

JĘDRZEJ BRZEZIŃSKI

## Anti-Enclosures and Nomadic Habits: Towards a Communist Reading of Deleuzoguattarian Nomadology

The paper has several objectives linked to Deleuzoguattarian nomadology. After a brief reconstruction of the concept, it proposes a selective reading oriented towards communist, autonomist and posthumanist tropes. In this reading, nomadism is understood above all as a movement of countering or resisting enclosures and sustaining vital relations with broadly understood commons. It also critiques certain tendencies, present in Deleuze and Guattari, which make such reading unobvious: abstraction, deterritorialization and postmodern Nietzscheanism. The second part of the article is an inquiry on habits, still from a Deleuzoguattarian perspective. It contests the traditional story about private property as a condition of the development of good habits and reveals an array of 'nomadic habits' outside of sedentary, bourgeois and capitalist models of social reproduction. It argues that such understood habits can be seen as the anthropological basis of commoning.

**Keywords:** Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, nomadism, commons, habit

The philosophical career of the concept of *nomadism* seems to be largely prompted by the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze — both alone and with Félix Guattari. This concept shows capacity to exceed the specialized philosophical field, all the while proving that it is driven by tensions if not paradoxes. Emblematising mobility, wandering and exploration, it also stands for — as authors often repeat — resistance to change, remaining within territories, the art of waiting, even absolute stillness. Characterized through a series of oppositions (smooth-striated, war machine-state, etc.) nomads subvert all the binary dichotomies foundational for Western ‘royal science’. In my article I will reconstruct the main points of the Deleuzoguattarian understanding of nomadism and ‘nomadic distributions’. Despite scattered references to *actual nomads* (like in Hubac, Joset or Clastres) we will notice that authors’ nomadology remains — for the better or worse — mainly a philosophical endeavor: instead of following the practices of nomadic peoples, it rather chooses to program the abstract machines in their deterritorializing movement of initiating new assemblages and new lines of flight. As such it still constitutes a complex problematic field, rich in political, ethical and practical consequences, which I will try to reconstruct in this article. Having done that, I conclude that there are two tendencies in Deleuzoguattarian nomadology, at least: one which I will call postmodern and one which I will call posthuman. And while the former focuses on following the absolute speed of intensities and differences, the latter tends to look for ways and practices that allow nomads to remain in possibly autonomous and sustainable relations with their changing territories — best understood as *commons* (see for instance Ruivenkamp and Hilton 2017, De Angelis 2017). I believe that the posthuman and communist perspectives remain closely linked — jointly proving that neither multiplicity nor survival are thinkable outside of what is ‘common’. The relationship of Deleuze and Guattari to the communist (and Marxist) tradition — of which commonism is an actualized, perhaps less ‘molar’ version — has already inspired many insightful studies (see for instance Thoburn 2003, Sibertin-Blanc 2016). Instead of repeating their findings, I will rather aim to see what communist tropes, suggestions, and perspectives can be found in the nomadological project. Furthermore, I will argue that what is much more urgent and much more promising today, rather than praising the contestatory powers of generalized deterritorialization, is to think nomadic territories as commons<sup>1</sup>. Yet, these territories are vanishing, they’re being sold out, enc-

---

1 Those researching commons see it very clearly: “The creation of new

losed by material and immaterial walls, fall prey to (so-called primitive) accumulation or simply become unlivable (Weizman and Sheikh 2015, Sheller 2018). But perhaps, once *habitats* lost, something to count on are *habits*? Here again, Deleuzoguattarian nomads, at first glance, seem to contradict anything habitual. But doesn't a cursory insight into nomadic practices already reveal a multitude of sedimented experiences, material knowledges, memories of collective struggles, rituals, ways of being together, dancing, dressing, etc.? In our societies of control and new enclosures, nomads' ability to move together with their territories proves to be perhaps their most prodigious feature.

### From nomadic distributions to minoritarian war machine

The notion of nomadism, or more exactly — of nomadic distributions — appears in Deleuze's seminal work — *Difference and Repetition*. Distributions and hierarchizations are components of judgment — thought, against Kant, as a material and empirical procedure. Deleuze's book can be read as, among many other things, his critique of idealism and dialectics, and the formulation of his own thinking beyond structuralism. What is at stake in the book is to formulate the Deleuzian philosophy of difference — understood not negatively and abstractly, as an effect of comparison of two preexisting entities, but — after Bergson — positively and productively, as a primal metaphysical element, generative of the multiplicity of ever-changing being. Ontology here is univocal, which means flat, with only local hierarchies, resulting from different degrees of intensity. Deleuze brings Duns Scotus and Spinoza together with Artaud, claiming that “Univocal Being is at one and the same time nomadic distribution and crowned anarchy” (Deleuze 1994, 37). Nomadic distributions are effectuated without any superior or transcendental rule: their principle remains inherent to them. They could be called *distributions from below* or, in Deleuze's concise formulation, dis-

Nomadic distributions are effectuated without any superior or transcendental rule: their principle remains inherent to them. They could be called distributions from below or, in Deleuze's concise formulation, distributions “without property, enclosure or measure.”

---

social relationships takes place in specific physical locations; often these are created intentionally by those in the movements, for example the recuperation of land upon which to grow crops and build homes, the recuperation of workplaces, and even the weekly assembly meeting on the same street corner, standing in a circle. The use of space as a place within which new relationships are constructed is something that often has been reflected upon. These spaces are simultaneously sites of protest and creation: for example, piquetes are open to assemblies and have become spaces of mutual support where people can get food and medical support” (Sitrin 2012).

tributions “without property, enclosure or measure” (Deleuze 1994, 36). Already this early — at once brief and imperative — statement of Deleuze should draw the attention of all the readers interested in Deleuzian mobile commons, precisely because of its definition of nomadic distributions as *anti-enclosures*, antagonistic to any regime of property.

Speaking about the etymology of the ‘nomad’ Deleuze refers to the assessments of the French linguist Emmanuel Laroche, tracing it back to the Greek root *nem*, meaning ‘pasturing livestock’. Laroche observes that the term is older than the agrarian reforms of Solon, and only since them did the partition and allocation of pastures come into question. Thus *nomos*, in its original meaning, refers not to a division of the land, but to a free distribution of animals themselves, within open and potentially limitless spaces, in view of their favorable coexistence. “To fill a space, to be distributed within it, is very different from distributing the space” (Deleuze 1994, 36) (obviously, Deleuze’s understanding of the notions of territory and *nomos* can be seen as going exactly against the sovereigntist, legalist and Eurocentric reading of Carl Schmitt: see for instance Moll 2020). Interestingly, Deleuze observes a certain connection between the historical models of food production and our different epistemological dispositions — the tendency to think in terms of dualism, he says, may have something to do with the agrarian revolution and the process of delimiting arable fields. Nomadic thinking — consequently — would be the one that avoids forms of identity, duality, and division. Correspondingly, in *What is Philosophy?* the authors point to Immanuel Kant, who in the Preface to his First Critique scorned a certain anti-rationalist barbarism, comparing its representatives to “a kind of nomads who abhor all permanent cultivation of the soil” (Kant 1998, 99). Deleuze’s thought or, better, his *nomadic science* — exactly against that of the great ‘striator’ from Koenigsberg — would rather follow those tribesmen, artisans and other practitioners of commons who look for non-possessive forms of reproduction.

“Treatise on Nomadology” from *A Thousand Plateaus* has to be seen as the main contribution of this duo to the theme in question. Several nomadic examples are mentioned — Bedouins, leopard-men, children’s gangs from Bogota, city proletariat<sup>2</sup>, nomads of the sea and more, whom

---

2 “Even Marx defines the proletariat not only as alienated (labor) but as deterritorialized. The proletariat, in this second perspective, appears as the heir to the nomad in the Western world. Not only did many anarchists invoke nomadic themes originating in the East, but the bourgeoisie above all were quick to equate proletarians and nomads, comparing Paris to a city haunted by nomads” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 558).

the authors follow, however loosely. The date in the title of this plateau — 1227 — refers to the death of Genghis Kahn — a point of ‘highest intensity’ of the nomadic Mongol Empire. The identification of nomadism with a ‘war machine’, analysis of which would need a separate paper, constitutes a pervasive trope of the text. The war machine (examples of which can be nomadic Mongols, but also the army of Moses, held captive by the striated space of the Egyptian state and resorting to violence to defend their nomadic venture) materializes the conflictual contents of nomadism — opposed to sedentary, striated spaces and the State (still the State is prone to recapture the violence of the war machine for its own goals and often does this). In fact, the notion of the war machine seems to be built on a certain (anti-Hegelian) dialectics (or *dialectics outside of dialectics*, as Małgorzata Kowalska put it, 2000). The war machine, first freely roaming through the smooth spaces, becomes captured by the State to serve its purposes and only then correlates with war as its object. This process — taking today a globalized, totalized and indeed fascist form — makes the war machine “grow stronger and stronger” resulting in a “highly discouraging” situation (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 422). Yet — the authors write:

(...) the very conditions that make the State or World war machine possible, in other words, constant capital (resources and equipment) and human variable capital, continually recreate unexpected possibilities for counterattack, unforeseen initiatives determining revolutionary, popular, minority, mutant machines. (...) However, in conformity with the essence, the nomads do not hold the secret: an “ideological,” scientific, or artistic movement can be a potential war machine, to the precise extent to which it draws, in relation to a *phylum*, a plane of consistency, a creative line of flight, a smooth space of displacement. It is not the nomad who defines this constellation of characteristics; it is this constellation that defines the nomad, and at the same time the essence of the war machine (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 422).

This minoritarian transformation of the war machine allows it to remain active within the spaces of the globalized axiomatics of capital accumulation and among the apparatuses of capture, all the while sustaining the fundamental relation with its proper, nomadic object: “not war but the drawing of a creative line of flight, the composition of a smooth space and of the movement of people in that space” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 422).

## Pierre Clastres, the nomos of the equal and a Deleuzoguattarian forest predicament

While opposing nomads and the State, Deleuze and Guattari pay an homage to Pierre Clastres, author of *Society Against the State* from 1974. Clastres describes a curious cleavage between two different South-American Indian cultures — on the one hand multiple tribes from the Andean plateaus, where emerged a “hierarchical authority, the power relation, the subjugation of men — in a word, the State” (Clastres 1989, 203) — on the other — so-called primitive or archaic — a number of tribes of Amazonian forest, mostly Guayaki and Tupi-Guarani, who — for reasons which Clastres does not decide to precisely determine — do not form a state. It doesn't mean that they live without any leadership — they do choose their chief, but on the basis of the prestige only, connected to his oratory talents and exceptional generosity, proved by multiple presents and services given to the members of the tribe. Clastres concludes that in stateless societies power and exchange are two opposed forces — and while exchange is the glue of the social fabric, power, even if weak, puts the chief in an external, somewhat suspicious position. The main law observed by these tribes (although often at least partially sedentary) is the law of the equality of the members of the tribe — which also mobilizes violence against those who want to step against it. From this point of view their ‘archaism’ can also denote the actual refusal to engage in ‘modern’, i.e. profit oriented, inegalitarian economy of agriculture.

What is perhaps worth noting is that despite their predilection for rhizomatic, intensive multitudes, Deleuze and Guattari do not hold forests in very high regards. “Forest, with its gravitational verticals” is qualified as a striated space (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 324) and mostly a counterpart to “agriculture, with its grids and generalized parallels” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 324). The authors write: “We're tired of trees. We should stop believing in trees, roots and radicals” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 15). Besides, forests appear in *A Thousand Plateaus* mostly in the context of different approaches to deforestation, characterizing the difference between the Eastern and Western early economies. Notably more interested in oppositions like ‘smooth-striated’ or ‘rhizomatic-arborescent’ than in a historical silvology, the authors skip over the role of forest environments for the stateless life (protection, provisions, magic) (see for instance Scott 2009) — the role which in most cases indeed belongs to the past, eradicated by the joint forces of the capital and the state. This dislike of forests seems to be aligned with the rejection of the arborescent model of thought (transcendental law, hier-

archy, centeredness, hegemony) in favor of the rhizomatic one (nomadic distributions). But doesn't any forest, understood as deep, necessary and vital interdependence of under- and overground systems, prove that this division is extremely binary and abstract? Sadly, for although certainly not smooth, but definitely rhizomatic and haptic, forests can nurture significant nomadic potentialities. If only for the reason that they escape vision and provide favourable conditions for becoming imperceptible, today still much more than all the watched-over deserts and seas. They can also be seen as a kind of *common* — as is shown in countless studies (Shiva 1989, Federici 2019, Kohn 2013, Clark and Page 2022, and many others). Moreover, the recent migrant struggles for passage through the eastern border of Poland, notably through Puszcza Białowieska, clearly show that still today forests can provide means of defense and invisibility for those who wish to cross them (Oliphant 2021), casting a protective shadow on the practices of “temporary mobile commoning” among migrants themselves, or between migrants and activists:

Despite their partial political invisibility, migrants' spatial disobediences are not mere ephemeral movements; they also produce spaces of liveability and collective struggles, and these experiences are sedimented over time, even if their actual existence is fleeting and brief (Tazzioli 2019).

### Nomadic solidarity and 'artisanal' line of flight

Another 'commonist' trope of the plateau can be found in the authors' reference to the medieval Muslim writer Ibn Khaldun and the notion of *assabiyah* — meaning 'group feeling' or collective *esprit de corps*. *Assabiyah*, understood as tribal solidarity and kinship can be seen as an essence of Bedouin social form, which is difficult to sustain after its transformation into a State. Loss of *assabiyah* is the main reason of the decadence and the fall of a State, exposing it to the attacks of the new nomadic war machines from the outside. Much more could be said about this fascinating topic — unfortunately Deleuze and Guattari devote only one footnote to it<sup>3</sup>. Thomas Nail justly picks up this trope to underscore the importance of solidarity and shared experiences in Deleuzoguattarian nomadology:

3 They also seem to commit an honest mistake while identifying *asabiyah* and “*ikhilāt*, from which the Arabic word for socialism is derived” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 555) for, as observes Cédric Molino-Machetto, these two notions are neither synonymous nor genetically connected (Molino-Machetto 2022, 563).

This dislike of forests seems to be aligned with the rejection of the arborescent model of thought (transcendental law, hierarchy, centeredness, hegemony) in favor of the rhizomatic one (nomadic distributions). But doesn't any forest, understood as deep, necessary and vital interdependence of under- and overground systems, prove that this division is extremely binary and abstract?

It would thus be a mistake to understand nomadic solidarity as simply a matter of merely unlimited space, a line of flight from, or internal transformation of state power. Rather, I am arguing, following Khaldun, that Deleuze and Guattari's concept of nomadism is a matter of belonging and unity among heterogeneous relays. It is a form of belonging that does not rely at all on the status or identity of the individual but with their ability to take collective action with others (Nail 2012, 9).

The itinerant work of early modern artisans provides another example of autonomous practices mentioned in this plateau. The authors write: "From depopulation, make a cosmic people; from deterritorialization, a cosmic earth — that is the wish of the artisan-artist, here, there, locally" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 346); or: "The artisan is the itinerant, the ambulant. To follow the flow of matter is to itinerate, to ambulate. It is intuition in action" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 409). Artisans are the ones who own not only a specific set of skills, but also the tools needed to accomplish the work, regardless of its placement. They follow the flows of matter (like wood or ore), interchange movement and stasis, all the while keeping a strong, autonomous position in relation to contractors unable to finish the work if the artisans abscond. It is a matter of "organization" "that separates prospectors, merchants, and artisans, [and] already mutilates artisans in order to make 'workers' of them" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 409). This 'organization', identifiable with capitalist axiomatics, institutes the division of labour, depriving the artisans of their means of production, forcing them to rent their tools, destroying a certain form of life and leading to their deplorable proletarianization<sup>4</sup>. While this process can be described as a progressive destruction of the non-capitalist Outside (in the sense of Mezzadra and Neilson 2019), artisanry, I believe, may still today propose a line of flight from sedentary and capitalistic cooptation, providing ways of subsistence beyond immobilization and subordination. I've pointed out the most important

4 In the context of Polish XVIII century a similar process of instauration of movement control through a series of coercive and penal dispositives, banning the vagabonds, here called the 'loose people', from their sources of subsistence (help in agriculture, practices of usufruct, itinerant small scale trade, etc.) and forcing to contribute in the capitalist industrialization is graphically described in the seminal work of Nina Assorodobraj (Assorodobraj 2020). Processes described here are indeed the examples of relative deterritorialization in action — resembling quite a lot what commonist theorists identify as ever reinstated 'primitive accumulation'. The book also proves that our 'societies of control' have in fact their long and painful prehistory.

commonist tropes of Deleuzoguattarian nomadology: the insistence on political and collective aspects; the Clastrian description of egalitarian, non-state societies; the conception of the nomadic solidarity taken from Ibn-Khaldun; the minoritarian transformation of the war machine; and the praise of artisans as potentially freer producers of value. These motifs join a series of other arguments, formulated by the authors elsewhere, which can be seen as important components of many contemporary theories on the left (micropolitics, anti-fascism, critique of capitalist axiomatics, molecular revolution, Guattarian “three ecologies”, etc.). I believe that they can jointly provide resourceful imports for the researchers of ‘mobile commons’, going much further than the suggestions formulated here. Still, I think that there are at least three problems with the nomadology of Deleuze and Guattari, which I will group under three following notions: abstraction, Nietzscheanism, and deterritorialization. Noticing these problems may help to avoid certain theoretical dead-ends, which are still common even among supposedly leftist commentators (in the Polish context, a stunning and long-lasting academic career of a depoliticized, bluntly deconstructionist “philosophy of difference” can be a good example of that. See for instance: Kujawa 2021).

Still, I think that there are at least three problems with the nomadology of Deleuze and Guattari, which I will group under three following notions: abstraction, Nietzscheanism, and deterritorialization.

### Critique of abstract, immobile or optimistic nomadism

The fragments of the nomadological plateau devoted to artisans, Gothic architecture, smithing, metallurgy, etc. provide a bunch of concrete, practice oriented descriptions of nomadic itineraries<sup>5</sup>. It turns out that itinerant merchants, blacksmiths and artisans can at times be nomads, all the while remaining in resourceful exchange with the villages and towns, even while becoming to a degree sedentary. The above figures are mixtures of nomadic and sedentary features, similar to “a hybrid, an alloy, a twin formation” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 415), blurring what seemed to be organized according to strict (binary) oppositions: nomadic-sedentary, immobile-following flows, smooth-and-striated, etc. But these oppositions tend to come back: smooth constantly mixes up with the striated, all the while remaining — ideally — opposed to it. The authors claim explicitly that “de facto mixes do not preclude a de jure, or abstract, distinction” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 475). This

<sup>5</sup> I am grateful to Piotr Wesołowski and other participants of the Machina Myśli seminar in Wolimierz for the insightful discussion on these topics.

is why also nomads can mix up with migrants, vagabonds, barbarians, blacksmiths, etc. while still constituting a certain ideal type or a pure Idea. A certain *speculative idealism* — to use Thomas Nail's qualification — can be seen in the following fragment in *A Thousand Plateaus* describing the nomadic war machine:

(...) it is still an Idea, and it is necessary to retain the concept of the pure Idea, even though this war machine was realized by the nomads. It is the nomads, rather, who remain an abstraction, an Idea, something real and nonactual, and for several reasons: first, because the elements of nomadism, as we have seen, enter into de facto mixes with elements of migration, itinerancy, and transhumance; this does not affect the purity of the concept, but introduces always mixed objects, or combinations of space and composition, which react back upon the war machine from the beginning (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 420).

But if nomadic thought was supposed to go against transcendental laws, why is it now said to be organized around 'pure Ideas', which are only pure abstractly and de jure? Why talk at all about 'pure' Ideas, 'pure' Outside, etc., if, as we saw, nomads excel rather at impurity, mixing, patch-working? And what about Spinoza's critique of abstraction, as necessarily fictional and imaginary, and its replacement with *common notions* (Deleuze 1988, 44-48)? We could risk the thesis that in these abstract moments Deleuze and Guattari are the farthest from materialist and commonizing direction one would like to find in their nomadology. Thomas Nail develops a similar, although much more complex argument about the Deleuzian tendency towards something which can be called a dematerialized theory of motion. In many places Deleuze notes that nomads can move "while seated" (not unlike himself, this Parisian arm-chair-nomad, who preferred "his own foreign lands" to travels). If it is possible, it is precisely because the 'absolute speed' of movement can best, and in fact only, be achieved through thinking. To reach there, a 'nomadic thought' has to eventually go past all its material actualizations and discover the 'pure Ideas'. Nail observes:

From his first book to his last, Deleuze grants a similar ontological primacy to what he calls "the image of thought". Thought, for Deleuze, following Spinoza, is just one plane of becoming among many, but more importantly, it is also the only plane capable of thinking its own plane and THE plane which is "the base of all planes" (matter, space, time, possibility, etc). (...) Strangely then, Deleuze and Guattari's description of the "infinite movement of thought" that defines philosophical practice must be understood as a kind of pure motion without

matter — an oddly abstract, ideal, and “purely formal motion,” as Marx might say (Nail 2019, 39).

Deleuzoguattarian nomads seem to be often prompted to go in this dematerializing direction. Dematerializing, and in fact immobilizing, as nomads “do not move”. According to Nail such an assessment can be linked to the fact that movement is not the primary feature of Deleuze’s ontology and constantly turns out to be subordinated to “stasis, time, immobile speed, vital force, and other such attributes” (Nail 2019, 38). He adds that Deleuze, together with Whitehead, inherits an outdated Einsteinian paradigm, in which “the universe is absolutely static but internally and spatiotemporally dynamic; that it is immobile but creative and becoming; that it is an ontologically ‘motionless voyage’” (Nail 2019, 40). Finally, Nail points out the privilege the authors ascribe to becoming as intensive, differential process, opposing it to history as extensive and representational (which is related, among other things, to their reading of Toynbee, see Kerslake 2008). Nail quotes Deleuze and Guattari identifying history with the “set of conditions from which one turns away in order to become, that is to say, in order to create something new” (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, 96). One has to agree with their rejection of simplistic or deterministic visions of history, but their rejection of history all together — while still referring to historical events — is much less convincing. Especially “if there is truly an ontological equality of fluxes, then history and matter are fully capable of becoming other than themselves through their *own flux*: motion” (Nail 2019, 40).

A somewhat complementary argument can be found in the weighty critique of Deleuzoguattarian nomadology written by Christopher L. Miller. Just as the authors continually refer to momentous historical events, while “turning away” from history as such, they reject anthropology with its necessarily representational character, but constantly, and quite liberally, reach out for cases from anthropological sources. Subject to the famous critique in *Difference and Repetition*, representation keeps on coming back through the back door — and, to make matters worse, often through documents of colonial origin and orientalizing character. Deleuze and Guattari do not want to “identify a regime or a semiotic system with a people or historical moment”, which makes the status of their anthropological references problematic. They want to define ‘nomad’ as an ‘ideal type’, but still informed by a selection of empirical insights and examples. Their selection, adds Miller, omits some substantial nomadic contradictions, “sanitizing” the source materials in

order to formulate a “happy nomadology” where there is no place for instances of actual violence, precariousness or risk of extinction (the forced sterilization of Roma women, still practiced in the 2010’s Europe is one drastic example of this, see the Center for Reproductive Rights et al. 2003, Kóczé 2011, Sinti 2022. It also shows that struggles over territory start on one’s own body).

Miller also critiques the notion of ‘smooth spaces’, claiming that such a pre-empted notion of space “reflects nostalgia for a world prior to or exempt from the dualisms of the signifying regime” (Miller 1993, 25). Deleuze and Guattari are accused of finding such a world in (or rather project it on) Africa, seen — argues Miller — as an “utopia of undividedness”. “The imagery of nomadology often describes this utopia in terms of ‘empty space,’ which Deleuze and Guattari call ‘smooth space.’ The making-empty of that space is a classic gesture of primitivism” (Miller 1993, 25). He highlights their tendency to immerse in the “changing state of things” instead of “reflecting on the world”, which seems to leave them “literally indifferent to the interiorities within which many people live” (Miller 1993, 21). I think that Deleuze and Guattari would object to such intent being attributed to their text. Lacking ethnographic expertise, I cannot properly weigh the gravity of Miller’s core arguments, but I also find that Bogue’s ‘apology’ only answers them partly (Bogue 2004). Deleuze and Guattari’s work may have indeed corresponded with a certain epoch in anthropology, when not all the anthropo- or Eurocentric shortcomings had been made apparent.

### Smooth spaces as commons?

What to do with smooth spaces then? If, as we have seen, striations can be understood not as abstract, conceptual operations, but as applications of concrete dispositives in service of the dominating axiomatics, these “walls, enclosures, and roads between enclosures” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 381) — it seems that smooth spaces – limitless, open and unruly – bear significant resemblances to commons. Filled with affects and not properties, “symptoms and evaluations” rather than measurements and judgments, “intense *Spatium* instead of *Extensio*” — smooth spaces are self-organized, distribute themselves nomadically, emerge alongside the autonomous movements which cross them. Deleuze and Guattari emphasize the secondary, that is, the metric, allocational, organizational, controlling, repressive, etc. character of striations, which are only possible on the intensive and creative smooth space, within its “sets of vicinities

and distances”, in other words — autonomous and creative nomadic distributions. Using Marx’s vocabulary, we could say that striations effectuate a ‘subsumption’ of the intensities of the smooth, they change natural and social *richness* into a mass of alienated *commodities*, and bring a halt to what in *Grundrisse* is called, in a very Deleuzian style, “the absolute movement of becoming” (Marx 1973, Holloway 2015). Smooth spaces, on the other hand, correspond with the definitions of commons in terms of emergent social creativity or a “collective self-experiment which can be the only meaningful response to the crisis of representative democracy”, as Jeremy Gilbert writes (2014, 170). Referring to the Deleuzoguattarian conception of “transversality” and Simondon’s theory of individuation, Gilbert links commons with the transition from preindividual to transindividual, below the molar, individualist striation:

In fact we might suggest that the common emerges precisely at the point where the preindividual becomes the transindividual, where the potentiality inherent in the sociality of social relations becomes the real creative potential of those relations as they are enacted and actualised in the present. (...) As such, to preserve and build commons — political and material instantiations of the common — is always to preserve and build the conditions of possibility for unpredictable future individuations (Gilbert 2014, 167).

Deleuze’s and Guattari’s major example is the sea, “for the sea is a smooth space par excellence, and yet was the first to encounter the demands of increasingly strict striation” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 479). 1440 — the year in the title of the last plateau, marking the onset of the slave trade by Portugal — adds yet another cue to read “smooth and striated” politically. But perhaps a different “marine model” is still possible? This view became largely elaborated by the scholars assembled around so-called “blue humanities”, who integrate critical posthumanist arguments while investigating the relations between humans and their aquatic environments (see Gaill and Euzen 2017, Mentz 2015, Linebaugh and Rediker 2000, and many more). In his recently published book, Guy Standing provides a global overview of the striating enclosures of the seas, once understood as paradigmatic commons, but increasingly subjected to threatening processes of appropriation resulting in “weakening commons communities, privatization of the seas, the handing of exploitation rights to multinational corporations, and the pursuit by governments of endless GDP growth” (Standing 2022, 52). Overfishing leading to the extinction of many species, dispossession of

Using Marx’s vocabulary, we could say that striations effectuate a ‘subsumption’ of the intensities of the smooth, they change natural and social richness into a mass of alienated commodities, and bring a halt to what in *Grundrisse* is called, in a very Deleuzian style, “the absolute movement of becoming”.

fishing communities, state wars around marine zones and rights to resources, and finally the disastrous discontents of the profit-oriented, irresponsible activities of the corporate sector (“ocean warming and acidification caused by global heating; the devastation caused by millions of tons of plastic, unchecked oil spills and the pumping of diesel fuel into the sea; the damage and destruction from mining and related activity in the sea, such as drilling for oil and gas by BP in the world’s largest deep-sea coral reef”, Standing 2022, 26) are only the most glaring consequences of the destruction of the blue commons. To sum up, with regard to all the historical-materialist elements of the Deleuzoguattarian project, and their repeated definitions of striations as enclosures, instead of tracing the abstract permutations of smooth and striated, I think we can rather look for resemblances between the ‘smooth’ and the ‘common’ (like their distributive, intensive, affective and creative characteristics). The authors write: “make the desert, the steppe, grow; do not depopulate it, quite the contrary” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 417). Such an interpretation, in my opinion, would not necessarily contradict their intentions, while concretizing and actualizing their concept.

### Nietzsche’s ‘nomadic thought’

A second group of problems with Deleuzoguattarian nomadology stems, in my opinion, from its inspiration by Nietzsche. Nomads come back in the presentation given by Deleuze in 1972, titled *Nomadic Thought* and devoted to the author of *Beyond Good and Evil*. Here the author describes nomadic as “a perpetual migration of the intensities designated by proper names” (Deleuze 2004, 257) in its movement between full body and the pure Outside. Proper names (an eclectic mix of examples: “pre-Socratics, the Romans, the Jews, Christ, the Anti-Christ, Julius Caesar, Borgia, Zarathustra”: Deleuze 2004, 257) are employed to replace the “signifiers” in the Nietzschean-Deleuzian anti-representational approach. Pure Outside opens up to blow away any mediation and coding, and “hook up” the names with forces and intensities, ‘machining’ their new (be it even mis-)interpretations. Nietzsche’s radical nomadism is identified with the movement in the ‘field of exteriority’, where the question whether one is a “fascist, bourgeois, or revolutionary in itself” is no longer adequate (associations of Nietzsche and fascism, were, says Deleuze, already undone by the revue *Acephale* and decides not to look into them at all). Nietzsche himself “lived like a nomad, reduced to his shadow, wandering from one furnished room to another” (Deleuze

2004, 259). Yet it is not actual movement that is definitive here but, again, a style of thinking: intensive, external, non-representational, ironic (and not hierarchical, individualistic, discriminatory, etc.). Jan Rehmann, in his seminal deconstruction of the ‘postmodern left-Nietzscheanism’ of Deleuze and Foucault, inscribes Deleuzian *Nomadic Thought* into what Domenico Losurdo called a “hermeneutics of innocence”, silencing of all the politically problematic elements of Nietzsche’s philosophy. Deleuze, according to Rehmann, fashions Nietzsche into a “anarchist rebel ‘against everything normative’” (Rehmann 2022, 14), ideal for the times after the failed revolution of ‘68. But this declared radicalism covers a very reactionary political agenda – the fact which Deleuze is rather quick to omit. Rehmann shows how he equates the Nietzschean concept of *Macht* with the Spinozian concept of power (*potentia*), not willing to admit that while the latter refers to essentially collective capacity to act, the former necessarily implies a theory of domination, if not extermination, of “the weak”. Rehmann argues that *difference*, a fundamental category for Deleuze, is hugely inspired by Nietzsche’s aristocratic “pathos of distance” —

[t]hat which in the *Genealogy of Morals* describes an explicit ‘social’ [*ständigisch*] divide between the higher-ranking and the lower is transformed into a ‘differential element’, which is intended to distinguish the life-affirming active forces from the passive and negating ones. Paradoxically, this kind of levelling not only prevents any serious criticism of Nietzsche, but also defeats the possibility of being aware of the ideology-critical potentials of his blunt discourse of unfettered domination (Rehmann 2022, 14).

In his impressive and thorough analysis, Rehmann identifies many other problems with the Deleuzoguattarian reception of Nietzsche. For instance, the Nietzschean notion of *Urstaat*, the eternal State, again annuls the question of the historicity of domination, positing instead a synchronous, almost mythical coexistence of the generalized State and the rebellious war machine, as a “pure form of externality”. Problematically, this ‘externality’ — argues Rehmann — often serves to dissimulate actual social conflict. Nomads may “take off on a nomadic adventure”<sup>6</sup> (Deleuze 2004, 259) and get integrated by the state or do not

6 Already reading Nietzsche is a sort of nomadic experience, compared also to “something like »being in the same boat«. However, this doesn’t come across as a very harmonious vision of a coexistence: “We’re in the same boat: a sort of lifeboat, bombs falling on every side, the lifeboat drifts toward subterranean rivers of ice, or toward rivers of fire, the Orinoco, the Amazon, everyone is pulling an

But it would be difficult to think this 'pure Outside' as a peripheral or marginal sphere of social relations opposed to the dominating axiomatics — at least with Nietzsche. It rather remains a vague, dematerialized and negative denomination of a postmodern pseudotranscendence *à la* Maurice Blanchot.

even leave the room at all — what matters is the intensity of nonconformist thinking and its relation to the pure Outside. But it would be difficult to think this 'pure Outside' as a peripheral or marginal sphere of social relations opposed to the dominating axiomatics — at least with Nietzsche. It rather remains a vague, dematerialized and negative denomination of a postmodern pseudotranscendence *à la* Maurice Blanchot. Rehmann's analysis of the term 'postmodern Nietzscheanism' is too detailed to be reconstructed here. In short, it points to the Deleuzoguattarian (and Foucauldian) rejection of the 'great narratives' — including Marxism and psychoanalysis — and their replacement with pluralized, decentralized and supposedly anarchistic Nietzschean critique ("Perhaps Marx and Freud are the dawn of our culture, but Nietzsche is something else entirely, the dawn of a counterculture": Deleuze 2004, 253). Replacement of the class struggle with a myth of the eternal conflict of masters and slaves (determined not by their social position, but by their spiritual and in fact moralistic 'nobility' or 'baseness'); an absolute blindness towards all forms of reciprocity and cooperation, as well as to the reality of exploitation; individualistic disdain of everything collective (gregarious) — all this renders Nietzsche a very problematic companion of any nomadic movement. His promises of liberation turn out to be extremely antiegalitarian and exclusionary.

### Deterritorialization and its discontents

A third problem can be found in the authors' theory of territory and deterritorialization. Territory is not what we first think it may be: a delimited piece of ground or a country with its borders. It is "the first thing to constitute assemblage", with a geographical and political structure, but one that remains movable, changing and open. By definition, territory is the land which can always be left behind, it is a "place of passage" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 323), it also "separates the interior forces of the earth from the exterior forces of chaos" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 321). The authors talk about rhythms and refrains embedded in the territory, frequently using the example of birds, whose territories are sung, which means lived, affective, performative and

---

oar, and we're not even supposed to like one another, we fight, we eat each other. Everyone pulling an oar is sharing, sharing something, beyond any law, any contract, any institution. Drifting, a drifting movement or 'deterritorialization': I say all this in a vague, confused way, since this is a hypothesis or a vague impression on the originality of Nietzsche's texts. A new kind of book" (Deleuze 2004, 255).

mobile. Deleuze and Guattari develop an extremely rich concept of the territory, which they complement with their theory of deterritorialization. If territory is the ground of an assemblage, it is deterritorialization which constitutes its ‘cutting edge’ — an abstract-machinic front, generative in new configurations beyond limits. Movements of territorialization and deterritorialization shouldn’t be understood as binary oppositions, because “territory is constantly traversed by movements of deterritorialization that are relative and may even occur in place, by which one passes from the intra-assemblage to interassemblages, without, however, leaving the territory” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 326). Deterritorialization can be absolute or relative: absolute deterritorialization — like philosophy — keeps its elements in the constant movement generating creative differences; relative deterritorialization — like capital — uproots its elements to reterritorialize them under new relationships of production (like peasants banned from accessing common pastures and made to work in the factories). Additionally, it can be negative (where a reterritorialization blocks the line of flight and a new assemblage is not created) or positive (which does create a new assemblage, calling for ‘new earth’ and ‘new people’<sup>7</sup>). Nomads change the land into “simply ground or support” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 381)<sup>8</sup>, they are “deterritorialized par excellence” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 381), they open new lines of flight and constantly transcend all the territories. But the authors are conscious of the fact that deterritorialization runs certain substantial risks. Too hasty deterritorialization or too violent abandonment of a form of the subject may launch forces and intensities too excessive to bear:

Staying stratified-organized, signified, subjected is not the worst that can happen; the worst that can happen is if you throw the strata into demented or suicidal

7 An insightful and clear presentation of the four different deterritorializations (relative-negative, relative-positive, absolute-negative and absolute-positive) is given by Thomas Nail in his article *What is an assemblage?* (Nail 2017).

8 Which makes them different from ‘reterritorializing’ migrants, being only in transition from one sedentary set up to a new one. In *The figure of the migrant* Nail criticizes the theory behind this distinction, for its inconsistencies in understanding the movement. Put simply — if everything is difference and movement, how can one even stop it, after reaching certain point? “A point is simply a relay— both an arrival and departure point for further movement” (Nail 2015, 26). This is a serious philosophical question, not without ethical consequences. Nail quotes Papadopoulos and Tsianos, who write: “Nomadism’s dictum ‘you never arrive somewhere’ constitutes the matrix of today’s migrational movements” (Papadopoulos and Tsianos in Nail 2015, 245).

collapse, which brings them back down on us heavier than ever (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 161).

For that reason, a great deal of caution is advised when undertaking any attempt at deterritorialization. But it is not the only problem. Deleuze and Guattari avoid moral judgments and favouring certain models over others — despite that, they constantly suggest their predictions. The more or less explicit criterium of their liking can be identified with novelty, the multiplication of differences, the creation of interesting convergences. Cede territories to open ways for the abstract machines! — seems to be authors' implicit imperative. But how often can we sustainably start a new assemblage? And what if we don't want to, feeling fine with the existing ones? And after all, don't the authors claim that "absolute deterritorialization does not take place without reterritorialization" (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, 101)? If this is the case, perhaps what we need is rather a new theory of reterritorialization, a reterritorialization which would be non-reactionary, anti-capitalist and below the radar of the State? In the age when deterritorializing powers are operated in their largest scope by globalized capital, free to venture around the Earth, don't we rather need some counter power, something to hang on to, to inhabit and defend? A ZAD, a TAZ, a squat, an inn, a square, a theatre, even "an object, a book, an apparatus or system" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 508). Eventually, if the deterritorializing edge of the war machine persists in the creation of new assemblages, its other edge — resistant and territorializing — rather seeks to endure within them, be it by mastering the infinitely slow movement, which can be associated with the refusal to work (see Thoburn 2003), with resistance (Smith 2016) and — to point ahead to my conclusions — a certain set of habits which allow for movement even without motion. At times, Deleuze and Guattari seem to be suggesting just that:

Whereas the migrant leaves behind a milieu that has become amorphous or hostile, the nomad is one who does not depart, does not want to depart, who clings to the smooth space left by the receding forest, where the steppe or the desert advances, and who invents nomadism as a response to this challenge. Of course, the nomad moves, but while seated, and he is only seated while moving (the Bedouin galloping, knees on the saddle, sitting on the soles of his upturned feet, 'a feat of balance'). The nomad knows how to wait, he has infinite patience (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 381).

Thus, we can probably conclude that deterritorialization — if it's to foster nomads — cannot do without any territorial backing, even

In the age when deterritorializing powers are operated in their largest scope by globalized capital, free to venture around the Earth, don't we rather need some counter power, something to hang on to, to inhabit and defend? A ZAD, a TAZ, a squat, an inn, a square, a theatre, even "an object, a book, an apparatus or system".

“simply a ground or support”, be it as large as a Bedouin’s saddle. Many examples from historical and contemporary class struggles could be used to show how difficult it is to attain necessary means of subsistence and resistance without at least some geographical groundedness. The inhabitants of the Aymara city of El Alto — or “the landless and rubber tappers in Brazil, indigenous Ecuadorians, neo-Zapatistas, water warriors and coca farmers in Bolivia, and unemployed in Argentina” (Zibechi 2012, 14) — represent a multitude of groups connected by struggles, concerning their rights of access to territories understood as commons. Also, affects need a space to spread, and even more so revolutionary ones<sup>9</sup>.

### Towards ‘nomadic habits’

Perhaps *habit* could be a notion to help us think such a non-compromising movement of reterritorialization? The *ideal type* of nomad — described by the notions of war machine, smooth space and deterritorialization seems to be a figure of the *non-habitual*: not inhabiting, exceeding habitats, contesting any social *habitus*, deterritorializing habits. Mark Seem, one of the translators and author of the introduction to *Anti-Oedipus*, seems to identify this anarchic, dismantling vector with the core of the Deleuzoguattarian political project:

Such a politics dissolves the mystifications of power through the kindling, on all levels, of anti-oedipal forces—the schizzes-flows-forces that escape coding, scramble the codes, and flee in all directions: orphans (no daddy-mommy-me), atheists (no beliefs), and nomads (no habits, no territories) (Seem in Deleuze and Guattari 1977, xxi).

A somewhat similar thought can be found in Toynbee, according to whom habits would rather characterize migrants — who move away from

<sup>9</sup> “One common factor is the territorialization of movements — that is, they have roots in spaces that have been recuperated or otherwise secured through long (open or underground) struggles. This reflects a strategic response of the poor to the crisis of the old territoriality of the factory and farm and to capital’s reformulation of the old modes of domination. The deterritorialization of production (spurred by dictatorships and neoliberal counter-reforms) ushered in a crisis for the old movements. It debilitated subjects that were part of disappearing territorialities in which they had previously acquired power and meaning. This defeat opened up a still-unfinished period of rearrangement that was reflected in the reconfiguration of physical space” (Zibechi 2012, 14-15).

the drying territories in order to reterritorialize the same ways of life elsewhere and who “change their habitat in order not to change their habits” (Toynbee in Kerslake 2008, 31). Also, Cezary Rudnicki observes that habits, seen as constitutive in the process of subject formation still in the *Difference and Repetition*, become replaced by desire in *Anti-Oedipus*, which results in an opening of the conception of subject, allows for new, non-habitual connections and helps it make itself a body without organs. BwO is “the principle of anti-habit, as it frees the organs from the necessity of always connecting in the same old ways” (Rudnicki 2018, 58). Consequently, the nomadic subject is also necessarily a counter-habitual force. In the last part of my essay I will try to contest this interpretation. It may not be wrong to the Deleuzoguattarian letter — or the diagram — but I believe that, somewhat against Rudnicki’s cooperationist declarations, it risks steering us back to the dematerialized, abstract, postmodern conclusions, which, as I showed, remain at variance with the communist perspective. If we want to “materialize”, we need to see the multitudes of nomadic practices. These practices very often turn out to be organized around habits — be it dance, techniques of travel, rules of cooperation, rites or rituals. The rebuttal of nomadic habituality looks almost like the flip side of the traditional liberal narrative, in which nomads, bypassing the regimes of property and untrammelled by the routines of land cultivation are deemed unable to form any positive habits and are thus necessarily unstable, irresponsible and potentially dangerous. My thesis is different: the example of nomads allows us rather to break this traditional coupling of habits with property. Nomads ‘travel light’, crossing the land which is never theirs. They do not sedentarize, do not enter into possession and do not buy or own more than can be autonomously carried. Still, they sustain certain patterns of repetitive action, which in the end allows them to carry more. Even descriptively they rather change properties — being fast, slow, seated, hungry, militant, precarious, etc. — without at the same time becoming something else. What describes them are then rather practices and habits — stabilizing yet changing ways of moving, communicating and sustaining nomadic forms of life. We can conclude that what may positively characterize nomads is on the one hand their habits, on the other — their conflictual relation with property. Their habits — communal luxuries or merely shared means of survival — can potentially be seen as ‘mobile commons’, the *hexis* of which is shareable, transmittable, based on the right to use, not on appropriation and extraction of value.

The question of mobility — today mostly privatized or state-controlled — is one of the momentous and ambiguous questions in the

We can conclude that what may positively characterize nomads is on the one hand their habits, on the other — their conflictual relation with property. Their habits — communal luxuries or merely shared means of survival — can potentially be seen as ‘mobile commons’, the *hexis* of which is shareable, transmittable, based on the right to use, not on appropriation and extraction of value.

history of capitalist axiomatics, as is shown in the insightful work of Yann Moulier Boutang (Boutang 1998). Wage labour needs workers in one place, unless it needs them elsewhere, and thus constantly redefines the limits of mobility. Dimitris Papadopoulos, Niamh Stephenson and Vassilis Tsianos comment on this, showing that from the point of view of regimes of property the control of movement has an absolutely crucial character<sup>10</sup>. Against this control and cooptation of mobility by capital — on the one hand, and against the ‘humanitarian’ view of migrants as victims — on the other, theorists of the autonomy of migration see in their movements a positive, constituent, counter-hegemonic, social power, following its own *nomos*. Perhaps, in the light of all the above, it is they who best embody today’s nomads?

Papadopoulos points towards a certain habituality of nomads, while referring to the classical work of Norbert Elias describing the process of ‘civilizing’. The property-oriented form of reproduction needs to be installed in the very matter of everyday life — with its practices and bodily attitudes. Autonomy, if it’s to be sustained, has to start at the same level:

Precarious workers create artefacts and social relations which remain outside capitalist modes of appropriation. Thus, they materialise their activities in ways which exceed the process of commodification. Continuous experience displaces hegemonic optic representations as it materialises in people’s everyday lives. Continuous experience instigates a transformation which happens on the very immediate, mundane, ordinary, grounded sphere of our bodily shape, habits, perception, and sociability. This is the reason why continuous experience is the most basic stuff of the imperceptible politics of escape (Papadopoulos, Stephenson and Tsianos 2008, 156).

## Habit in Deleuze and his predecessors

Deleuze in fact has a few interesting things to say about the concept of habit, although rather in his earlier works and not in the context of

10 “The freedom to move is the main source of productivity and the main target of control. The spectre of the workhouse always hovers over free labour. The freedom, which is so central for the circulatory function of the market, needs always to be under control and surveillance. In this sense, free labour, that is, self-determined, autonomous mobility, is always under the threat of immobilisation and territorialisation. The control of mobility is a social issue for capitalism, not just an issue pertaining to some atypical mobile workers” (Papadopoulos, Stephenson and Tsianos 2008, 205-206).

The property-oriented form of reproduction needs to be installed in the very matter of everyday life — with its practices and bodily attitudes. Autonomy, if it’s to be sustained, has to start at the same level.

nomads. Most generally, a robust, theoretical basis for a theory of habits can be found in the concepts of virtual and differentiating repetition. As virtual, that is “as real as actuality, as dynamic as potentiality, and as myriad and shifting as possibility” (Carlisle 2014, 11) habits present an enduring capacity to actualize, break into capable action. While being both receptive and resistant to change, they offer a form of a ‘good’ repetition in the potentially chaotic realm of constant differentiation. But what does ‘habit’ mean exactly? I find the commentaries of Elizabeth Grosz and Catherine Malabou particularly helpful to answer this question. Both scholars notice a certain divide in the philosophical tradition as regarding habit. On the one hand, a group of more or less Cartesian thinkers (besides Descartes — Kant, Sartre, Proust, and to some extent Spinoza) will identify habit with some kind of unconsciousness — ridiculous automatism making us look like machines, vacuous expression concealing the inescapable freedom of our every choice, a second nature which hides the first or a commonplace attitude dominated by powers of imagination. (It is curious, by the way, that Kant, whose life’s clockwork regularity became anecdotal was among the most stringent attackers of the concept of habit). On the other — we have an apologetic, although not unambiguous, line of thinkers highlighting the essential powers and gains of habit (Aristotle, Hume, Leibniz, Hegel, Ravaisson, Bergson — and Deleuze). Grosz, drawing on this tradition, accentuates the intermediary function of habit, operating between the traditional dichotomies — passivity and action, materiality and life, necessity and freedom, instinct and reflection — or even invalidating them. The concept of habit also bridges specific divides (animals, plants, even inorganic matter like crystals develop habits in their “ability to discern and extract what [they] require from [...] earth, sun and the various forces of the earth”; Grosz 2013, 231). Grosz:

Habit is, in short, a much more interesting concept than its place in the recent history of western thought, and especially within both the empiricist and phenomenological traditions, enables us to see. It signals the possibility of seeing a new kind of relation between life and its surrounding support systems, a new kind of immersion of the forces of the living in the forces of the real that is far richer and more complex than the immersion and transformation of the human accomplished through the eruption of language (and moreover, which help explain this eruption) (Grosz 2013, 218).

In his commentary on Hume, Deleuze writes:

But isn't that the answer to the question: Who are we? We are habits, nothing but habits. The habit of saying Me ... Maybe there is no more surprising response to the problem of the self (Deleuze 2006b, 365).

Showing that all knowledge comes from habit, Hume cancels the qualitative distinction between the rational discourse of the learned and the prejudiced discourse of the vulgar populace. We could also find in him a positive vision of society, which emerges from natural sympathy, but also from habits, contracts, institutions — and where the state comes from outside to play only a corrective and coercive role. Habits, for Hume, are great guides of human life.

Bergson — another of Deleuze's great predecessors — has a more ambivalent understanding of habit. Habit, as a kind of memory, preserves past in the present, and thus plays a decisive role for the continuity of becoming in the world of constant change. Habit is a property of a body made up of the past changes and open to the future, ready to create. On the other hand — in his essay *On Laughter* — Bergson sees the laughable and indeed tragic aspects of habituation — turning the subject into a ridiculous automaton. Automatism is a degenerated form of habit, where vitality and creativity are lost under mechanistic repetition. How to understand this ambiguity? It seems that the distinction between the rigidity and plasticity is decisive: habit, being basically a plastic reaction of the body accommodating the change, may become automatic, when it loses this plasticity. For Catherine Malabou, the eminent contemporary theorist of plasticity, automatism would no longer be opposed to habit, but rather synonymous with it, showing only a difference of degree. For her it is addiction that constitutes a negative limit of habit — or rather its other *fold*. She writes in her introduction to Félix Ravaisson's *Of Habit*:

The law of reversibility of energies at work in the process of habit produces a weakening of passivity and an exaltation of activity. The weakening of passivity is explained by the development of an internal activity, and the exaltation of activity is accompanied by the birth of a passion and a degradation of effort. In this way habit engenders needs and tendencies, which can just as well be needs of intelligence, tendencies of the heart and of the will, as chronic illnesses, addictions, intoxications and tics (Malabou in Ravaisson 2008, xix).

Ravaisson calls habits “obscure intelligence” in its becoming and connects it to the natural tendency to persevere. Habit is a “middle term between will and nature”, but “it is a moving middle term”: “The history of Habit represents the return of Freedom to Nature, or rather the

invasion of the domain of freedom by natural spontaneity” (Ravaisson 2008, 77).

Deleuze, to my knowledge, does not refer to Ravaisson directly. Like him, however, he talks of habit as a bridge principle between traditionally opposed domains — notably between action and contemplation. If nomads do not move, then — one could argue — it is also because they, like us, contract new habits by contemplation. We ‘are’ contemplations, in which passivity and activity turn out to be intensive and continuous, not opposed. “Habit draws something new from repetition — namely, difference” (Deleuze 1994, 73). This is not only reserved for humans:

What we call wheat is a contraction of the earth and humidity, and this contraction is both a contemplation and the auto-satisfaction of that contemplation. By its existence alone, the lily of the field sings the glory of the heavens, the goddesses and gods - in other words, the elements that it contemplates in contracting. What organism is not made of elements and cases of repetition, of contemplated and contracted water, nitrogen, carbon, chlorides, and sulphates, thereby intertwining all the habits of which it is composed? (Deleuze 1994, 75)

Deleuze notices the very basic, molecular function of habits in the realm of organic life, generating through their ‘contractions’ not what we have, but literally what we are — our nature, which is always already *a second nature*:

A soul must be attributed to the heart, to the muscles, nerves and cells, but a contemplative soul whose entire function is to contract a habit. (...) Habit here manifests its full generality: it concerns not only the sensory-motor habits that we have (psychologically), but also, before these, the primary habits that we are; the thousands of passive syntheses of which we are organically composed (Deleuze 1994, 74).

The theme of habit, illustriously advanced in *Difference and Repetition*, gets somewhat brushed off in Deleuze’s later writings: it practically doesn’t appear in *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* nor after. My intuition is that the reason for this omission can be connected with the Deleuzoguattarian rejection of the tropes derived from biological organicism and their replacement with ‘machinic’ terminology, BwO’s and the polymorphous concept of desire. Yet, habits too point to the ontological openness of organisms, to their connections with the inorganic, their capacity of change, etc. They also, in my opinion, cope

with the task of thinking beyond binaries better than abstract permutations of concepts.

But why should habits matter for the commonist nomadology? If capitalism, as Elias shows, continually applies all its efforts to change the habits of vagabond populations, the resistance towards its axiomatics is always anchored in the continuous experiences of bodies (Elias 1994). Habits — as we have seen — are basically independent from property and properties, they are also something else than work or labour. Based on essentially free activity, they are a kind of resource that sidesteps the problems of scarcity. As such, they are rather reproductive (oriented towards “the perpetuation of our *case*”: Deleuze 1994, 74) than productive (oriented towards specific gains). They can also be seen as prefigurative: their ends overlapping with their means, following their immanent principles of action. Habits are prefigurative, but not predefined — on the contrary, they are always dynamic and particular, unsubsumable under the general form of a concept. Being particular, they turn out to be shareable, or more — they are shareable *because* they’re particular (also in the sense of something autonomous). They are profoundly common: like the ability of plants to contract elements, like the transmission of embodied knowledges, like memory, which is always collective, like the rituals of sociability, even Maffesoli’s neo-tribalism (1988), like strategies of protest and resistance. Ultimately, habits embody one’s tendency to be in common with one’s very self — a certain ethics, not even of care, today mostly appropriated by the cosmetic industry, but rather of solidarity with oneself. Such solidarity, I believe, makes possible solidarity with others. The non-essentialist and transitive character of habits opens them towards what is new or just different – like dogs, sheep, plants or crystals. They keep together the nomadic societies, not organized by a system of enclosures and sold labor, but rooted in collective material practices. For these reasons, I think that (nomadic) habits can be seen as an anthropological basis of commoning.

## Conclusion

In this article, I’ve tried to present Deleuze as a theorist of *nomos* understood as autonomy, who can help us think about commons. But how would he relate to his established image of the philosopher of deterritorialization? I believe that there are many Deleuzes (and I am not the first to observe this; see Massumi 2015, among others). On the nomadic grounds at least two of them meet — a Deleuze whom we can call

For these reasons, I think that (nomadic) habits can be seen as an anthropological basis of commoning.

‘postmodern’ and a Deleuze whom we can call ‘posthuman’<sup>11</sup>. The first one will be criticizing representation, constructing more or less abstract (thus innocent) war machines, posing binary oppositions in order to contest them in the next step, accelerating movements of *flux*, while dematerializing them or fracturing with abstract moments of *stasis*. But movements seem to matter here less than speeds, for speed is intensive and movement extensive, i.e. a mere locomotion, a transit from A to B, hence in the end always a vector of reterritorialization. But if “absolute deterritorialization does not take place without reterritorialization” (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, 101), as I tried to show above, it seems worthwhile to think a reterritorializing movement which does not necessarily and by definition fall into traps of subjugation to the capital and the State. Such a conceptual decision would also cancel the sharp distinction between the nomad and the migrant, which turned out to be in many ways problematic. Last but not least, the postmodern Deleuze inherits substantial problems of Nietzsche’s moral and social philosophy, whose ‘principle of non-representation’ or ‘pathos of distance’ should be deconstructed as anti-democratic dispositifs meant, among other things, to hide the exploitation of active, working people (yet morally ‘reactive’) behind the ‘heroic fiction’ about the self-affirmative, overmanly subject. (Nietzsche’s trauma after learning about the Paris Commune, seen as a threat of destruction of all culture, is symptomatic here; see Losurdo 2020, Sautet 1981). In my opinion, the presentation of nomads as primarily the agents of intensive, differentiating thinking, “deterritorialized par excellence”, along with apparent disregard of their actual trajectories, falls not too far from the Nietzschean postmodern “philosophization” (abstraction, pluralization, aesthetization, moralization, naturalization, etc.) of the social conflict.

The posthuman Deleuze, instead of praising immaterial flows and absolute speeds, would rather look for non-reductive and non-binary terms at work in the process of sustaining life, which is always to some extent nomadic, even ‘destroying what destroys it’, not reterritorializing it under a form of capitalistic property, but also not losing it in the abstract or machinic movement of pure deterritorialization. What is at stake here is rather to preserve some territories, “never to leave them”, even if under a radically transformed form. Such a transformation should bypass the regimes of property, even if it has to change a territory

11 On the latter, see works of Rosi Braidotti, concentrating on Deleuze’s “nomadic ethics” defined as “a thin barrier against the possibility of extinction” (Braidotti in Smith and Somers-Hall 2012, 187).

into something practiced, affective and portable. We would be searching here for some non-compromising bridge principles and practices which can inform movement different than just the armchair nomadism on the one hand and vacation travels on the other, movement which helps us withdraw from the regimes of property, while remaining sustainable and — with a little luck — maybe not precarious; which, finally, deconstructs the transcendental laws of morals but opts for some immanent ethics. Habit — understood as embodied practice or material intelligence — can be in my opinion seen as such a bridge principle and as a “ground or support” of nomadic movements. Characterized as both receptivity and resistance to change, it may allow nomads to deterritorialize or transform their territories while moving within them and with them. A certain nomadic distribution, based on a principle internal to itself, can be found operative in habits too, able to become deterritorialized and replaced when they stop serving the purposes of sustainability. I have sketched an affirmative conception of habit here, yet in fact nothing seems to definitely ward off its rigidifying function, which may still recapture the embodied intelligence and bring it down to the dull routine of reproducing the alienated and oedipalized form of life. As I have tried to show in this article, such an affirmative conception of habit is not possible without a certain deterritorializing, revolutionary or minoritarian caveat, preventing its rigidification and capture. Yet, it is even less possible outside of what is common.

## References

- Assorodobraj, Nina. 2020. “The beginnings of working class (fragments).” Translated by Jędrzej Brzeziński. *Praktyka Teoretyczna* 36(2): 67-103.
- Bogue, Ronald. 2004. “Apology for nomadology.” *Interventions* 2(6): 169-179.
- Boutang Moulier, Yann. 1998. *De l’esclavage au salariat économie historique du salariat bridé*. Paris: PUF.
- Braidotti, Rosi. 2018. “On nomadism: A conversation with Rosi Braidotti.” *Political Critique*. <http://politicalcritique.org/world/2018/nomadism-braidotti/>.
- Braidotti, Rosi. 2011. *Nomadic theory: The portable Rosi Braidotti*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Braidotti, Rosi. 2012. In Smith, Daniel W., and Henry Somers-Hall

- (eds.). *The Cambridge Companion to Deleuze*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Carlisle, Clare. 2014. *On habit*. London: Routledge.
- Center for Reproductive Rights and Poradňa pre občianske a ľudské práva. 2003. *Body and soul: Forced Sterilization and Other Assaults on Roma Reproductive Freedom in Slovakia*.
- Clark, Cristie, and John Page. 2022. *The Lawful Forest: A Critical History of Property, Protest and Spatial Justice*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- D'Andrea, Anthony. 2007. *Global Nomads: Techno and New Age as transnational countercultures in Ibiza and Goa*. London: Routledge.
- De Angelis, Massimo. 2017. *Omnia Sunt Communia: On the Commons and the Transformation to Postcapitalism*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Deleuze, Gilles. 1994. *Difference and Repetition*. Translated by Paul Patton. Columbia University Press: New York.
- Deleuze, Gilles. 2001. *Empiricism and Subjectivity*. Translated by Constantin V. Boundas. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Deleuze, Gilles. 2004. *Desert Islands and Other Texts (1953—1974)*. Translated by Mike Taormina. New York: Semiotext(e).
- Deleuze, Gilles. 2006a. *Nietzsche and Philosophy*. Translated by Hugh Tomlinson. New York and London: Continuum International Publishing Group.
- Deleuze, Gilles. 2006b. *Two Regimes of Madness: Texts and Interviews 1975-1995*. Translated by Ames Hodges and Mike Taormina. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e).
- Deleuze, Gilles, and Felix Guattari. 1987. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Translated by Brian Massumi. Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press.
- Deleuze, Gilles, and Felix Guattari. 1994. *What is Philosophy?* Translated by Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell III. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Elias, Norbert. 1994. *The Civilizing Process: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Federici, Silvia. 2019. *Re-enchanting the World: Feminism and the Politics of the Commons*. Oakland: PM Press.
- Gaill, Françoise, and Agathe Euzen, eds. 2017. *L'océan à découvert*. Paris: CNRS.
- Gilbert, Jeremy. 2014. *Common Ground: Democracy and Collectivity in an Age of Individualism*. London and New York: Pluto Press.
- Grosz, Elizabeth. 2013. "Habit today: Ravaissou, Bergson, Deleuze and us." *Body and Society* 19 (2&3): 217-239.

- Holloway, John. 2015. "Read Capital: The First Sentence. Or Capital starts with Wealth, not with the Commodity." *Historical Materialism* 23(3): 3-26.
- Kant, Immanuel. 1998. *Critique of pure reason*. Translated by Paul Guyer and A.W. Wood. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kerslake, Christian. 2008. "Becoming against history. Deleuze, Toynbee and vitalist historiography." *Parrhesia* 4: 17-48.
- Kóczé, Angéla. 2011. "La stérilisation forcée des femmes roms dans l'Europe d'aujourd'hui." *Cahiers du genre* 1(50): 133-152.
- Kohn, Eduardo. 2013. *How forests think? Toward anthropology beyond the human*. Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press.
- Kowalska, Małgorzata. 2000. *Dialektyka poza dialektyką. Od Bataille'a do Derridy*. Warszawa: Aletheia.
- Kujawa, Dawid. 2021. *Pocątunki ludu. Poezja i krytyka po roku 2000*. Kraków: Ha!art.
- Linebaugh, Peter, and Marcus Rediker. 2000. *The Many-headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Losurdo, Domenico. 2020. *Nietzsche, the Aristocratic Rebel: Intellectual Biography and Critical Balance-Sheet*. Translated by Gregor Benton. Leiden and Boston: Brill.
- Malabou, Catherine. 2008. "Addiction and Grace: Preface to Félix Ravaisson's *Of Habit*." In Ravaisson, Félix. *Of Habit*. Translated by Clare Carlisle and Mark Sinclair. London and New York: Continuum.
- Marx, Karl. 1973. *Grundrisse*. Translated and edited by David McLellan. St. Albans: Paladin.
- Massumi, Brian. 2005. "Undigesting Deleuze." <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/undigesting-deleuze/>.
- Mentz, Steve. 2015. *Shipwreck Modernity: Ecologies of Globalization, 1550-1719*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Mezzadra, Sandro, and Brett Neilson. 2019. *The Politics of Operations. Excavating Contemporary Capitalism*. London and Durham: Duke University Press.
- Miller, Christopher, L. 1993. "The Postidentitarian Predicament in the Footnotes of A Thousand Plateaus: Nomadology, Anthropology, and Authority." *Diacritics* 23(3): 6-35.
- Molino-Machetto, Cédric. 2021. "Anthropologie du pouvoir et généalogie de l'État: Deleuze et Guattari, lecteurs d'Ibn Khaldûn et de Clastres." *Dialogue* 60(3): 557-577.
- Moll, Łukasz. 2020. "Nomos akumulacji pierwotnej i anomos dóbr

- wspólnych w dobie niewczesnej nowoczesności.” *Civitas* 26(2): 47-70.
- Moll, Łukasz. 2021. *Nomadyczna Europa. Poststrukturalistyczne granice europejskiego uniwersalizmu*. Toruń: Wydawnictwo UMK.
- Nail, Thomas. 2012. “Violence at the Borders: Nomadic Solidarity and Non-Status Migrant Resistance.” *Radical Philosophy Review* (15)1: 241-257.
- Nail, Thomas. 2017. “What is an Assemblage?” *SubStance* #142, 46(1): 21-37.
- Nail, Thomas. 2019. *Being and motion*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Oliphant Roland. 2021. „Inside Poland’s border zone where people are quietly starving in the woods.” *Telegraph*. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/world-news/2021/11/11/dispatch-inside-polands-border-zone-quiet-war-humanitarian-crisis/>.
- Papadopoulos, Dimitris, Niamh Stephenson, and Vassilis Tsianos. 2008. *Escape Routes. Control and Subversion in the Twenty-first century*. London: Pluto Press.
- Ravaisson, Félix. 2008. *Of habit*. Translated by Clare Carlisle and Mark Sinclair. London and New York: Continuum.
- Rehmann Jan. 2021. *Postmoderner Links-Nietzscheanismus. Deleuze & Foucault — Eine Dekonstruktion*. Kassel: Mangrover Verlag.
- Rudnicki, Cezary. 2015. “Deleuze i Guattari o dwóch zagrożeniach.” *Kronos* 4(35): 50-66.
- Ruivenkamp, Guido, and Andy Hilton, eds. 2017. *Perspectives on Commoning: Autonomist Principles and Practices*. London: Zed Books.
- Sautet, Marc. 1981. *Nietzsche et la Commune*. Paris: La Sycomore.
- Scott, James C. 2009. *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia*. New Heaven: Yale University Press.
- Sheller, Mimi 2018. *Mobility Justice: The Politics of Movement in an Age of Extremes*. London and New York: Verso.
- Shiva, Vandana. 1989. *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Development*. London: Zed Books.
- Sibertin-Blanc, Guillaume. 2016. *State and Politics: Deleuze and Guattari on Marx*. Translated by Ames Hodges. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e)
- Sinti, Cyrine. 2022. “They will take my daughters.” *New Internationalist*, 10 February. <https://newint.org/features/2021/12/07/they-will-take-my-daughters-roma-forced-sterilization>.
- Sitrin, Marina A. 2012. *Everyday Revolutions. Horizontalism and Autonomy in Argentina*. London and New York: Zed Books.
- Smith, Daniel W. 2016. “Two Concepts of Resistance: Foucault and

- Deleuze.” In Morar, Nicolae, Thomas Nail, and Daniel W. Smith (eds.). *Between Deleuze and Foucault*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Standing, Guy. 2022. *The Blue Commons: Rescuing the Economy of the Sea*. London: Pelican.
- Tazzioli, Marina. 2019. *The Making of Migration: The Biopolitics of Mobility at Europe’s Borders*. Los Angeles, London, New Delhi, Singapore, Washington DC and Melbourne: SAGE Publications.
- Thoburn, Nicholas. 2003. *Deleuze, Marx and Politics*. London: Routledge.
- Weizman, Eyal, and Fazal Sheikh. 2015. *The Conflict Shoreline: Colonization as climate change in the Negev Desert*. New York: Steidl.
- Zibechi, Raul. 2012. *Territories in Resistance: A Cartography of Latin American Social Movements*. Translated by Ramon Ryan. Oakland: AK Press.

JĘDRZEJ BRZEZIŃSKI – philosopher and translator, writing his PhD on Deleuzian ethics in Polish Academy of Sciences.

**Address:**

Graduate School for Social Research  
Polish Academy of Sciences  
Nowy Świat 72  
00-330 Warszawa  
**email:** jedrzejbrzezinski@protonmail.com

**Citation:**

Brzeziński, Jędrzej. 2022. „Anti-Enclosures and Nomadic Habits: Towards a Communist Reading of Deleuzoguattarian Nomadology.” *Praktyka Teoretyczna* 4(46): 161–192.

**DOI:** 10.19195/prt.2022.4.6

**Autor:** Jędrzej Brzeziński

**Tytuł:** Anty-groźenia i nomadyczne nawyki: w stronę komonistycznego odczytania deleuzoguattariańskiej nomadologii

**Abstrakt:** Tekst stawia sobie kilka zadań związanych z Deleuzoguattariańską nomadologią. Dokonawszy zwięzłej rekonstrukcji tego pojęcia, proponuje on odczytanie oparte na wybranych – komonistycznych, autonomistycznych i posthumanistycznych – tropach. Nomadyzm w tym odczytaniu rozumiany jest przede wszystkim jako ruch anulowania groźen i oporu wobec nich, ruch podtrzymujący witalne relacje z dobrami wspólnymi. Jednocześnie, tekst poddaje krytyce pewne obecne u Deleuze’a i Guattariego tendencje, które takie odczytanie utrudniają: abstrakcję, deterytorializację i ponowoczesny nietzscheanizm. Druga część artykułu podejmuje zagadnienie nawyku, ciągle w Deleuzoguattariańskiej perspektywie. Kontestuje ona tradycyjną opowieść o własności prywatnej jako warunku wykształcania dobrych nawyków i wskazuje na wiele przykładów „nawyków nomadycznych”, poza osiadłymi, mieszczańskimi i kapitalistycznymi modelami reprodukcji społecznej. Argumentuję, że tak pojęte nawyki mogą być uznane za antropologiczną podstawę uwspólniania.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, nomadyzm, dobra wspólne, nawyk