Human Form'. Others, such as Nietzsche's sister, have done all the harm they could with the notion that what would overcome this Human Form was necessarily the SuperMan. From the NSDAP to Hollywood, we know what has become of SuperMan. Every idiotic form of exact humanization of things has had its turn at defining what is Super about Man. What Nietzsche really had in mind is something much less grandiose and far more subtle. He was thinking about what might possibly overcome this Human Form, and this could only be the desire to reach for that which is 'overhuman', not supermanly. For the overhuman is that which makes us exist, it is the whole of the inhuman, subhuman and superhuman worlds that inhabit our body, our being and our mind, that insist like so many partial objects behind that which we call History.

Funny enough - or not funny at all - is the fact that Reich's understanding also suffered a similar denaturation at the hands of those that call themselves Reichian. Reich himself became sorely aware, in his days in America, of the insufficiency of the responses he had given to the political question of fascism, in those days when he had remained a consistent Freudo-Marxist. None of the self-styled Reichian currents of today has the least criticism of those very responses Reich gave to the problems of fascism, sexual economy or desire. None have tried to answer these questions anew by bringing in new perspectives. Instead there is this closure of thought, and also this amalgamation where elements of Reich's late microfunctionalist thought are mixed and confused with elements of his psychoanalytical and dialectical period. Yet, I contend, between these two periods of his thought there is a noticeable shift in the nature of the method, an absolute break whose exploration is more than ever required, if we are to understand, at last, how libidinal economy is a matter of the regime of the unconscious reactions that determine our affects, our thoughts, our emotions and actions, and the History that they - now inevitably - compose, including the History of fascism and its return.

How, then, did the masses desire fascism, and how does desire desire its own repression? Posing the question properly is the real beginning to finding a valid solution to the problem: the product of History is not so much the commodity as its logic of reproduction, that very Spirit that places itself and its reactive values above Life. For as long as human values that we deem to be superior to Life are made to rule over our lives, are desired, all that History will leave us is its unconscious repetition, a pointless Survival. If we accept the proposed split between the two economies then everything follows: the reduction of all creativity to Labour and the reduction of sexuality to a model of reproduction that even if it does not reproduce the species still reproduces the principle of a family. The reduction, in sum, of Life to Survival, as an organized and premeditated reality. Likewise, the moment we seize the unity of the two economies, their identity in nature and difference in regime, we begin to understand that there is only one reality which, reactively or actively, we are existentially compelled to have to produce.

The question of fascism is, however, more complicated still than is the problem of political economy - than is the process whereby we become ready to receive all forms of subjugation, once we accept our desire to be split and reduced to Labour and Oedipus. For fascism is a sliding rule - an escape from a line of escape - more than it is just the rule of the Structure; it is an hybrid State, a gigantic corporation, a Jacobin Party-Police machine and a whole machinery of war engaged in self-abolition. It is part of a suicidary line, a desire to die and destroy all in the passage that comes from a bitter realization of the hollowness of all those human values we placed upon Life, including the Proletariat, the Messiah, Love and Peace, and so on. So, the reason why those who are hungry do not always steal or rebel is that they are afraid of themselves, afraid of their desire and of having to take responsibility for that desire without thereby, in turn, becoming fascists, and coming to hate Life so much that all becomes hateful. And in being thus afraid of themselves, they also become guilty of a cowardice towards Life - and proceed to

get their cheap kicks, by being lost in the anonymous crowd and by bandying about and bullying those who are different because they feel, perceive and think differently. Fascism is a form of social equalization - like death, all are equal before it.

It is indeed better that, in such a base state of Spirit, the masses choose not to make a revolution, for fascism is precisely the outcome when such happens in just these states of mind or desire - and instead of desiring their liberation and that of Life on this planet, the masses end up only too often by desiring a greater repression of sexuality, thought, action and desire. It is always on the way to change things for the better that the worst happens. And when desire is denied the conditions for its open development, it backfires to choke all light out of the living. Fascism, then, is just the modern form that the Historically-produced death-instinct takes. There is where its banality belies its very nature and origin. It is the Historical intervention of Death upon a biological, human and social Life completely separated from itself, unable to self-regulate and thus assume the mastery of its destiny.

We could bring back Nietzsche - in the spirit of Deleuze and Guattari's argument - to suggest that the question of the two economies, or the two regimes of desire is, after all, simply the question of the two qualities of the will that produces the world, macro and micro: a will to deny Life, with all its stages - negative, reactive and universal - and a will to affirm and double-affirm Life; a will *for* power - where power is conceived as a potentate (Spinoza's *Potestas* as Deleuze taught it) - and a will *to* power, where power is a 'puissance', a *Potentia*, a potentiality of becoming that alone can map its actualization. Fascism, then, functions like a cure for *Potestas* that turns out to be worse than the supposed disease of *Potentia*.

To conclude: against the Marxist discourse - including Freudo-Marxists - we should understand how the connection between desire and society occurs directly at the level of the infrastructure - rather than being flattened onto the dualism of infra and suprastructures. This is the analytical displacement that Deleuze and Guattari suggest one must take, if one is to grasp the deep connection and difference between the two economies. They work with the same energy, with the same unconscious, and constitute the same reality, at once collective and libidinal - but, in one case, all flows are subjected to the politics of State, Capital, War, Party, Family, Civilization, Globalization, Humanity, while, in the other, it is these institutions and values, or their very deconstruction, which become subject to the limit subjectivity, to the overhumanity that may yet overtake us to at last make Life on this planet, even if it be for a mere historical moment, into the sole master of its own destiny. But this is just a potentiality.