

Was Lenin Deleuzo-Guattarian?

Urstaat and Becoming-Revolutionary

by

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I think Deleuze and Guattari's theoretical contribution to Marxism is their analysis of the State. Their concept of the Urstaat challenges traditional Marxist narratives, influenced by Engels, by arguing that the State does not emerge progressively from economic development but exists as a universal apparatus of capture, structuring all social formations. Their discussion of the Urstaat can be seen as both a homage to Lenin's State and Revolution and a radical innovation that reconfigures the Marxist theory of the State. Like Lenin, Deleuze and Guattari recognize that the State is not a neutral apparatus but an instrument of domination that perpetuates class hierarchies. Lenin famously argued that the proletarian revolution must dismantle the bourgeois state apparatus, replacing it with a dictatorship of the proletariat as a transitional form before the eventual withering away of the State under communism. However, Deleuze and Guattari depart from Lenin's framework by rejecting the idea that the State emerges historically as a necessary outcome of economic development. Instead, they argue that the Urstaat exists as a universal organizing principle that captures and restructures social formations across different historical periods. For them, the State is not a secondary effect of class struggle but a pre-existing mechanism that ensures the subjugation of productive forces. This challenges Lenin's assumption that the proletarian State could be a temporary means to overcome class domination. Deleuze and Guattari suggest that all state formations, including socialist ones, risk perpetuating the very mechanisms of control they seek to abolish. Their critique also expands on Lenin's concerns by incorporating anthropological and geopolitical analyses, particularly through their engagement with Wittfogel's Oriental Despotism. By examining the persistence of despotic state structures across different historical and economic contexts, they argue that even the most revolutionary state formations may still operate within the axiomatic of the Urstaat, reinforcing hierarchical power rather than dismantling it. This innovation transforms Lenin's analysis by moving beyond the question of state seizure toward an understanding of becoming-revolutionary as a means of escaping capture altogether. Rather than seeing the State as a byproduct of class struggle, they position it as a pre-existing force that overcodes and territorializes societies, ensuring their subordination to centralized power. This reconfiguration of state theory critiques historical materialism's evolutionary assumptions and offers an alternative understanding of power, particularly under capitalism. Building on Pierre Clastres' critique of the State, Deleuze and Guattari argue that even so-called primitive societies are not pre-state formations but actively resist state capture. Their discussion of the Asiatic Mode of Production—developed through Wittfogel's analysis of hydraulic societies—further illustrates how despotic states did not emerge from economic necessity but rather as pre-existing structures that maintain themselves through control over infrastructure and labour. Deleuze and Guattari extend Wittfogel's critique to argue that the modern capitalist State inherits these despotic features, functioning as an apparatus that perpetuates centralized control while adapting to different socio-economic conditions. Even within capitalist development, remnants of the Urstaat persist, demonstrating that state power is not overcome but reconfigured. This talk will also explore the political implications of the Urstaat for revolutionary movements. Deleuze and Guattari reject traditional Leftist strategies focused on seizing state power. Instead, they advocate becoming-revolutionary, a minoritarian, planetary politics that escapes state capture rather than reinforcing it. By rethinking revolution beyond the Party and the proletarian State, their work offers an alternative to orthodox Marxist-Leninist (or Stalinist) frameworks, challenging how we conceptualize political struggle in global capitalism today.