

ARTICLE

Perspectives on guilt in modern capitalism: a dialogue between Deleuze-Guattari and Walter Benjamin

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Abstract

This article reflects on the connections that can be established between the characterization that Deleuze and Guattari make of the “civilized capitalist machine” in their *Anti-Oedipus* and Walter Benjamin’s analyses of the “capitalist religious structure” in his fragment entitled *Capitalism as religion*, especially with regard to the concept of guilt. As can be seen, what seems to be different in Benjamin’s thought compared to the Deleuze-Guattarian approach is the fact that the German philosopher initially presents capitalism as having an intrinsically religious nature – capitalism is a religion in itself. This aspect does not seem to find similarities with the Deleuze-Guattarian conception of the “civilized capitalist machine,” although the latter admits the “divine character of capital.” Religion, for Deleuze and Guattari, has the clear role of helping in the repression and shaping of human desire.

Keywords: Guilty. Capitalism. Desire. Walter Benjamin. Deleuze and Guattari.

Olhares sobre a culpa no capitalismo moderno: um diálogo entre Deleuze-Guattari e Walter Benjamin

Resumo

O objetivo deste artigo consistiu em refletir acerca das conexões que podem ser estabelecidas entre a caracterização que Deleuze e Guattari fazem da “máquina capitalista civilizada” em seu *O anti-Édipo* e as análises que Walter Benjamin fez da “estrutura religiosa capitalista” no seu fragmento intitulado *O capitalismo como religião*, especialmente no que diz respeito à ideia de culpa. Como pôde ser observado, o que parece ser distinto no pensamento Benjaminiano em comparação com a abordagem Deleuze-Guattariana é o fato de que o filósofo alemão apresenta, inicialmente, o capitalismo como tendo uma natureza intrinsecamente religiosa, ou seja, o capitalismo seria uma religião em si. Esse aspecto parece não encontrar aproximações com a concepção Deleuze-Guattariana da “máquina capitalista civilizada”, embora essa última admita o caráter “divino do capital”. A religião, para Deleuze e Guattari, teria uma clara função de auxílio na repressão e na modelagem do desejo humano.

Palavras-chave: Culpa. Capitalismo. Desejo. Walter Benjamin. Deleuze e Guattari.

Perspectivas sobre la culpa en el capitalismo moderno: un diálogo entre Deleuze-Guattari y Walter Benjamin

Resumen

El propósito de este artículo es reflexionar sobre las conexiones que se pueden establecer entre la caracterización que Deleuze y Guattari hacen de la “máquina capitalista civilizada” en su libro *El AntiEdipo* y los análisis de Walter Benjamin sobre la “estructura religiosa capitalista” en su fragmento titulado *El capitalismo como religión*, especialmente en lo que se refiere al concepto de culpa. Como puede verse, lo que parece diferente en el pensamiento de Benjamin frente al enfoque de Deleuze y Guattari es el hecho de que el filósofo alemán presenta inicialmente el capitalismo con una naturaleza intrínsecamente religiosa, es decir, el capitalismo sería una religión en sí mismo. Este aspecto parece no encontrar similitudes en la concepción deleuze-guattariana de la “máquina capitalista civilizada”, aunque esta última admite el “carácter divino del capital”. La religión, para Deleuze y Guattari, tendría un papel claro de ayuda en la represión y formación del deseo humano.

Palabras clave: Culpa. Capitalismo. Deseo. Walter Benjamin. Deleuze y Guattari.

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INTRODUCTION

In his *Letter to a severe critic*, Deleuze (2021, p. 17) states that “[...] writing is a flow among others, without any privilege regarding the others, and that goes into chains, countercurrent and swirl relations with other flows [...]”. Especially, talking about literary writing, the French philosopher argues that the book would be “[...] a cog in a much more complex external machine”. To think about the civilized capitalist machine, based on authors with such different historical and intellectual trajectories as Walter Benjamin, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, in the limited space of an article, is an even greater challenge. The first difficulty is that the study object has multiple layers of reality that make the scholar’s viewpoint extremely hard. In the words of Deleuze and Guattari (2021b), their constructivist project would be constituted as a theory of multiplicities in which the multiple would be the substantive, i.e., multiplicities would be reality itself and would not presuppose any unity, any totality, nor would refer to any subject. For the authors, these multiplicities would have a rhizomatic nature that denounce the “arborescent pseudo-multiplicities”, which are the image of the world-tree and the root-system.

Another point to be raised is that the civilized capitalist machine has already been the object of a huge diversity of scholars from the most varied theoretical-methodological strands who, acting among themselves, mapped it on a map of multiple connections.

Since this rhizome has multiple entry possibilities and all multiplicities are flat, which ones would be the most appropriate for establishing a fruitful dialogue among diverse authors as Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari and Walter Benjamin? For this article’s purposes, we chose to observe two basic works by the three authors, namely, the book *Anti-Oedipus*, written by Deleuze and Guattari (2011) in 1972, and the fragment *Capitalism as religion*, written by Benjamin (2013) in 1921.

Influenced by Nietzsche, especially regarding the second treatise of the *Genealogy of morals*, as well as by Marx, in the volume III of his book *Capital*, Deleuze and Guattari (2011) undertake an analysis of the “social machines” (territorial, despotic and capitalist) according to the concept of “debt”. The Benjaminian fragment, on the other hand, has an essentially anti-capitalist character and is deeply influenced by authors such as Friedrich Nietzsche, Max Weber and Georg Simmel, as well as by the anarchist theorist Gustav Landauer. The text, deeply inspired by the book about Thomas Müntzer, written by Bloch (1973) and published in 1919, is one of the harshest criticisms of capitalism at the time. The author presents a little-explored facet that capitalism is an essentially religious phenomenon.

However, the “religious” nature of capital is not a solitary finding of the German philosopher. Marx himself had already presented elements close to this reality when dealing, in the *Economic-philosophical manuscripts*, with the money issue. When analyzing the play *Timon of Athens*, by William Shakespeare, for example, especially with regard to scene III of act IV, Marx (2004) presents money as having two main properties: being a “visible divinity” that transmutes human properties into their opposite and being “the universal prostitute”. Sacredness and profanity would be attributed to the Marxian general equivalent. What seems to be original in Benjamin’s perspective is exactly the characterization of this capitalist religious structure in four main elements: a) it is a purely cultic religion; b) which propagates a permanent cult; c) this cult is not expiatory, but blaming and d) its God needs to be hidden and can only be invoked at the zenith of its blaming.

This blaming character of capitalism is, in my view, one of the facets that would most closely link the Deleuze-Guattarian analysis present in *Anti-Oedipus* with that presented by Benjamin in his *Capitalism as religion*.

Thus, the purpose of this article is to reflect on the connections that can be established between the characterization that Deleuze and Guattari make of the “civilized capitalist machine” in *Anti-Oedipus* and the analyzes that Walter Benjamin made of the capitalist religious structure in his fragment entitled *Capitalism as religion*, especially regarding the idea of guilt.

Through this reflection, the aim is to promote, in the organizational studies, an expanded debate on the capitalist reality from the viewpoint of authors who have only been used in a more continuous way in the last two decades, by field researchers (Barreto, Carrieri, & Romagnoli, 2020; Cavalcanti, 2016; Paes & Borges, 2016; Zioli, Ichikawa, & Mendes, 2021).

This article comprises, in addition to this introduction, the following sections: 1) *Mea culpa, mea maxima culpa?* Or the era of *homo culpabilis*? 2) Capitalism, desire and guilt: a perspective based on Deleuze and Guattari; 3) Capitalism as religion: the Benjaminian view; 4) Some final considerations and 5) References.

MEA CULPA, MEA MAXIMA CULPA? OR THE ERA OF HOMO CULPABILIS?

If we could carry out an enterprise in which we seek to build a certain archeology of guilt in the western popular imaginary, we would necessarily turn our eyes to the Christian “Genesis”. In its first pages, it is narrated that God planted a garden in Eden and placed man who was created from the clay of the earth to cultivate its soil and guard it. Surrounded by all sorts of trees, pleasant ones, with good fruits to eat, trees of life and of knowledge about good and evil, the newly created man receives his first precept: “You may eat the fruit of every tree in the garden, but you shall not eat the fruit from the tree of knowledge about good and evil, because the day you eat it, you will surely die”.

Although it is not possible to discuss this curious precept in the short space of this article, we drawn attention to the fact that Christianity, in the first words of its Holy book, admits the dubious character of science, which is good, but can also accomplish evil, and places religion as the fundamental north of human behavior. This is not the place to comment on the dubious nature of religion itself. After all, if the tree of science can accomplish good or evil, why not religion? Anyway!

Shortly after the establishment of this norm, God creates the woman – “I will give you an assistant suitable for you” – from the ribs of her companion and, together, they live naked and shameless in an idyllic Paradise.

I would like, if the reader allows me, to reinforce the terms I just quoted: naked and shameless. Is it the verification, even if indirect, that sexuality and, consequently, human desire would be as natural as the trees from Eden’s Garden? I think so.

The biblical scene continues, and a central character, the serpent or, in other words, “the most cunning animal”, makes its debut on the main stage. The serpent, which can be metaphorically interpreted as the male sexual organ, turns to the woman and asks: “Is it true that God has forbidden you to eat the fruit from every tree of the garden?” The woman replies: “We can eat fruits from the trees in the garden. But, the fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, God said, ‘You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, so you won’t die’”. With that answer, the serpent retorts: “Oh, no! You shall not die! But God knows that when you eat it, your eyes will be open, and you will be like gods, knowing good and evil”.

The narrative continues, and the woman, “seeing that the fruit from the tree was good for food, pleasant in appearance, and very suitable for opening the mind”, ate and offered it to the man, who also ate. At this point, both man and woman found themselves, for the first time, naked and, in the presence of God, felt ashamed. About the rest of the story, I think everyone knows. God curses the serpent: “Cursed shall you be above all animals and above all wild beasts; on your belly you will crawl, and dust you will eat all the days of your life”; curses woman: “I will multiply your pains in childbirth; you will give birth in pain, your desires will impel you to your husband and you will be under his dominion”; and, finally, curses man: “Through toil you will get your livelihood from the earth all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the grass of the earth. In the sweat of your face, you will eat your bread”. He expels Adam and Eve from Paradise, taking care to place “cherubs armed with a flaming sword to guard the way to the tree of life” and, finally, he says in a loud and clear voice: “Man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil. Now, let’s care that he does not draw on it and take also the fruit from the tree of life, and eat it, and live forever”. Here is the original fault.

It is not only in the “Genesis” book that there are a series of religious precepts that seek to shape human behavior by establishing a clear limit between what is permitted and what is prohibited. In the other books of the *Pentateuch* (“Exodus”, “Leviticus”, “Numbers” and “Deuteronomy”) that, together with “Genesis”, make up the Jewish Torah, there is also an enormous number of religious, ritualistic, cultural, legal, dietary and even sexual rules. In Leviticus 15:16-18, for example, a man “[...] who has a seminal spillage” is commanded to wash his whole body with water, even though he remains unclean until evening. Furthermore, “[...] every garment and every skin on which the semen falls shall be washed with water and shall be unclean until the evening”. In the same way, “[...] if a woman has slept with this man, she shall wash herself in the same water as him, and they shall be unclean until evening”.

Guilt, especially in this historical moment in which the Catholic Church played a dominant ideological role in Western society, seems to be related to non-compliance with some commandment or religious precept and establishes, in the social imaginary, the idea of sin.

Delumeau (2009, p. 201) points out in his *History of fear in the west*, that the fear of the Black Death in Europe in the Middle Ages generated a series of religious explanations in which the Church “[...] assured that God, irritated by the sins of an entire population, had decided to take revenge [...]” and that “[...] it was convenient to appease him by doing penance”. In this sense, the Church played the role of interpreter of various signs (for example, the passage of comets) which announced that divine vengeance was at hand, causing panic to the population. According to Delumeau (2009), the Church assumed, for several centuries, the role of repressor and punisher of certain social groups that, somehow, either questioned Catholic precepts or casted doubt on them. It is from this perspective that, for example, women and Jews were considered agents of Satan and, consequently, were burned at the stakes of the Inquisition (accused of witchcraft or deicide).

It was only in 1517 that Luther attacked for the first time the dogma and institutions of the Catholic Church, grouping around himself, at least in Germany, “[...] the wealthy elements of the opposition, the mass of the gentry, the bourgeoisie and even a part of the secular princes who wanted to get rich by seizing the assets of the clergy [...]” (Engels, 1975, p. 56). From then on, the emergence of a religious *ethos* different from the Catholic one culminated in a strong alliance established between Protestantism and capitalism. This link, widely discussed in Weber (2001), made the Protestant religion (especially Methodism) work throughout the Industrial Revolution as an “ideological arm of capitalism”. According to Thompson (1987), Methodism displaced the threatening energies or emotions of its faithful to fraternization parties, vigils, musical meetings or renovationist campaigns. Still, as the author points out, during these ceremonies, the preacher didactically spoke “[...] in a rude and emotional style about his spiritual experiences, temptations and struggles against sin” and the faithful “[...] stood up and publicly confessed their sins and temptations, often accompanied by sexual overtones” (Thompson, 1987, p. 248).

The object of preaching was mostly to say that redemption would never be assured and that temptations would arise everywhere. There was a constant inner stimulus towards a sober and diligent behavior by the believer, who should direct all his energies (including sexual ones) to carry out a methodical and disciplined work.

Having exposed this, in the following two sections, we will seek connections between the conceptions of capitalism and guilt in two basic works by three authors: the book *Anti-Oedipus*, written by Deleuze and Guattari (2011) in 1972, and the fragment *Capitalism as religion*, written by Benjamin (2013) in 1921.

CAPITALISM, DESIRE AND GUILT: A PERSPECTIVE BASED ON DELEUZE AND GUATTARI

It is a commonly accepted fact that Deleuze and Guattari (2011) reject, in *Anti-Oedipus*, a psychoanalytic conception of desire based on the idea of lack (Antunes, 2014; Peixoto, 2004; Wendling, 2010). For the authors, when undertaking a true “genealogy of desires”, the human unconscious could be understood as a *locus* of production, and not of representation. By questioning a certain “*furious oedipalization*” that would be in charge of psychoanalysis, Deleuze and Guattari (2011) propose an unconscious that would be much closer to a conception of a factory, or atelier, than to a theater. In this sense, desire would be much closer to the idea of a process than necessarily of an entity. It would be a propagator of flows and lines that would produce certain connections. In Hur’s words (2020, pp. 175-176), the Deleuze-Guattarian desire would consist of “[...] a force that acts and is acted upon by different components” and, therefore, “[...] can assume several direction vectors”, constituting different configurations. Thus, desire would be a “[...] collective enacting, in which the individual is just one point or a resultant of his connections”.

The desiring machines are binary machines, with a binary rule or associative regime; one machine is always coupled to another. The productive synthesis, the production of production, has a connective form: “and”, “and then” [...] It is because there is always a machine producing a flow and another one connected to it, operating a cut; a flow extraction (the breast – the mouth) (Deleuze & Guattari, 2011, p. 16).

The Deleuze-Guattarian subject, understood as a “desiring machine”, would fundamentally be constituted in three different ways: a) the connective synthesis that mobilizes the libido as extraction energy¹; b) the disjunctive synthesis that mobilizes the Numen² as the energy of detachment of a flow³ and c) the conjunctive synthesis that mobilizes the *voluptas*, energy of consumption, as residual energy⁴. The construction of this subject would go through exactly what Deleuze and Guattari (2011) call a “celibate machine”, i.e., the one “[...] that produces intensities or intensive quantities, Freud’s drives idea, measured by the quantity of libido, which will be desirably spent in the production process” (Deleuze & Guattari, 2011, p. 17).

While acknowledging that this “desiring production” has not been completely ignored by psychoanalysis, Deleuze and Guattari (2011) understand, however, that it was “judged” by psychoanalysts based on an essentially Oedipal perspective. In this way, the desire conceived as positive or productive was, within the scope of psychoanalysis, almost always understood as an “*anoedipal*”⁵ nature. What Deleuze and Guattari (2011) intend to point out is that Oedipus fundamentally became, in the hands of the “civilized capitalist machine” and its psychoanalysts, an agent of antiproduction in desire, a castrating element “worse than the original sin”. “It is written on the pediment of the office: leave your desiring machines at the door, abandon your orphaned and celibate machines, your tape recorder and your little velocipede, enter and let yourself be *Oedipalized*” (Deleuze & Guattari, 2011, p. 79).

It is no coincidence, therefore, that Deleuze and Guattari (2011) make, in the manifesto-sentence above, a clear religious allusion, by using an intertextuality with *The Divine Comedy*, by Dante Alighieri, who, upon reaching the doors to hell, finds the following inscription: “Abandon all hope, you who enter”. Although it is not explicitly said, or even metaphorically, in the sentence above, it should be remembered that in the original work of the Italian poet, the door to hell was guarded by Minos, a character whose occupation was to assess guilt and emit the sentences of sinners. Would psychoanalysts be the modern Minos? I think the two French philosophers would say yes.

When dealing with the Kafkanian work, Deleuze and Guattari (2021a, p. 23) state that “[...] it is not Oedipus that produces neurosis, it is the neurosis, i.e., the desire already submitted and seeking to communicate its own submission, which produces Oedipus”.

All desiring production is smashed, subjected to the demands of representation, to the dark games of the representative and the represented in representation. This is the essential point: the reproduction of desire is replaced by a simple representation, both in the healing process and in theory. The productive unconscious is replaced by an unconscious that only knows how to express itself – and express itself in myth, tragedy, dream. But who tells us that dream, tragedy and myth are suitable to the unconscious formations, even if we take into account the work of transformation? (Deleuze & Guattari, 2011, p. 77).

Thus, for Peixoto (2004), supported by the Deleuze-Guattarian perspective, this negative conception of desire would be instituted by these ideological means, especially through Oedipus, in order to rationalize a social situation of hierarchy or domination.

We call idealism of psychoanalysis a whole system of settlements, of reductions in theory and analytical practices: reduction of the desiring production to a system of so-called unconscious representations, and the corresponding forms of causation, expression and understanding; reduction of the factories of the unconscious to a theater scene, Oedipus, Hamlet; reduction of social libido investments to family investments, establishment of desire under family coordinates, still Oedipus [...] The psychoanalysis does nothing more than square Oedipus, Oedipus of transference, Oedipus of Oedipus, on the couch like a muddy little earth. However, whether familiar or analytical, Oedipus is fundamentally an apparatus for the repression of desiring machines, and in no way a formation of the unconscious itself (Deleuze, 2021, pp. 27-28).

¹ “A baby is breastfed. Machine-organ-mouth ‘and’ machine-milk flow/breast. Something goes through between the two surfaces. Desire runs through the machines. An intensity radiates through the child’s body. Something happens. Actions and passions, gestures and affections. Joy was drawn from the experience as an increase in potency. Satisfaction. The agency is successful” (Catenaci, 2022, p. 89).

² Deleuze and Guattari (2011) call deviant libidinal energy as “Numen”.

³ “The inclusive disjunction behaves like the assimilation of the different, without its difference being suppressed; what is disjunctively included retains its uniqueness. [...] The same mouth ‘or’ chews ‘or’ sings ‘or’ screams ‘or’ kisses, whatever, depending on the desiring energy that runs through it at the moment” (Catenaci, 2022, pp. 91-92).

⁴ “To stay with the child being breastfed: i. The machine-organ-mouth ‘and’ a machine-milk flow/breast = connection; ii. The machine-organ-mouth and a machine-milk flow/breast ‘or’ machine-organ-mouth and machine-air flow = register disjunction [‘or’ suckle, ‘or’ scream]; iii. Finally, this will be the product of a subjective consumption [‘so, that was it!’]” (Catenaci, 2022, p. 93).

⁵ All “pre-Oedipal”, “para-Oedipal” and “near Oedipal” forms are included here.

However, one should not think that psychoanalysis is the only institutionalized form managed by capitalism to territorialize the flows of desire. There are also other possible connections to be established in this field: family, church, fascism. One of them concerns the role that the religious institution plays in capitalist society by imprinting guilt on the subject, leading him to a privatized and, in certain cases, even fetishized sexuality. It is within this perspective, for example, that Deleuze and Guattari (2021a) draw attention to Kafka's blocked desire in *The metamorphosis*, which is fundamentally directed towards the portrait of the lady on the wall, as well as the uncovered neck of her sister. Desire thus takes on a forbidding, unspoken air, condemnable in itself and only exercised in dark rooms or bathrooms. This restricted, blocked, submissive, repressed sexuality ends up territorializing itself in the "privileged" private zones of the human body, thus neglecting all the multiple potential configurations of human desire. For Deleuze and Guattari (2018, p. 212), there is "[...] only one sexuality that is the same everywhere and that floods everything". Understanding sexuality from this perspective implies understanding that it is, above all, social and political.

I don't know if we should call this a secret, but the opening of desire to the social field is a certain characteristic of political freedom, a certain characteristic of innovation, of the particular production of objects; and it is exactly what the social field does not want to hear about [...] Everything is completely programmed (Deleuze & Guattari, 2018, p. 217).

This finding also reminds us of another institutionalized and mediated form of capitalism to territorialize the flows of desire, namely, fascism. Deleuze and Guattari (2021b) state, in *A thousand plateaus*, that society always runs the risk of experiencing "Oedipal resurgences to fascist concretions" and add with an almost prophetic air: "Groups and individuals contain micro-fascisms always waiting for crystallization" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2021b, p. 26).

In this context, the Deleuze-Guattarian project present in *Anti-Oedipus*⁶ would be exactly:

To make schizophrenic, schizophrenizing the field of the unconscious and also the historical social field, in such a way as to explode the Oedipus yoke and to rediscover everywhere the force of desiring productions, to rebind in the own real the bond of the analytical machine, of desire and production (Deleuze & Guattari, 2011, p. 75)⁷ ⁸.

Antunes (2004) and Guéron (2017, 2020) point out that this project would also be based on the criticism of another pillar of modern society, namely, the civilized capitalist machine. Guéron (2017, 2020), especially, draws attention to the fact that, in this attempt to think about the *socius* through a certain "machinic materialism", deeply influenced by both Marxism⁹, with emphasis on book III of *Capital*, and by Nietzsche, according to the treatise on the *Genealogy of morals*, Deleuze and Guattari (2011) end up proposing, in *Anti-Oedipus*, an "evolutionary" characterization of social machines¹⁰, from the most primitive, "territorial machine", through the "despotic" to the most contemporary, "civilized capitalist machine".

In Chapter III of *Anti-Oedipus, savages, barbarians, civilized*, Deleuze and Guattari (2011, p. 185) state that pre-capitalist social machines would be inherent to desire in the sense that "they encode it, encode the flows of desire". Thus, for the authors, "[...] codifying desire – and fear, the anguish of decoded flows" is something "[...] characteristic of the *socius*". For Guéron (2017, pp. 263-264), this would mean that the flows of desire would be "[...] rigorously determined, i.e., what is determined in these social relations is the role that each individual and/or group will play". Furthermore, Guéron (2020) states that this codification process could be characterized by the introduction of an element of "non-production". This element, in the author's perspective, would be, exactly, the debt, the guilt, the fault (Guéron, 2020). As will be discussed later, the capitalist machine,

⁶ Antunes (2014) states that, even though it is a reference work on modern desire and the constitution of the political-economic subjectivity of capitalism, *Anti-Oedipus* would deal more with the repression of desire and the production process of modern man.

⁷ For Foucault (1993, p. 1), "Anti-Oedipus shows, initially, the extent of the rided ground. However, it does much more. It doesn't get distracted by vilifying the old idols, even though he has a lot of fun with Freud. And, above all, it encourages us to go further. It would be a mistake to read *Anti-Oedipus* as the new theoretical reference. [...] One should not look for a 'philosophy' in this extraordinary profusion of new notions and surprise concepts. *Anti-Oedipus* is not a counterfeit of Hegel. The best way to read *Anti-Oedipus* is, I believe, to approach it as an 'art', in the sense of 'erotic art', for example. Relying on apparently abstract notions of multiplicity, flows, devices and ramifications, the analysis of the relation of desire with reality and the capitalist 'machine' brings answers to concrete questions".

⁸ "A truly materialist psychiatry is defined [...] by a double operation: introducing desire into the mechanism and introducing production into desire" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2011, p. 39).

⁹ For criticisms of the Marxist approach used by Deleuze and Guattari in *Anti-Oedipus*, see Cotrim (2021).

¹⁰ It should also be said that, according to Antunes (2014, p. 278), in the Deleuze-Guattarian approach, the social machine would be "literally" a machine insofar as it would have an "immovable engine" and would do "[...] several types of cuts: flow extraction, chain detachment, parts distribution".

unlike the previous ones, was built, on the contrary, “[...] on decoded flows, replacing intrinsic codes with an axiomatic of abstract quantities”.

According to Deleuze and Guattari (2011, p. 187), the “territorial machine” would be “[...] the first form of *socius*, the primitive inscription machine, the ‘megamachine’ that covers a social field”. The earth, in the Deleuze-Guattarian perspective, would be, as Ribeiro (2012, p. 4) points out, “[...] the machinic unity of the primitives and all the machine-bodies of men belong to them and are crossed by their forces”. Thus, for Antunes (2014, p. 278), in this model, society would not be a simple means of exchange, in which the essential would be to circulate and pass around, but a *socius* that favors inscription, marking and being marked. Still according to the author, there would only be “[...] circulation when the inscription requires or allows it”, i.e., “[...] what characterizes the primitive territorial machine is to codify the flows, invest the organs and mark the bodies” (Antunes, 2014, p. 278).

The primitive territorial machine encodes flows, invests organs, marks bodies. To what extent circulating, exchanging, is a secondary activity in relation to this task that summarizes all the others: marking the bodies, which are from the earth. The essence of the registering, inscribing *socius*, while attributing to itself the productive forces and distributing the agents of production, consists of this: tattooing, excising, incising, cutting, scarifying, mutilating, encircling, initiating (Deleuze & Guattari, 2011, p. 191).

For Ribeiro (2012, p. 4), this cruel job of marking bodies would have, as a function, the constitution of beings capable of answering for their debts. In this way, the creditor-debtor relationships in these primitive societies would be finite relations that would be at the “[...] basis of the horizontal alliances machined by the bodies”. Also, according to the author, these debts of primitive societies would be “[...] composed of asymmetric prestations and counter-prestations” (Ribeiro, 2012, p. 4). This debt would not be incurred, therefore, in an established relationship between man and his god, but would concern one or other individuals. It is also important to emphasize that, in this type of society, there would not be an abstract quantity, the general capitalist equivalent, which would level material goods or prestige. Thus,

[...] the whole question about the primitive *socius* is, therefore, to mark the bodies so they are capable of paying the debt, only being able, according to Deleuze and Guattari, if they build enough inscriptions on these bodies, with the necessary violence, so they are capable of creating a biocosmic memory: memory of words that the entire body of the earth goes across it (Ribeiro, 2012, p. 4).

For Deleuze and Guattari (2011, p. 193), this cruelty would have nothing to do with any kind of violence, but rather with a “[...] movement of culture that operates in bodies and is inscribed in them, cultivating them”. One objective of this cruelty is to make man and his organs as “gears of the social machine”.

Another important aspect about the Deleuze-Guattarian “territorial machine” is that its operation would consist in declining alliance and filiation. Filiation and alliance would be, as stated by Antunes (2014, p. 279), “[...] like two forms of primitive capital, ‘fixed capital (or affiliative stock) and circulating capital (or movable blocks of debt), to which correspond two memories, one biofiliative and one of alliances and words”.

According to Deleuze and Guattari (2011), the establishment of the “despotic machine” could be summarized by the idea of a new alliance and direct filiation. In this context, the despot would refuse lateral alliances and extensive filiations of the former community. He would enforce a new alliance and place himself in direct filiation with God, causing the people to follow him. Thus, for Guéron (2020, p. 103), “[...] with the emergence of the State, [...] all the lateral processes of debts that were always renewed as finite debts in societies without a State – determining the direct exchanges between things and word –, turn to a supposed ‘superior being’ to which everyone would now be indebted”. “The emergence of the God-Despot-State is, at the same time, the emergence of an infinite element of debt: a transcendent infinite debt [...]” (Guéron, 2020, p. 131).

It should also be noted that the appearance of this machine, established on the basis of a law (and an overcoding process), could be characterized by the installation of a new regime of signifiers. For Guéron (2020), priests, bureaucrats and judges would be, in this sense, the interpreters of this law.

For Antunes (2014, p. 267), the “end of history” consists in the appearance of the “civilized capitalist machine”¹¹, which, in the author’s words, “[...] radically decodes and deterritorializes social life”. In this sense, influenced by Marx, Deleuze and Guattari (2011) point out that the “civilized capitalist machine” would fundamentally consist of the meeting of two main elements: a) the deterritorialized worker who sells his workforce and b) the decoded money, capital, which is able to buy it. Furthermore, for Deleuze and Guattari (2011, pp. 299-300),

[...] each of these elements brings into play several processes of decoding and deterritorialization with very different origins. Regarding the free worker, we have land deterritorialization through privatization; the decoding of instruments of production by appropriation; the deprivation of the means of consumption through the dissolution of the family and the corporation; finally, the worker’s decoding for the benefit of the work itself or the machine. About capital, we have the deterritorialization of wealth through monetary abstraction; the decoding of production flows by mercantile capital; the decoding of States by financial capital and public debts; the decoding of the means of production through the formation of industrial capital. [...] But capitalism only begins, the capitalist machine is only assembled, when capital directly appropriates production, and when finance capital and mercantile capital are nothing more than specific functions corresponding to a labor division in the capitalist mode of production in general.

Such elements lead, according to Guéron (2017, p. 265), to the Deleuze-Guattarian conception that the “civilized capitalist machine”, with its permanently unlimited productive flows, would be characterized by an essentially schizophrenic character. It should be noted that what Deleuze and Guattari call schizophrenia can be understood as “[...] a force that is always pressing, threatening and escaping social relations, exerting a kind of pressure, like a kind of physical energy, on individuals and social groups”.

[...] capitalism deals with these flows in a completely different way from the social relations of production that preceded it: it cannot do without these flows, at the same time that it lives under permanent threat from them. There is, hence, an external, schizophrenic limit, which makes these flows a threat, but it is exactly there that the process of axiomatization will try to manage them as much as possible from inside. It is a process where counter-production is expanded in the same movement of expansion of capitalist production. Thus, capitalism is installed – and maintained – based on a complex system of conjunction of differential flows of decoding and deterritorialization (Guéron, 2017, p. 266).

For Deleuze and Guattari (2011), however, two other fundamental characteristics are important for the “civilized capitalist machine”. At first, capitalism operates a process of decoding flows related to goods and money by abstraction. Thus, for the authors, capitalism only emerges at the historical moment when money becomes a general equivalent (Deleuze & Guattari, 2011). In addition, a second characteristic concerns the fact that capital, according to Guéron (2017, p. 268), undertakes a process of (self)mystification, “[...] a kind of fetishism of all fetishisms, which causes all production to be attributed to it, i.e., capital becomes [...] the ‘natural and divine presupposition’ of the entire productive process”.

It should be noted, at this point, that capitalism would manage to introduce an element of counter-production into the desiring machine, i.e., the “civilized capitalist machine” encodes the flows of desire through a certain introjection of debt, bad conscience and, why not say, guilt. As pointed out by Deleuze and Guattari (2011), the supreme purpose of capitalism consists, fundamentally, in producing lack even where there is always excess. Thus, modern man, emptied of the sacred and indebted by the profane (with his consumer desires, most of the time, unattended and his ever-increasing monetary debts), is always in a state of permanent indebtedness in the presence of a god who is not more the Christian god, but the market god.

¹¹ It is important to highlight that the use of the term “civilized capitalist machine” is deeply inspired by Marxism, although Marx himself does not use it in these terms. For Guéron (2020), by the way, the Marxist influence on Deleuze and Guattari’s thought is quite significant and cannot be underestimated. According to the author, although the two French philosophers had already worked with Marxist concepts in *A thousand plateaus*, it is in *Anti-Oedipus* (especially in Book III of *Capital*) that this relation is intensified.

In the same direction, for Guéron (2017), the Deleuze-Guattarian approach would conceive the debt in capitalism as having a totally “immanent” character – infinite immanent debt. Allied to this, Peixoto (2004, p. 119) understands that “[...] the ontological foundation of the lack is revealed in terms of reification of the economic concept of scarcity [...]”; in other words, “[...] the critique of the discourse about desire as negativity [...] exposes its ostensibly privative character as the effect of a concrete material deprivation, [which] implies a type of reactive and anti-life ideology”.

[...] it will be, with the emergence of capitalism, that the debt will gain an ‘immanent’ dimension: the ‘infinite immanent debt’, according to the authors. It is curious because they will articulate the process of guilt introjection in how it is radicalized in Christianity, described by Nietzsche in *The genealogy of morals* (“schuld” is the same German word for “debt” and “guilt”), with the concept of “immanent” that comes from Marx’s passage on the immanent management of the debt [...] (Guéron, 2017, p. 270).

Perhaps it is this aspect that makes Antunes (2014) understand that capitalism, in the Deleuze-Guattarian approach, ends up deterritorializing the sacred, including its rituals and traditions, refusing any religious conviction system. The fact is that the “civilized capitalist machine” undertakes, according to Deleuze and Guattari (2011, p. 341), a profound movement of desire repression, through the establishment of “neo-territorialities” that are, in the authors’ words, “artificial, residual, archaic”, in addition to Oedipal idealism itself, which welds “sexuality to the family complex” based on a mythological argument that adapts the productive power of the unconscious to “[...] edifying forces of myths and religions” (Deleuze & Guattari, 2011, p. 81). “Deterritorialization is accompanied by an uninterrupted reterritorialization, a re-coding of old forms. The State, the homeland and the family continue to reappear in a modified form, but equally governed by rules and equally repressive” (Antunes, 2014, p. 268).

This repression of desire and, why not say, this modeling of desire in capitalism, connects it directly to the universe of consumption. Antunes (2014, p. 254) states that capitalism models desire, through a compulsive and alienating need (unlimited consumption), and that this element has become the “[...] key in understanding addictions, becoming a deviation from the vital order to the pathological order, characterized by the reduction of the desired object to the needed object”.

CAPITALISM AS RELIGION: THE BENJAMINIAN VIEW

According to Löwy (2013), *Capitalism as religion* is one of the most impressive texts written by Walter Benjamin in his pre-Marxist phase. Directly influenced by Ernst Bloch’s book on the German revolutionary Thomas Müntzer¹² and by Gustav Landauer’s romantic-anarchist socialism, the fragment is frighteningly topical. It is fundamentally anti-capitalist and comprises a meager four pages of writings and bibliographical references, and, in addition, it has a hermeticism and density rarely seen in the human sciences, which leads scholars to a variety of interpretations.

The first aspect to be highlighted is that the fragment was written at the same time as two Benjaminian texts, which are very critical of capitalist society, namely *The critique of power as violence* (1921) and *Theological-political fragment* (1920-1921). Thus, it is not surprising that Walter Benjamin sought, at that time and in this fragment, to analyze, in a very revolutionary way, the “capitalist religion”, even if it was a much more Weberian than Marxist analysis. We put it in these terms, because the first sentence of the fragment is exactly:

Capitalism must be seen as a religion, i.e., capitalism is essentially at the service of resolving the same concerns, afflictions and anxieties to which the so-called religions once wanted to offer an answer. The demonstration of the religious structure of capitalism, which is not just a formation conditioned by religion, as Weber thought, but an essentially religious phenomenon, would lead us, even today, to divert to a generalized and excessive polemic (Benjamin, 2013, p. 21).

¹² According to Löwy (2007, p. 177), “[...] the title of the excerpt was inspired by Ernst Bloch’s book, Thomas Müntzer, theologian of the revolution, published in 1921; in the chapter dedicated to Calvino, the author denounced, in the doctrine of the Genoese reformer, a manipulation that would ‘totally destroy’ Christianity and introduce ‘elements of a new religion’, the one of capitalism erected as a religion [...] and turned Church of Mammon”.

It is important to highlight that, for Benjamin (2013) capitalism would have an intrinsically religious nature, in opposition to the classic Weberian conception that there would be an elective affinity between the Christian religion and the capitalist economy. In other words, the author is claiming that capitalism is not favored in any way by any religious ideology, but it would be a religion itself (Benjamin, 2013).

Defending his argument, Benjamin (2013) points out that the “capitalist religion” would be composed of four main traits: a) it is a purely cultic religion; b) it propagates a permanent cult; c) this cult is not expiatory, but blaming and d) its God needs to be hidden and can only be invoked at the zenith of its blaming.

Regarding the first characteristic, Benjamin (2013) states that the “capitalist religion” gives meaning to all things, based on a direct and immediate relation with its cult. It follows that, in this religion, there would be no mediations or mediators or even ideology. About this, Míguez (2021, p. 14) highlights that “[...] capitalism imposes its utilitarian cultural *ethos* as the only human dimension with transcendent meaning”. “Capitalism is a purely cult religion, devoid of dogma” (Benjamin, 2013, p. 23).

The second trait, for Benjamin (2013), is that the “capitalist religion” promotes a cult of permanent duration. In the author’s words:

[...] capitalism is the celebration of a cult *sans trêve et sans merci* [without truce and without mercy]. For it, there are no “ordinary days”, there is no day that is not festive in the terrible sense of ostentation from the entire sacral dove, the extreme commitment of the worshiper (Benjamin, 2013, p. 22).

There would not be any moment of “rest” for the worshiper of the “capitalist religion”, since he is in the universe of production or consumption or both. For Coelho (2021, p. 254), one of the possible interpretations of this passage may be related to a certain culture of consumption, “[...] in which every day is a moment of consumption and life is constantly, without truce, understood by the dynamics of success in the market and mediated by the ownership of consumer goods”.

Another possibility of interpretation is associated with a possible criticism by Walter Benjamin of the book *The protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism*, by Max Weber. In this book, Weber (2001) approaches, among many other aspects, how the Protestant religion exerts permanent control over people’s way of life. Benjamin’s irony would be exactly in the reference to the Catholic feast days that the Protestants had abolished. Coelho (2021, p. 252) also points out that this permanent character of the capitalist cult would involve “[...] certain deities, which are worship objects”. For the author, one of the most obvious examples of this aspect would be exactly the cult of money in its most diverse forms, since, currently, paper money is no longer, as it was then, the main circulating medium (Coelho, 2021).

It is also interesting to highlight, on this point, the proximity that Löwy (2007, p. 180) establishes between the analysis of money present in the fragment and what is inscribed in one of the texts by the Jewish/German anarchist thinker Gustav Landauer cited by Benjamin in the references, *Llamamiento al socialismo*. The text says:

[...] the word “God” [*Gott*] is, in its origin, identical with “idol” [*götze*] and that both mean “the melted” [or “the molten”] [*gegossene*]. God is an artifact created by men, to whom life is given, brings the lives of humans to himself, and finally becomes more powerful than humanity. [...] The only molten [*gegossene*], the only idol [*götze*], the only God [*Gott*] to which human beings gave their lives was money [*geld*]. Money is artificial and alive, money produces money and more money, money has all the power in the world. [...] Who does not see, who does not see even today that money, that God, is nothing more than a spirit created by human beings, a spirit that has become a living thing [*ding*], a monster [*unding*], and that is the meaning [*sinn*] of our life that has gone crazy [*unsinn*]? Money does not create wealth, it is wealth; it is wealth itself; there is no other wealth than money (Landauer, 1919, p. 144).

The third trait is that the “capitalist religion” would be the first case of a blameworthy and non-expiatory cult. In the words of Benjamin (2013, p. 22):

[...] such a religious system is the result of a monstrous movement. A monstrous conscience of guilt that does not know how to expiate takes hold of the cult, not to expiate this guilt, but to make it universal, to hammer it into the conscience, and, finally and above all, to involve God in this guilt, so he gets interested in the expiation. Therefore, guilt must not be expected from the cult itself, nor even from the reform of that religion, which should be able to find some solid foothold within itself; nor from the refusal to adhere to it. It is part of the essence of this religious movement - capitalism - to hold out until the end, until the final and total blaming from God, until the state of universal despair is reached, in which some hope is still deposited. Therein resides the historically unprecedented aspect of capitalism: religion is no longer a reform of being, but its collapse. It is the expansion of despair into the universal religious state, from which salvation would be expected. God’s transcendence collapsed. But he’s not dead; he was included in human destiny. This passage of the “human being” planet through the house of despair in the absolute solitude of its orbit constitutes the *ethos* defined by Nietzsche. This human being is the superhuman being [*ubermensch*], the first one who begins to consciously fulfill the capitalist religion.

For Silva (2021), a religion that blames the individual without offering him any kind or possibility of redemption, actually becomes a myth and places human beings in an essentially tragic situation. Thus, for the author, by taking the place of “traditional” religion, capitalism would not produce any kind of hope, but rather a state of universal despair, since “[...] it presents itself as an impersonal force dictating human destiny, as an inescapable totality with no alternatives” (Silva, 2021, p. 104). In this way, capitalism would carry out a secularizing process of religion at a level never observed in humanity before, since there would be no kind of transcendence in it or heaven for which human beings could aspire (human desires would only be satisfied here and now for those who can consume). This process of secularization of capitalism would also make evident, according to Silva (2021, p. 104), the “[...] impossibility of the cult to promote redemption and, as an index of this failure is guilt”. “In the capitalist logic, if poor people are guilty of their exclusion, they are out of grace by the will of God expressed in the markets” (Coelho, 2021, p. 257).

Löwy (2007, pp. 182-183) also draws attention to an extremely perverse argument of capitalism, the idea that “[...] if the poor are guilty and excluded from grace and if in capitalism they are condemned to social exclusion, it is because ‘it is the will of God’ or, its equivalent in the capitalist religion, the ‘will of the markets’”. It should also be noted that the capitalist religion, by treating the condemnation for the exclusion as the will of God, would make it impossible, or, at least, would weaken any form of political action to challenge the *status quo*. Thus, any kind of questioning of the divine would expose the human – as can be seen in some Greek myths – to the idea of a tragic and exemplary punishment.

Another interesting aspect pointed out by Coelho (2021) is that the “capitalist religion”, while being conceived from the idea of exploitation, exclusion and sacrifice, would also be capable of producing a certain fascination and devotion. In this perspective, capitalism creates a strong idolatry (fetish), both by its simulacra, money, capital, goods, among others, and for its “priests”, big businessmen, entrepreneurs, etc. “Comparison between images of saints from different religions, on the one hand, and banknotes from different States, on the other hand. [...] The spirit that is expressed in the ornaments of banknotes” (Benjamin, 2013, p. 23).

For Benjamin (2013, p. 22), the fourth and last trait “[...] of this religion is that its God needs to be hidden and can only be invoked at the zenith of its guilt. The cult is celebrated before an immature deity [...]”. On this point, Benjamin’s text refers, in a very interesting way, to Freud. In this text, Benjamin (2013, p. 22) states:

Freudian theory is also part of the sacerdotal empire of this cult. It was conceived in totally capitalist molds. Based on a very profound analogy yet to be clarified, what has been repressed – the sinful representation – is the capital that yields interest to the hell of the unconscious.

When one observes the citation to Freud in the fragment, it is noted that, although it is a punctual mention and that the author himself admits the need for the theme to be better discussed, one can see the agreement of the German philosopher with the idea that the Freudian theory would be intrinsically linked to capitalism, so being an essential part of the cult,

of the “capitalist religion” (Benjamin, 2013). In addition, Benjamin points out, in the same fragment, that desire, as a “sinful” representation of the unconscious, is, in his perspective, a repression instrument of capital.

For Míguez (2021, p. 15), when interpreting this passage of the fragment, the “capitalist religion” would hide “[...] its blaming God in the unconscious, who is an immature God, whose maturity is injured in each representation”. Finally, it is worth highlighting the “mysterious” mention of Nietzsche in Benjamin’s text. According to Benjamin (2013, pp. 22-23),

The type of capitalist religious thought gains grandiose expression in Nietzsche’s philosophy. The idea of the superhuman being transposes the apocalyptic “leap” not to repentance, atonement or penance, but to the apparently constant intensification, but discontinuous in its last stage, causing rupture. Therefore, in the terms of the *non facit saltum* [makes no leap], intensification and development are incompatible. The superhuman being is the historical human being who got there without conversion, who grew up across the sky. This bursting of the sky by intensified humanity, which, in religious terms, is and remains guilt (also for Nietzsche), caused Nietzsche to do a prejudgment. And similarly, Marx too: unrepentant capitalism turns into socialism with interest and interest on interest, which, as such, are a function of guilt (see the demonic ambiguity of the concept).

According to the reading that Löwy (2007) makes of this, in his own words, “obscure paragraph”, a possible reading would be that the Nietzschean superman does nothing more than intensify the cult and expansion of the capitalist religion. Still for the author, Nietzschean thought would not question human guilt and despair and would leave it to its fate (Löwy, 2007).

SOME FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The main objective of this article was to reflect on the connections that can be established between the characterization that Deleuze and Guattari make of the “civilized capitalist machine” in their book *Anti-Oedipus* and Walter Benjamin’s analyzes of the “capitalist religious structure” in his fragment entitled *Capitalism as religion*, especially about the idea of guilt.

As can be seen throughout this article, the Deleuze-Guattarian conception of psychoanalysis has an essentially critical character. By criticizing the conception of psychoanalysis, according to the idea of lack as representation, Deleuze and Guattari seek to create a conception of the unconscious as potency, with considerable approximations with the Nietzschean concept of potency wish or, in other words, as production. Furthermore, for the authors, Oedipal idealism would serve the “capitalist civilized machine” as an instrument for repressing desire and rationalizing a social situation of hierarchy or domination. When one observes the citation to Freud in Benjamin’s fragment *Capitalism as religion*, although it is a punctual mention and that the author himself admits the theme needs to be better developed, it is possible to notice the German philosopher’s agreement with the idea that Freudian theory would be intrinsically linked to capitalism, being an essential part of the cult, of the “capitalist religion”. In addition, in the same fragment, Benjamin points out that desire, as a “sinful” representation of the unconscious, is, in his perspective, a repression instrument of capital.

The mention of the idea of guilt in the Benjaminian fragment that deals with Nietzsche’s thought is clearly directed to capitalism, and not to other pre-capitalist forms as highlighted in the “primitive machine” from Deleuze and Guattari. Despite this, it is a fact that the Deleuze-Guattarian analysis, deeply inspired by Nietzsche, “advances” towards capitalism by arguing that it codifies the flows of desire, through a certain introjection of debt, bad conscience, and guilt. Capitalism thus conceives, for Deleuze and Guattari, debt with a totally immanent nature. Being an infinite and immanent debt, there would be no room for man to establish any kind of questioning about his situation of concrete material deprivation. It is in this respect that the paragraph about Nietzsche in the Benjaminian fragment seems to come close to Deleuze and Guattari. As previously stated, for Benjamin, Nietzschean thought does not question the capital guilt and leaves man abandoned to his own fate in a situation of clear despair.

What seems to be different in Benjamin’s thought, at least with regard to the studied fragment, in comparison with the Deleuze-Guattarian approach, is that the German philosopher initially presents capitalism with an intrinsically religious nature, i.e., capitalism would be a religion itself. This aspect does not seem to find similarities with the Deleuze-Guattarian conception

of the “civilized capitalist machine”, although the latter admits the “divine character of capital”. Religion, which must not be confused with Benjamin’s idea of “capitalist religion”, for Deleuze and Guattari, would have a clear function of helping in the repression and modeling of human desire. But, it must be said that there would be a “divinatory” character in the general capitalist equivalent (money) both in Benjamin and in Deleuze and Guattari.

Another important point is that the “capitalist religion” would have, for Benjamin, a permanent cultic character. This aspect does not seem to find an immediate approximation with Deleuze and Guattari. However, by saying that the “civilized capitalist machine” would be essentially schizophrenic, with its productive flows always pressuring social relations, and modeling desire, through a compulsive and alienating need, Deleuze and Guattari seem to indicate that, in their perspective, the cultic character of capitalism would consist of the capitalist addiction for consumption.

Regarding the fact that Benjamin considers capitalism a religion with a blaming and not expiatory cult, it is noted that the author moves further towards the idea of redemption, a theme he discusses with more detail in Theses II and III of the book *Theses on the concept of history*, rather than on the “causes” of guilt in capitalist society. Although it is not the direct object of this article, it must be said that Benjamin handles redemption in *Theses on the concept of history* as a kind of apocatastasis, i.e., a return to a certain original state, in the Gospel, the reestablishment of Paradise by the Messiah. Deleuze and Guattari, on the contrary, when carrying out a “debt genealogy” along the social machines, understand that this debt gradually moves from the relationship with other, the finite debt of the territorial machine, to the despot, the transcendent infinite debt of the despotic machine and, finally, for capital, the immanent infinite debt.

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