

THE ELIMINATION OF STRENGTH

Absolutism, the Body of the Despot, and the Rise of the Chinese Empire



Unity and Dominion

The first unified dynasty of China was founded in 221 B.C. Fifteen years later, it fell. But the imperial machinery it set in motion during that short time was to span the dynasties, running for over two thousand years until the proclamation of the Republic in 1912.

The Qin Dynasty was the product of a century of military expansion by a peripheral feudal state of the same name. The Qin state overran its neighbors one by one, bringing the Warring States Period (463-222 B.C.) and the fragmented Zhou Dynasty to a close. The process began with far-reaching social reforms introduced by the Legalist philosopher Shang Yang, advisor to Duke Xiao of Qin (reigned 361-338 B.C.).¹ It was completed by Duke Xiao's descendant, Duke Cheng, the self-proclaimed First Emperor, under the tutelage of another Legalist, a disciple of Shang Yang named Li Si.²

The central work in the Legalist corpus is The Book of Lord Shang (Shangjun shu). Traditionally attributed to Shang Yang, as it now survives it is the work of many hands.³ It reads like a collective how-to manual for the absolute State. Legal documents recently discovered in the grave of a local Qin dynasty official display in astonishing detail the

concrete workings of the empire, providing evidence that policies of the kind set forth in The Book of Lord Shang had in fact become day-to-day reality.⁴

The aim of this article, however, is not to establish a cause-effect relation between the ideas of 'great' men, texts, and subsequent events. These formations are indeed understood to be related--but all on the level of effect. All are effects of a common dynamic that is contained neither in the concepts, nor in the texts, nor in the events, but is located in their interstices, inhabiting the space of their interrelation. The aim here is to chart that inter-dynamism: what Michel Foucault would call the "strategies" of the absolute State, and Deleuze and Guattari its "abstract machine." What we hope to establish, alternating between textual analysis of The Book of Lord Shang and historical description, is a flow-chart of despotic desire.

Lice

"Rites and music, odes and history, moral culture and virtue, filial piety and brotherly love, sincerity and faith, chastity and integrity, benevolence and righteousness, criticism of the army and being ashamed of fighting"--

The "six lice" that threaten the state.

"When these twelve gain an attachment, dismemberment ensues" [D 256/KH 13:106-7 (see Key to Citations at the beginning of the Notes)].⁵

No sooner are they six than they are twelve. Any count is conventional, for lice are legion.⁶ If they are, they are spreading, in geometrical progression. They are a contagion sapping the strength of the state.

"Longing for old age, (enjoyment of) eating, beauty, love, ambition, and virtuous conduct" [D 306/KH 20:159]--"the things people desire are countless" [D 211/KH 5:57].

Attributes of lice: they are nondenumerable, and they are desired. The question is not so much what they are, as how they are. Lice are not particular things, or even particular actions. They are a mode which any thing or action may adopt.

Lice grow naturally from the necessary functions of the body politic. "Farming, trade, and office are the three permanent functions in a state. Farmers open up the soil, merchants [import] products, officials rule the people. These three functions give rise to lice" [D 306/KH 20:159].

A third attribute: lice are a departure. They are necessary functions running away with themselves. The difference between a louse and a necessity is one not of nature but of degree and direction. If farmers produce more food than is needed for minimal health, then people eat for eating's sake. If merchants import more commodities than are needed for food production, then people own for the joy of possession. If there is eating for eating's sake and possession for the joy of it, then the officials who regulate production and consumption grow fat and rich, and begin to act in their own interests. Lice are excess: the overfulfillment of a need. Lice are a diversion: of energies away from the state.

Lice are the threat of a realm of self-indulgence in which desires are fulfilled for their own sake. They are the threat of a realm of self-interest in which desiring bodies act on their own behalf and on behalf of their own (family, caste). The feared dismemberment of the state is the creation or continuation of semi-autonomous social realms incompletely subordinated to the state and expending bodily energies the state could otherwise channel toward its ends. Correction: end.

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1. Wandering scholars are lice. The various "statelets" of the Zhou dynasty were in constant battle. Their leaders, faced with incessant warfare and increasingly complex internal hierarchies, turned to the services of educated bureaucrats and military advisors called 'wandering scholars' (youshi). Beginning in the 5th century B.C., these wandering scholars became increasingly mobile, moving from one statelet to another, offering advice and analyses of current events and political philosophy. Confucius (551-479 B.C.) is the best known example. Various schools of thought were generated by these men and their disciples, most notably Confucianism, Mohism, Legalism, and Taoism. Each school delighted in attacking the others, exposing weaknesses in their logic or decrying their effect on policy.⁷

From the time of its establishment in the 9th century B.C. until the formation of the Empire most of the chancellors of Qin were scholars brought in from other states. But The Book of Lord Shang and the legal documents express extreme suspicion about such people: "When 'wandering scholars' are staying somewhere without tallies, the prefecture where they stay will be fined one suit of armour." [H104/C3/W7.9b]⁸

A second statute brings out the underlying rage of the state at those it cannot control: "Those who praise the enemy in order to frighten the mind of the population will be dishonored. What is to 'dishonor'? To dishonour him when alive, and when the dishonoring is over, to cut him asunder--that is what is meant." [H134/D41/W8.29a]

The First Emperor pursued these policies to their logical extreme. Few events in Chinese history have had an impact equal to the famous Burning of the Books begun in 213 B.C. and the massacre of 460 Confucian scholars who were traditionally said to have been buried alive in 212 B.C. Significantly, the Book of Lord Shang was spared, along with medical and prognosticatory texts. Note that a calendrical/divinatory text was included in the tomb of the Qin official at Yunmeng.⁹

2. More lice

a) Feudal lineages and peasant families. The suppression of Confucianism and other moralist schools of philosophy removed the ideological base of support of the feudal aristocracy, whose lands themselves were appropriated by the state. The territorial clans of the peasantry were undermined through reforms that realigned land divisions and placed all land under centralized administrative control. (See "Unifying abstraction and the capture of land" below).

b) Merchants. The state attempted to control the flow of goods and capital. Officials inspected the marketplaces, checking people's passes and policing prices. In the Yunmeng statutes we find: "When a stranger has not yet presented his passport to the officials and trades with them, the fine is one suit of armour." [H174/D163/W8:33a] This was one of a number of mechanisms the cumulative effect of which was to prevent the emergence of capitalism:

"The resources of the merchant," states The Book of Lord Shang, are in his personal fortune. Thus in a single house within the empire is sequestered personal fortune and [monetary] resources. A person's resources consisting of a weighty fortune, he [may] perversely rely on this power[ful condition] abroad, and gathering up great resources, return to his house;¹⁰ this would have been a problem for [exemplary rulers] Yao and Xun. Therefore Tang and Wu prohibited this, with the result that their success was established and their fame made." [D 220/KH 6:66]

Merchants and criminals were routinely exiled to border regions, where they would be absorbed into the rigid organization of the garrison colonies protecting the sedentary interior of the state from nomadic attack from the steppes [Bodde 1938:171].

c) Criminals and self-serving bureaucrats. Large groups of "fugitives, bonded servants, and shopkeepers" were deported in 214 B.C. to labor colonies in the South, where they were put to work on large-scale agriculture-related projects [SJ 6:253/MH

2:169] They were followed in 213 B.C. by "functionaries who had not been upright in handling court cases," some of whom were sent North instead to work on the Great Wall [SJ 6:253/MH 2:169]

3. Summary. Anyone whose actions did not conform to the pattern of movements prescribed by the state was either immobilized ("erased" or hobbled by fines) or rechanneled (into forced service). The state displayed an obsessive fear of undisciplined movement of people and ideas, carefully preventing the creation of spheres of interest outside its direct control. In the vocabulary of the time, it destroyed the possibility of "perversely relying on one's own power and returning to one's house." That involved containing flows unleashed by its own policies, such as the movements of the new merchant class necessary to distribute the increased agricultural surplus created by government promotion of agriculture. It also involved attacking preexisting semi-autonomous formations: the feudal aristocratic families and the territorial clans.

One Hole

"A country of a thousand chariots that keeps only one outlet (door) for its products will flourish, but if it keeps ten outlets it will be dismembered" [D 197/KH 4:42].¹¹ "The means whereby a country is made prosperous are agriculture and war" [ibid.].

Agriculture is the source of energies, war their only allowable outlet. All activity must flow uninterruptedly from singular source to singular outlet.

Law, the channelizer, is "an expression of love for the people" on the part of the ruler [D 169/KH 1:14]. A people subject to the law "will love their ruler" in return [D 192/KH 3:37].

The wise ruler "causes others to love" [D 293/KH 18:144]. He makes the people "delight in war," so that "they behave like hungry wolves on seeing meat" [D 286/KH 18:138]. He "establishes what they desire" [D 241-2/KH 9:88].

Unless the people are made one, there is no way to make them attain their desire. Therefore, they are made one; as a result of this unification, their

strength is consolidated, and in consequence of this consolidation, they are strong. ... A country that knows how to produce strength ... bars all private roads for gratifying their ambition and opens only one gate through which they can attain their desire ... It can make the people do what they hate in order to reach what they desire [D 211-12/KH 5:57].

All doors of desire are closed save one. Behind the closed doors lie cultivated pleasures. These imply leisure. Which in turn implies shelter from the most basic demands of the state. Sheltered, a body is free to indulge. Its satisfactions, as listed among the lice, are of three kinds: consumptive (having a physical object such as food, another body, or a material possession), reflective (having an intellectualized object, as in the case of music and wit), and preservative (moral training, family ritual, the only object of which is reproduction). Consumptive and the preservative satisfactions go hand in hand. The former, by their very nature, require constant replenishment. The latter assure the physical availability of the necessary objects through the perpetuation of an amenably sheltering social order. Combined, they mitigate the dangers posed by either in isolation: outright hedonism or utter stagnation. Reflective satisfactions contribute to this mutual control loop, but also present a danger of their own: a kind of aesthetic hedonism that would be next to impossible to stop once it took off on its own, due to the slippery nature of its intellectualized objects.

The closed doors lead to an arena of more or less superfluous activity privileging repeated, object-oriented satisfaction and reproduction. The open door leads directly to the predatory thrill of pursuit and attack, a joy so immediate that all concern for consequences disappears. "For the sake of our superiors, we (the people) forget our love of life" [D 188/KH 3:33]. For the people, as desired by the ruler, there is no object, not

even self-preservation. The process of coinciding with the ruler's desire is its own reward. The prey--its specific attributes, the predator's enjoyment of them after the capture (in other words whether any given wolf eats the meat)--is irrelevant. It is more the stimulus than the destination of a drive. The ruling drive with which the people coincide as they die is fueled by interim objects, but has no end. There is always another state to conquer, and when they all fall there are still seas to cross. The insanity of an infinite outward rush replaces the reasoned circularity of social reproduction attended by the petty satisfactions of privilege. A 'barbaric,' ultimately objectless, one-time orgiastic expenditure replaces the limited excesses of the repetition-compulsion of 'civilization' and its contents.

The channelization of energies toward war and away from semi-privatized or familialized satisfactions is not a repression, or even a sublimation, so much as an immediate conversion of investments that retain their directly libidinal nature. The people must be made to do what they hate--place themselves in bodily danger, forego the sophisticated pleasures of good food and witty conversation, turn their backs to the sweet rigors of morality and ritual--in order to give themselves over to an intenser love, the life-consuming pull of predation in fusion with the person of the ruler as State desire in the raw.

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1. Agriculture for war. The second chapter of the Book of Lord Shang is entitled "Opening up the Wastelands." Of twenty measures proposed to expand cultivation of wastelands and strengthen agriculture, nine involve restrictions on the movements of aristocrats, merchants, idlers, and criminals.

The Yunmeng documents reveal a similar preoccupation with agriculture and the control of resources:

"Whenever the rain is beneficial and affects the grain in ear, a report in writing is to be made concerning the crop that has been benefited and the grain in ear, as well as the number of qing [15.13 acre units] of cultivated fields and areas without crops ... Likewise in cases of drought and violent wind or rain, floods, or hordes of grasshoppers or other creatures which damage the crops, the number of qing concerned is always to be reported in writing. Nearby prefectures have light-footed [runners] deliver the letter, distant prefectures have the courier service deliver it." [H21/A1/W7.1a] The government

granaries supplying the army and state laborers were closely policed (see "Regulated Stockpiling" below).

The state had at its disposal two categories of laborers: *corvée* laborers and hard-labor convicts. In the following dynasty, the Han (206 B.C.-220 A.D.), all men except the higher levels of the (by then reconstituted) aristocracy had to perform two years of military service and one month of *corvée* duties per year. In the Qin, men were enrolled on the registers at age 15 and left them at 60. Soldiers of the triumphant armies of Qin presumably served long periods in the army: battles were fought almost continuously from 256 to 210 B.C. The length of time served by convicts has been much debated. Hulsewe maintains that it was under six years but other authorities disagree. In any case, there must have been immense armies of prisoners of war working away their lives on the gigantic Qin hydraulic and wall-building projects. Personal files appear to have been kept on laborers, noting which tools were lent to them, whether they were delinquent at their duties, and even whether or not the sections of pounded-earth wall they had worked on had collapsed within a year of their work on it.

Effective measures were taken to ensure that all surplus-value was channeled into war, directly in the form of food and soldiers for the army, and indirectly in the form of labor for fortifications and for public works promoting intensive agriculture.

2. Militarization of society. All of society was reorganized according to a military model, transforming the Qin state into an immense war machine. The impetus for the application of the military model to society at large appears to have been the prolonged contact between the Qin state and the 'barbarians,' as groups outside the mainstream of Chinese culture were called. (See "Nomadic Carriers" below.)

a) Cell structure. The military practice of organizing troops into five-man squads was applied to the entire population through household registration. Every five-family group had to provide five men for the military draft and *corvée* labor. Officials were punished for attempting to draft more than one member of a family at the same time, but they were also punished if they failed to register young men who had come of age, or failed to muster the conscripts, or attempted to conceal those who should be conscripted by making them "retainers."

b) Militarization of rank. Rank in civil administration was pinned to military exploits rather than aristocratic title. Specifically, it hinged on chopping off enemy heads. Anyone who took one head was promoted one rank, up to the fourth rank. Then one could be promoted only if one became the leader of a military squadron, and then only if one's squadron took 33 heads [Tu 1985]. Officers were awarded special prerogatives, but were still kept in five-man mutual surveillance units.

The specifics of the assignment of ranks, tax exemptions, and lands and estates in reward for heads taken in battle are given in Chapter 19 of The Book of Lord Shang, "Within the Borders." The Han Feizi [17:43.15] summarizes the situation: "The law of the Lord of Shang said: 'Those who take one head receive one degree in rank, and those who

desire an office (instead), receive an office of 50 piculs of grain; those who take two heads, receive two degrees in rank." [D 296, n.5].

"If the centurions and corporals take over 33 heads, this is accounted ample. ... (D297/KH 19:147)."

"If in attacking a city or beseiging a town, (each general) can capture 8000 heads or more, it is accounted ample; if in a battle in the open field, 2,000 heads are accounted ample. ..." [D297/KH 19:149].

c). Hierarchization. The entire social structure was integrated into a twenty-tiered hierarchy of ranks.¹² This represented a significant extension of hierarchy by comparison to the earlier feudal social organization, in which the graduated ranks of the aristocrats set them off as a group from the undifferentiated 'masses'. There was a corresponding development of specialized units within the military. Ranks in the military were marked by badges and flags, and in civil society by sumptuary regulations governing clothing, official lodging, and per diems.

d). Pass system. The movement of the entire population was restricted and organized along military lines, requiring tallies and passports to move between cities and in some cases even from one part of a city to another [Yates 1980].



3. Unifying abstraction and the capture of land. The entire empire was divided into administrative units modeled on the military commanderies, or garrison colonies, that had been established in frontier regions captured from the 'barbarians.' This involved the imposition of a unified system of administration over what had been widely diversified feudal holdings and particularistic communities.

The crucial step in this process was Shang Yang's "destruction of the well-field system [the legendary feudal tenant farming system], and the opening up of the pathways and roads between the fields." This removed the land from the control of the feudal fiefdoms and local clans. It took the capture of land to a new level: land is now viewed abstractly as consisting of quantifiable units by a state which minutely surveys its products, efficiently taxes it, and redistributes it for its own ends.¹³ This 'statistical' method of governing was one of the major innovations championed by the Legalists, and

entailed the first population censuses conducted in China.¹⁴ Shang Yang's land reforms appear to have opened the way for some form of private land-ownership and the buying and selling of land. However, the state maintained ultimate ownership and the peasant's rights of possession was closer to usufruct. The break-up of lineal territorialities had the effect of 'nuclearizing' the family. Nothing would stand between the now standardized basic productive unit of society and the central administration. The landed holdings of the feudal lords and the particularistic self-contained village communities were gathered up and transformed into building blocks for the new edifice of empire.

After the First Emperor's death, usurpers bypassed his eldest son and installed a younger sibling as Second Emperor. They ordered the eldest son and General Meng Tian to commit suicide, cynically charging them with disloyalty toward the imperial house. Meng Tian refuted the charges, but implied that his innocence concealed a guilt of a different nature: "Indeed I have a crime to die for. Beginning at Lintao and extending to Liaodong, I have made ramparts and ditches over more than ten thousand *li* [one-third mile], and in that distance it is impossible that I have not cut through the veins of the earth" [SJ 88:2570]. The veins of the earth refer to Chinese geomantic principles, but also recall the close relationship between 'primitive' communities and the territories to which those communities had religious as well as lineal ties (see "Divinity as the Fulfillment of Patriarchy" below). These territories are cut loose from their traditional dividing lines, gathered up by the State, and recodified; this process may be called "overcoding." Meng Tian's evocation of a crime against geomantic lines in relation to a controversy surrounding the imperial line indirectly expresses the transposition from earth-based territoriality to a reterritorialization on the imperial household as abstract unifying principle of a now centralized and hierarchical State. The First Emperor was of course guilty of similar crimes. One of the imperial progresses he undertook to mark the boundaries of his newly conquered realm was impeded by local goddesses. In retribution, he ordered 3,000 convicts to chop down all the trees covering the goddesses' sacred mountain and to paint the mountain red, a color associated with condemned criminals. [SJ 6:248/MH 2:154-156] This is a graphic example of imperial overcoding: the Emperor sweeps down to impose his judgment, literally leaving his mark as he transforms the earth, usurping the powers associated with a local sacred site as part of a unifying circuit around the realm.¹⁵

4. The law enters the people: the spying-machine. To ensure that the people pursued the single and correct path, and to excise or block the development of any mediating lice, the state of Qin instituted a system of mutual responsibility. No segment of society was exempt. In the army, rank-and-file and officers alike were organized into five-man units. In civil society, peasant families, merchants, and bureaucrats were all broken down into fives. If one member of a cell was found guilty of a crime, the other four received the same punishment. Several passages in the Yunmeng legal documents suggest that the spying system was a social innovation that required repeated clarification, in particular

the concept of mutual responsibility. Notice the self-referential and reflective nature of the text of the law:

"What is the meaning of 'the four neighbors'? The 'four neighbors' means the group of five" [H146/D82/W8.30b].

"[The Statutes say that in the case of] robbery and all other crimes 'those who dwell together' are liable to be tried. What is the meaning of 'those who dwell together'? The household is meant by 'those who dwell together.' Servants are tried for crimes [committed by the members of a household] but the [members of the household] are not tried in those crimes committed by the servants: that is the meaning." [H126/D19/W8.28a]

The abstraction of the land and the population and their recodification by a centralized State apparatus made it possible for the emperor's will to reach into the people in the form of a self-policing body of law.

5. Taxation and state money monopoly. At the same time as the State abstracts the land and asserts ultimate ownership over it, a system of taxation is created to abstract the flow of wealth.

"The delivery of hay and straw per qing is made according to the number of fields bestowed. Irrespective of whether the fields are cultivated or uncultivated, per qing three bushels of hay are delivered and two bushels of straw. ... When delivering hay and straw, conversion of the one into the other is permitted." [H23/A3/W7.1b] The reference to government bestowal of land is evidence against outright private ownership [Hulsewe 1985:215-18].

The next step in the abstraction of wealth was also taken: the introduction of a general conversion standard. In other words, money. Several passages in the Yunmeng materials refer to the payment of fines, fees, or taxes in cash. Currency consisted of round bronze coins and pieces of cloth measuring 8 feet by 2 1/2 feet (equivalent in value to 11 coins). An allusion to the apprehension of counterfeiters reveals that the Qin state kept a monopoly on money. In a particularly heavy-handed measure, the First Emperor intentionally made the coins weighty and cumbersome in an effort to slow down the flow of capital unleashed by his own centralization policies.

6. Summary. By recodifying and redistributing the territory, imposing conscription and corvée, reorganizing society into mutual spy cells, creating money, and instituting regularized taxation, the State was able to capture both labor and land as part of a generalized militarization of society. All resources followed an orderly flow inward--into centrally administered food and weapon production, stockpiling, and fortification--in order then to be discharged through the one and only hole of the State. Not only was all of society subordinated to war, it was explicitly reorganized on a military model. Lice fell on hard times, as particularist desires for satisfaction and preservation were converted into regimented collective predation carried out without concern for life or limb of the 'masses.'

On Weakening the People

"A weak people means a strong state and a strong state means a weak people. Therefore, a country which has the right way is concerned with weakening the people. If they are simple they become strong, and if they are licentious they become weak. Being weak, they are law-abiding; being licentious, they let their own ambition go too far; being weak, they are serviceable, but if they let their ambition go too far, they will become strong" [D 303/KH 20:155].

Lice are the people's strength. They give the people the autonomy, will-power, and resources to pursue their own ends. Strength for the people is weakness for the State, which has only one end (without end). The people's counter-State desires must be pared away to make all their energies available for service to the pared-down state of attack.

"A country that practices knowledge and cleverness will certainly perish" [D 201/KH 4:46]. "A country," on the other hand, "where the wicked govern the virtuous will be strong" [D 200/KH 4:45].

The right way to rule is to lavish torturous affections on one's subjects. "If penalties are made heavy and rewards light, the ruler loves his people and they will die for him" [D 200/KH 4:46]. Desires will then flow in the right ("wicked") direction. Loving violence toward the people begets loving violence for the ruler.

A country which knows how to produce strength but not how to reduce it may be said to be a country that attacks itself, and it is certain that it will be dismembered. A country that knows how to produce strength and how to

reduce it may be said to be one that attacks the enemy, and it is certain that it will be strong [D 202/KH 4:47].

A proliferation of lice, because it opens doors and encourages an invigorated people to follow diverging paths, is a poison that undermines the unity of the State and saps the strength of the body politic as a whole. The poison can be tortured into dormancy, but is never eradicated.

If the country is strong and war is not waged, the poison will be carried into the territory. ... But if the country thereupon wages war, the poison will be carried to the enemy, and, not suffering from rites and music and parasitic functions, it will be strong [D 199/KH 4:44].

A hydraulics of vigor and violence the goal of which is to flush dismemberment out of the State and into the enemy's camp, through the sole outlet of war.

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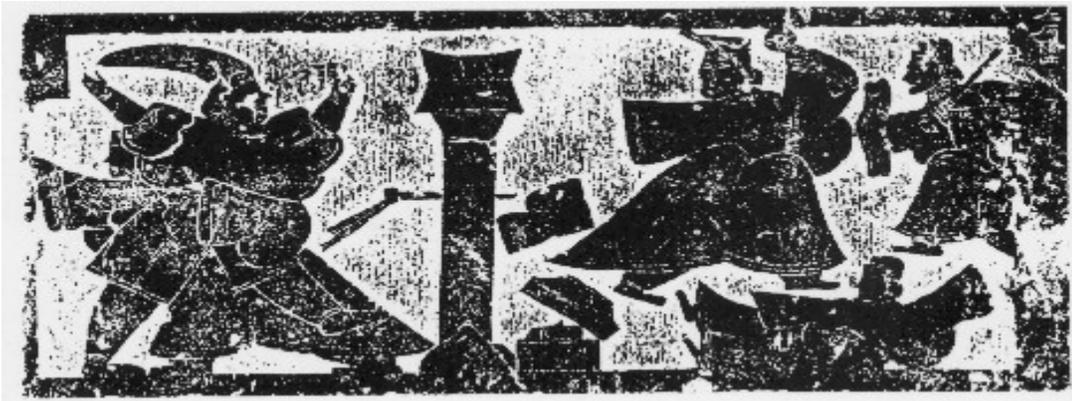
1. The law as instrument of torture: The penal code of the Qin included the following types of punishments: death penalty, hard labor, banishment, castration, and a variety of fines.¹⁶ Reflecting the military obsessions of the Qin state, most fines were payable in shields or suits of armor. Dismemberment was a favored penalty: criminals were perceived as dismemberers, and paid their debt to society in kind. There were at least four methods of carrying out the death penalty: beheading, referred to as "casting away in the marketplace"; "being torn apart by carriages"; being cut in half at the waist; and drowning, for convicted lepers. The term "casting away in the marketplace" makes an explicit equation between the undisciplined flows of trade and dismemberment. The inclusion of death by drowning for lepers suggests a connection between criminality and disease. There were five categories of hard labor: wall-builders (male) and grain pounders (female), gatherers of firewood for sacrificial rituals (male) and sifters of white rice (female), bond servants and bond women, robber guards and watchmen. These punishments involved some form of mutilation. The males of all five groups had their beards shaved off (apparently regarded as a form of public humiliation). The wall-builders also had their heads shaved (a practice still used in contemporary China for criminals). Other mutilations, in ascending order, included tattooing the face, cutting off the nose, cutting off the left foot, and cutting off the right foot. Several of these mutilations (particularly tattooing of the face) appear to have been connected to the marking of the prisoner as a 'barbarian' unfit for the State.

"It is a significant fact that the first codes are supposed to have been promulgated during the hunt, that is to say, in the Marches which are the home of the Barbarians. The penal code, while it exceeds simple family justice, or the procedure of the vendetta, is like martial law, or the right of war." [Granet 1930:221] (See "Nomadic Carriers" below)

The treatise on law in the History of the Former Han Dynasty (Han Shu) remarks: "Qin put together Shang Yang's law of mutual responsibility and created [under him] the execution of kindred to the third degree [i.e., including parents, brothers, spouse and children]. In addition to bodily mutilation and capital punishment, there were the punishments of chiseling the crown, extracting ribs, and boiling in a cauldron." [Bodde 1986:58, quoting Hulsewe 1975:332].

Several authors of the Legalist system ended their lives as its victims. These include Han Feizi, who was poisoned by Li Si, in turn executed by the Second Emperor. Shang Yang also died a victim of his own principle of unbending application of the law. He had antagonized the Heir Apparent by having his Tutor's nose cut off for a minor infraction. When Shang Yang's patron, the Duke of Xiao, died, Shang Yang fled. He attempted to take refuge in an inn, but the innkeeper told him, "Anyone who attempts to stay in an inn without proper credentials is a criminal." The innkeeper was merely quoting the statutes of Qin as seen in The Book of Lord Shang. Shang Yang tried to flee to the safety of his own fiefdom, but was captured, then torn to pieces by four horses in 338 B.C.¹⁷

2. Poisonous words. The chapters on defenses against seige in the Muozhi include a discussion of rituals to be performed before doing battle with the enemy. They indicate that war was viewed by many of the statelets at the end of the Warring States period as an evil inflicted by an outside aggressor which had to be exorcised by ritual, magical, and military means [Yates 1980]. Qin employed ritualistic curses against the enemy, as evidenced by the "cursing the Chu" inscriptions engraved in 313 B.C. by King Huiwenwang of Qin [Li Xueqin 1986:239].



The enemy, however, was also within. The Yunmeng legal documents include a suit brought against a fellow villager for his "poisonous words." The man was found guilty and punished by ostracization. The word "poison" appears to have been taken literally. [H206/E24/W.8.37b] Contentiousness, or social disunity, was perceived as a bodily violation.

3. Summary. The reduction of the people's desires required the imposition of a vicious, physically mutilating system of punishment designed to transmit internal "poison" (disunity) to an outside enemy and to prevent the enemy from injecting poison back into the State. Without such an enemy, the State could not work its magic. As part of the process, the people were made to experience punishment as an expression of the emperor's love for them. Waging war became their only opportunity to express their love for him. Loving one's ruler meant learning to love one's own dismemberment and death.

The Unification of Words

The double vocabulary of the reduction or streamlining of energies and of their channeling for full utilization, expresses a paradox. The unity and maximum strength of the State can be assured only if dismemberment is evacuated; dismemberment, however, can be evacuated only if the people populating the State are reduced through torture. The body politic can only avoid accidental dismemberment by deliberately practicing it on itself. It can only prevent itself from attacking itself by attacking itself first, in order thereafter to attack another body politic which might have attacked it first, had it not already done so.

To follow this preemptive logic, entire realms of activity and potential must be pared away. The human body must be divested of any pretence to wholeness and self-direction, becoming a unifunctional working part of a greater whole. In other words, a dedicated organ in a superorganism.

If objects come near, the eye cannot but see them; if words are insistent, the ear cannot but hear them, for if objects approach they alter in

appearance, and if words draw near they form coherent speech. So with the organization in a well-governed state, people cannot escape punishment any more than the eyes can hide from the heart-mind (xin) what they see. In the disorderly states of the present time, it is not thus: reliance is placed on a multitude of offices and a host of civil servants, but however numerous the civil servants may be, their affairs are the same and they belong to one body. Those whose affairs are the same and belong to one body cannot control one another. [D.320-21/KH 24:175]

There must be no distance between the ruler and the bodies of his subjects, who provide him with unmediated vision, comprehension, and judgment. The person of ruler is a double-faceted principle of desire (heart) and direction (mind). The body politic's capacities for concerted vision, comprehension, and judgment flows from the ruler's person, and what is gleaned by them returns to it.

There is a fundamental difference between this heart-mind/organ distinction and the Cartesian mind/body duality. The state is not disembodied in the ruler, as transcendent seat of rationality. The ruler is embodied in the State. Not only his senses but his faculty of judgment is embedded in the body politic in the form of the mutual spying machine.¹⁸ In the well-governed state, he is the source and destination of all possible sensation and thought, between which there can be no separation.

If a coherent body, similarly combining sensation and thought, interposes itself between the ruler and his organs, the body politic is mutilated, rendered blind, deaf, and dumb. The emperor is no longer able to judge and rule. Not only is the ruler's sensation cut from his thought, but source and destination are no longer one. The ruler is still the

driving principle by right, but in fact he is crippled, depleted, for what he brings forth is not returned. An interloping body diverts energies to its own ends.

The presence of such a mediating body cannot be tolerated. The law is the means by which the parasitic bureaucratic body is destroyed, and the mutilation it causes healed. It enforces nonseparation between the heart-mind and the organs. The law is the vehicle by which the source--the ruler as desire or driving principle--is embodied in organs connecting the source to itself as destination. The law makes immanent what otherwise would be a piece apart, in the dark and impotent. It closes the State circle in such a way as to make it a line. It makes it possible for the spiralling energies of the body politic to be channeled toward their one rightful outlet: war, the river of no return.

The law divides as it unifies. "In a condition of complete government, husband and wife and friends cannot dismiss each other's evil deeds and cover up each other's faults without causing harm to those close to them, nor can the men of the people conceal each other from their superiors and government servants. That is because, although their affairs are connected, their interests are different" [D 321/KH 24:176]. Everyone's affairs are connected in their subordination to the aims of the state, but each individual is assigned a special function distinguishing him or her from those around. Each is held responsible for the proper fulfillment of the other's duty. As the reference to government officials reveals, it is recognized that the total elimination of the bureaucratic caste is unattainable. Their numbers must be held to a minimum, their functions must be clearly differentiated, and they must be subject to the same system of mutual responsibility as everyone else.

The establishment of strict divisions within the body politic constitutes the core of the law. This is called the "unification of words." There can be no social order without it.

Words, slippery by nature, are the most fearful of lice. "A country that loves talking is dismembered" [D 188/KH 3:35].

Words must be unambiguously pinned to a referent. That referent must be an unambiguous State function. That State function must carry with it unambiguous duties. When the duties are fulfilled, the functionary must be unambiguously rewarded. When they are not, he must be unambiguously punished. [D, KH chapters 8, 9, 17]

Social divisions are just the beginning. The unification of words as applied to State functions can only succeed if other aspects of life are similarly unified. Rewards and punishments, not to mention taxation, cannot be systematized unless currency and weights and measures are standardized. Society cannot be effectively divided into mutual responsibility units unless the population is known. Births and deaths must therefore be registered. The land must be surveyed and its divisions regularized. The products of the land must be painstakingly accounted for. The waters must flow where they are needed. Roads must connect the capital from which order emanates to the countryside embodying it, like spokes in a wheel. An immense labor of organization, standardization, and recording must be undertaken. All of this necessitates clear boundaries for the state as a whole: the Great Wall and inscribed stone monoliths will mark its borders.

The more unified the body politic becomes, the more differentiated it is. The more undividedly its energies flow, the more rigidly they are channeled. In order to smooth, one must striate.

* * *

1. Standardization of language, weights, measures, and roads. Li Si introduced standardized "Small Seal" script forms for the Empire, suppressing the earlier Large Seal script as well as several regional scripts (such as the Chu "bird-script"). He reduced the number of characters by twenty-five percent by removing alternate characters and rare place-names. [Barnard 1978] His calligraphic style appears on surviving Qin inscriptions.

"In the twenty-sixth year of his reign (221 B.C.) the First Emperor of Qin annexed all the feudal lands under heaven, brought peace to the black-heads [the 'masses'], and

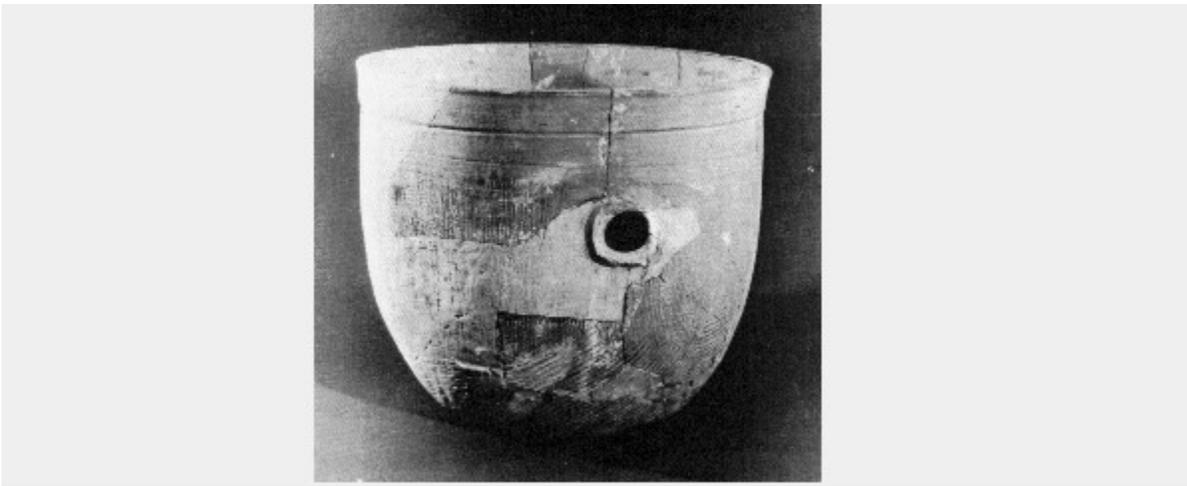
proclaimed himself the sole ruler. Then, he issued a decree to his ministers, ordering them to clarify and unify all laws and weights and measures which were perplexing or which were not uniform." [Cotterell 1981:75; Li Xueqin 1985:240-46]



This inscription has been found on a large number of bronze and iron standard weights and measures (see illustration) dating to the first empire, including a bronze pint measure (sheng) which was originally cast in 344 B.C. and inscribed with Shang Yang's name. Whole sections of the Yunmeng legal documents are concerned with the problem of standard weights, and the punishments to be allotted to those who dare tamper with the standards. Extraordinary attention was paid to minor infractions. If a weight deviated by less than 1%, heavy fines were levied on the culpable official.

Metal currency was standardized, as was the gauge of vehicles.

2. Regulated stockpiling. Stockpiling was a chief concern of the state. Centralized granaries are essential to the provisioning of a large-scale war-machine. The Yunmeng documents reveal a highly detailed and standardized granary administration system. Constant and careful inspections were conducted. State and regional granaries kept detailed accounts of grain received and rations issued. There was an obsession with graft among officials. Many regulatory and supervisory methods are outlined, with itemized punishments for specific infractions. In a typical example, punishment is exacted for the discovery of poorly maintained granaries: we learn that when it comes to the Law, three mouseholes are equal to one rathole.



Weapons, shields, and armor were also stockpiled. A large number of bronze weapons cast by the state of Qin have been discovered in every corner of the early Empire by Chinese archaeologists. Many of these are inscribed with the date of casting, the name of the prime minister who supervised their production, and the place of production (usually in regional government foundries or in central governmental institutions). Shang Yang's name appears on at least two bronze weapons dating from 349 and 346 B. C. [Li Xueqin 1985:234].

3. Marking and recording: the inscription of the law. Censuses, cadastral surveys, tax assessments, physical marking of prisoners, insignia of rank, the pass system, and registration at inns (all discussed above) were aspects of a generalized process of marking and recording undertaken to regularize implementation of the law.

The law itself was inscribed. It was Qin policy to post the laws throughout the land, beginning as early as 513 B.C. with the inscription of the law on iron tripods. Practisebooks found in Han border garrisons suggest that the army may have been instrumental in spreading literacy. But to most people, the official inscriptions were primarily awesome emblems of authority. Foremost among them were the imperial monoliths. The secret rituals and imperial progresses of the First Emperor were marked by great stone inscriptions set atop the sacred mountains and at the borders of the Empire. The texts to these monuments have been preserved in the Shiji. In them we read that the progresses of the First Emperor "mark the end of human tracks..."

4. Territorial Unification. Bodde [1986:61] estimates that Qin built imperial roadways totalling over 4250 miles, far more than the 3740-mile Roman road system (as estimated by Gibbon). According to a critical Han dynasty memorial: "The First Emperor ordered the building of post-roads all over the empire, east to the uttermost bounds of Qi and Yan, south to the extremities of Wu and Chu, around lakes, and rivers, and along the coasts of the sea; so that all was made accessible. These highways were fifty feet wide, and a tree

was planted every thirty feet along them....all this was done so that the First Emperor's successors should not have to take circuitous routes" [quoted in Needham 1971:7].

The Great Wall built by General Meng Tian is said to have extended over 3,110 miles [Li Xueqin 1985:249; for another view, see Waldron 1990]. The Wall connected together earlier walls built by various northern statelets. Kafka's picture of the fragmentary work on the Wall had more than a little truth [Kafka 1948].

Prior to the establishment of the Empire, Qin was involved in massive hydraulic engineering projects. The Chengdu plains irrigation system was completed from 250-230 B.C., and to this day irrigates over 200,000 square miles. The Zhengguo canal was completed in 246 B.C., and provided irrigation for half a million acres. "Thereupon the land within the passes became a fertile plain and there were no more bad years, Qin in this way became rich and powerful, and ended by conquering the various lords" [SJ 29:1408/MH 3:525]. The Magic Transport canal was completed by 219. Joining the Wei and the Yellow River by means of a three-mile channel through mountainous terrain, the canal became a vital link in an inland waterway system that eventually extended 1,250 miles from the north to the south. [Needham 1971:299-306].

5. Summary. Unification requires increasingly minute and regulated compartmentalization, enforced by ubiquitous mechanisms of differentiating markings and vengeful recording. It is therefore inseparable from the dismemberment it is designed to avoid. It is instructive to recall that Shang Yang, the mighty unifier, ended up in quarters.

Feet Like Flowing Water

Stopping the soldiers of his (an exemplary ruler's) three armies was like cutting off their feet, (and) marching them was like flowing water. [D 281/KH 17:130]

The soldiers in unified motion toward the unified aims of the State are like water flowing down a straight and narrow channel. They melt into a liquid body, continuous and without distinguishable organs. But the moment their ordered flow is stopped, organs appear and are in the same stroke amputated.

Water, however, does not naturally conform to straight and narrow channels, but has the lice-like tendency to flow "without preference for any of the four sides" [D 316/KH 23:171]. Three of the four sides of natural water flow must have been stopped for the

army to have begun its onward march. That means that feet must have already appeared-been amputated. Even at its apogee, the moment of predatory attack, the war-machine's unity is predicated on the dismemberment which prevents it (and which it is meant to prevent). Consolidated organization always entails fragmentation. Maximum flow requires extreme rigidity.¹⁹

Abolition

"Abolish laws by means of the law" [D 254/KH 13:105].
"Abolish words by means of words" [ibid.].

Generation

Depend on war for peace [D 189/KH 3:35].

Govern wisely: cultivate stupidity [D 176-77/KH 2:20].

Inspire love through hate [above].

Build strength on weakness [above].

"Generally, there is no one in the world who does not base order on the causes of disorder. Therefore, to a limited degree of order corresponds a limited degree of disorder, and to a great degree of order corresponds a great degree of disorder" [D 322/KH 25:179].

Spiral and Line

To eradicate something, that very thing must be instituted in its most extreme, condensed, functionalized form. To bring something forth, its very opposite must be made to flourish.

Inhabiting the Legalist project is an inescapable double-bind. The desire propelling the State designates as its only acceptable outlet an undivided outward torrent of infinite

conquest. To achieve that end, however, the State must turn against itself, and foster within it what it is intent on not having. To have no laws and words, it must have them with a vengeance. To have order it must have disorder. To have unity, it must hew out disciplined organs and in so doing dismember itself. To expand its domain, it must seal its borders.

The Legalist state plays on the tension between rigidity and compartmentalization (striation), and fluidity and unity (smoothing). Striation, in the form of the law, emanates from the ruler's body, source and center of the State. Its role is to levy: the capture of energies to be channeled back to the source. Striation radiates in waves to the periphery, then bounces off the wall and returns to the center in the form of a smooth flow of goods and bodies channeled uninterruptedly into the army, which then flows out to meet the enemy. An oscillation develops between two contradictory dynamics, each of which covers the entire territory. As both dynamics are carried to their extreme and any mediation that might exist between center and periphery is progressively removed, the period of the oscillation shortens and the vigor of the outward flow increases. The interior becomes a quickening spiral of centrifugal waves of striation and centripetal smooth flows. At the center, the spiral of capture is converted into a line of fluid attack sent out in pulses. The aim is to accelerate the process to the point that the spiral melds with the line, and the pulses become continuous. At that ideal point, feet are liquid and dismemberment is wholeness.

Legalism is a blueprint for a synthesis of antagonistic social dynamics. It is not a dialectic. Although the dynamics are combined in such a way as to produce a concerted effect, their antagonism is never overcome and the mix is highly unstable. The synthesis

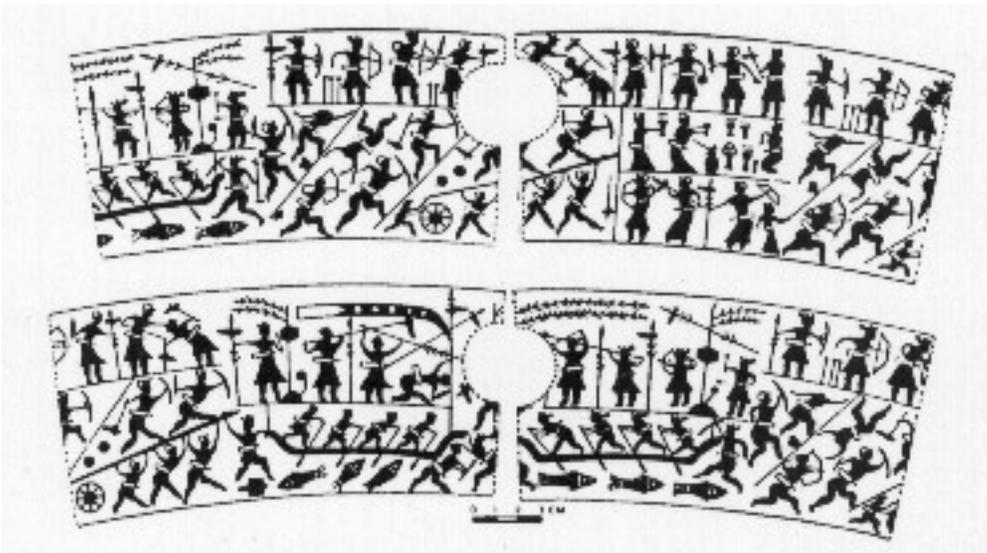
is functional and has material limits. The only ideality involved is the virtual point of absolute synthesis that can never be attained.

The more explosively the State pushes outward, the more intensely it implodes. It is destined to self-destruct. The Legalist state is a suicide state. In this, and in the nature of the frenzied synthesis it attempts, it is quintessentially fascist.

At dead fascist center lies the ruler: source and destination of the State spiral, capturer of energies, converter of spiral to line, creator and destroyer. To the extent that virtual point of absolute dynamic synthesis can be actualized, it is actualized in the person of the emperor. The emperor embodies the generation of abolition that is State desire in its purest expression.

* * *

Accelerating timeline. The state of Qin had its beginnings in a minor fiefdom located on the western frontier of the Zhou feudal realm in modern-day Gansu, 190 miles west of the eventual imperial capital of Xianyang (contemporary Xian). It was given to Feizi, "a petty chieftain and clever horsebreeder," in the 9th century B.C. As a reward for protecting the Zhou rulers from the Rong 'barbarians' inhabiting its region, Qin was made a principality in 770 B.C. The early years of the Qin state were primarily concerned with battles against the Rong and Di peoples. The last record of a Rong attack comes in 430. From then on, Qin was on the offensive. In 315 it captured 25 walled-towns from the Rong. Once Qin had colonized the Rong, it was able to direct its energies against the central Chinese statelets. From the seventh to the fourth centuries B.C. the capital moved eastwards into central China in five stages. It reached what was to become the imperial capital (Xianyang) in 350 B.C., simultaneous to the implementation of many of Shang Yang's reforms. Shortly thereafter, the Qin ruler declared himself to be a "king," and initiated a series of conquests against the seven principal statelets of China. Qin defeated Ba and Shu in the Sichuan region in 316. It destroyed the remnants of the Zhou state in 256. The process of conquest then began to accelerate. Qin defeated Han in 230, Zhao in 228, Wei in 225, Chu in 223, Yan in 222, and finally Qi in 221. The State was at last One. To mark the event, the "king" assumed the title of "emperor" (huangdi, literally "august god").²⁰ The timeline of social transformation also followed an accelerating trajectory.



A brief combined chronology:

- 350 Shang Yang begins his program of militarizing society. Qin is divided into 31 counties on the commandery model. Qin completes pacification of Rong and Di, then confronts the nomads of the steppes.
- Qin moves its capital East. The first step in the rush to conquest.
- 316 First attacks successful.
- 256-222 Seven states successively overwhelmed and submitted to Qin administration is expanded. Vast irrigation projects coordinated.
- 221 Empire proclaimed. Work on Great Wall begun. Attacks on the Xiong-nu nomads. Standardization of words, calendars, weights, and measures. Final reorganization of Empire into 36 commanderies.
- 216 Massive census and registration of goods and men.
- 213 Burning of Books
- 212 Massacre of Confucians
- 210 Huge public-labor projects well under way (highway system, Great Wall, palaces, tomb). Imperial progresses begin.
- First Emperor dies.
- 207 The organs revolt: convict armies rise up against the State. Second Emperor compelled to commit suicide.
- Qin dynasty ends.

Tremendous battles were fought throughout China in 105 out of 141 years from 363 to 222. Traditional figures for the war casualties inflicted by the Qin armies from 360 to 234, before the final push to empire, totalled 1,489,000 [Hsu 1977:64-7, Bodde 1986:999-

101]. The Qin army was said to number 600,000 men. In a battle against the state of Zhao in 260 B.C., 50,000 enemy soldiers were killed and then the remaining 400,000 men who had surrendered were massacred.²¹

The Qin state's accelerating time-line marks an exacerbation of the contradictory tendencies of the State discussed in the preceding section. That tension is expressed in the tasks assigned to the principal Qin general, Meng Tian, by the First Emperor as recounted by Jia Yi in his essay, "The Faults of Qin": "the First Emperor. ... cracked his long whip and drove the universe before him, swallowed up the eastern and western Zhou, and overthrew the feudal lords. ... In the south he seized the land of the hundred tribes of Yue. ... Then he sent Meng Tian to build the Great Wall and defend the borders, driving back the Xiongnu over seven hundred li, so that the barbarians no longer ventured to come south to pasture their horses and their men dared not take up their bows to vent their hatred". In other words, Meng Tian was ordered to simultaneously build the Great Wall--in order to set the boundaries of the State--and to strike against the nomads in order to expand the boundaries.²²

Black Hole

The law, by necessity disseminated throughout the territory, must nevertheless have a separate existence, a jealously guarded body of its own. The Book of Lord Shang specifies that a complete record of it must be kept in a forbidden archive in the capital. [D 329/KH 26:187]

After the foundation of the Qin Dynasty, weapons from throughout territory were brought to the capital and melted down. They were cast into giant guardian statues in 'barbarian' dress and stationed inside the imperial palace at Xianyang [SJ 6: 239-40, 240n6/MH 2:134-35, 134n1]

Upon unification of the empire, a reported 120,000 dispossessed feudal lords were forced to move to the capital. The mightiest among them received prime accommodations: replicas of their home palaces built in the vicinity of the imperial palace. [SJ 6:239/MH 2:137-38]

Toward the end of his reign, the First Emperor built a new palace of unrivalled splendor for himself. It was surrounded by an elevated circular road for ceremonial processions. A straight road ran from the front of the palace to the summit of a hill, upon which an arch was erected. Another road led across the Wei river to the town of Xianyang. The arch was the palace door, open to the sky. The circular road was an expression of the Emperor's elevation. The road across the water bridged the distance between the emperor on high and his lowly subjects, duplicating the hanging bridge of stars which, in Chinese astronomy, spans the Milky Way [SJ 6: 257/MH 2:174-75]

The First Emperor subsequently built covered roads connecting his new palace to the 270 replica palaces. He would circulate among them at will, disguised so no one would know where he was at any given time. [SJ 6: 257/MH 2:177-78]

Eleven years before the emperor's death, hundreds of thousands of conscripts were set to work on the Emperor's tomb. Precious objects of every description were brought to the site. Models of palaces, towers, and official buildings were constructed, as were mechanized waterways reproducing the rivers and seas in miniature. Painted on the ceiling was a chart of the heavens. On the floor was a map of the land. When the tomb was closed, the artisans who had built the machinery were executed and buried alongside their creations, so that no one would be left alive to divulge the secrets of the emperor's last whereabouts. [SJ 6:265/MH 2:194-95]. The area around the tomb was sealed off by two concentric walls. [Cotterell 1981:18].

Recent archeological excavations have unearthed portions of the funerary complex. A pit containing an army of thousands of life-sized terra cotta soldiers and horses in battle formation was found on the eastern flank. Other pits have been found in each of the three other directions. [Li Xueqin 1985:251-62]



At the pulsating heart-mind of the empire, point of conversion between the spiral of State order and the line of outward attack, lies the emperor's body. A singular phenomenon occurs there. An increasing portion of the captured bodies and goods destined for the outlet of war are diverted. Rather than being flushed out, more and more of the "poison" in the body politic continues to eddy, ever inward. Energies are diverted from the straight and narrow path of attack, but not into a controlled mini-spiral, or reproductive cycle perpetuating the privilege of a mediating caste of lice, whether mercantile, feudal, or bureaucratic. These energies take a third route, neither productive-destructive (agriculture to war) nor reproductive (consumptive, preservative, reflective). The centripetal flow pattern is pushed to its extreme, swirling into a centralized sink-hole of antipproductive expenditure. The excess that had been extirpated from the State returns, entirely defunctionalized and in absurdly exaggerated dimensions.

What the de-loused but unmilitarized energies spiral in toward is a microcosmic doubling. The country, its inhabitants and products, the earth and its waters, the sky and the stars, the entire universe, are sucked into the center, toward the emperor's body. Duplicated in miniature, they mark the site of that body's disappearance. Disappearances. A maze of palaces produces invisibility in life, in a rehearsal for the tomb. A doubling of the world, within which a double disappearance occurs.

There are varieties of void. The first disappearance is of a different nature from the second. Palatial invisibility is oneness. The emperor's live disappearance is a fusion with the universe in its microcosmic expression. It is a symbolic unification of the empire, its cosmological foundations, and its reigning principle, in a black hole of exalted anonymity. Death is the ultimate amputation. It equals dismemberment.

The double disappearance of the emperor's body is a recapitulation of the antagonism between unity and dismemberment constituting the overall dynamic of the empire. The site of the disappearances is itself a recapitulation of the same antagonism: the symbolic unification of the imperial microcosm is only possible in a highly artificial, strictly segregated realm of doubling. Imperial unity is predicated on separation from the empire it unifies. The empire only exists as a whole apart from itself (the empire as a whole only exists as a part of itself).

The centrifugal outflux of law and striating order returns as a centripetal influx of smoothed, captured energies, which is then diverted into an eddying reflux of excess disappearance. The outward spiral of embodiment is answered by an inward spiral of disembodiment. The becoming immanent to the body politic of the emperor is accompanied by a proportional transcendentalization of his body at dead center.

Corresponding to the explosive channeling of energies out of the State spiral into war is an equal and opposite implosive diversion of energies into its heart-mind.

The more the law striates, the smoother things flow. The smoother things flow, the closer the centrifugal spiral comes to coinciding with the centripetal. The closer the centrifugal spiral comes to coinciding with the centripetal, the closer the source of all State flow comes to coinciding with its destination. The closer the source of State flows

comes to coinciding with its destination, the more concertedly the State explodes through its only outlet. The more concertedly it explodes, the more forcefully it implodes.

The antagonism between unity and dismemberment can never be overcome, only recapitulated. It can (and must) be contracted into a smaller and smaller space, in an infinite regress of transcendence (doubling and disappearance: the concentric symbolic circles revolving around what in relation to the present-day avatar of despotic desire--Oedipal subjectivity--is called the "signifier of signifiers").²³ It can also (and must) be concretized in a line of destructive expansion of the sustaining field of immanence (the appearance of a one-way growth vector of physical attack; today it is in suspense, having assumed a peculiar form of perpetual war called "deterrence" [Virilio 1976, 1986]). The simultaneity of the two movements is the end of state--in both the chronological and metaphysical meanings of the word.

The absolute state is an impossibility, a virtual point of synthesis that is never attained. The State is an Idea.

* * *

1. The jealousy of the law. "Should anyone dare to tamper with the text of the Law, to erase or add one single character, or more, he shall be condemned to death without pardon. Whenever government officials or the people have questions about the meaning of the laws, [the officer who presides over the law] should, in each case, answer clearly according to the laws and mandates about which it was originally desired to ask questions ... Should the officers who preside over the Law not give the desired information, they should be punished according to the contents of the law; that is, they should be punished according to the law about which the government officials or the people have asked information." [D 328/KH 26.186] The law is an animal--it acts like a defensive organism that strikes back when and where it is stricken. It is to be treated as though it had a body. The Yunmeng documents echo the quasi-sentient vengefulness of the law described in the preceding quote from the Book of Lord Shang:

"When a member of a group of five denounces another member, hoping thereby to escape punishment, (and the denunciation is) careless, (the denunciator) is to be punished with the punishment he had hoped to escape. (The Statute) also says: 'When one is unable to determine the criminal and denounces another person, this is (a case of) being careless in denouncing.' Now A says, 'The member of my group called B has killed a

person with murderous (intent). B is immediately arrested, but questioning shows that he did not kill a person. What A reported is careless. Is he warranted to be sentenced for carelessness in denouncing, or for what he (had hoped) to escape? To sentence him for what he (had hoped) to escape is fitting." [H145.D80.W8.30a]

Granet also remarked upon the jealousy of the law, which he notes was inscribed on the cauldrons used to boil criminals.

2. The memory of the law. The Yunmeng documents state that all inquiries concerning the meaning of the law are to be carefully recorded and added to the archives, becoming part of the body of the law itself. [H145.D80.W8.30a] If the law is a body, it is a body-memory. Any impingement from the outside is a potential trauma, and is permanently registered--exactly like the Freudian unconscious, which registers a permanent, physical trace of every excitation [see Derrida 1978]. Only this structure is collective and manifest, seeming to confirm Deleuze and Guattari's theory [1983] that the Freudian unconscious is an individualization of a despotic political structure (rather than despotism being the result of a projection of a personal unconscious structure).

3. The hiding of the law. "Forbidden archives are to be built for the laws, which are locked with a lock and key to prevent admittance, and are to be sealed up; herein should be sealed one set of the laws and mandates. Inside the forbidden archives they should be sealed with a seal forbidding their opening. Whoever ventures unauthorizedly to break the seals of the forbidden archives, to inspect the forbidden laws and mandates or to tamper with one or more characters of the forbidden laws shall, in any of these cases, be [sentenced to] death without pardon." [D 229/KH 26:190]

The law must be hidden. But to function, it must be broadcast--on everything from cauldrons to imperial monoliths. Even in its shyness, it is self-replicating. The Yunmeng legal documents were found inside the tomb of a local official named Xi, buried on top, alongside, and underneath him, as if appendages to his body (see note 4). They appear to have been his personal copy, and his tomb became their forbidden archive. The most important doublings of the law--those providing it with a local seat from which to meet the people--are also disappearances mimicking that of the forbidden archives in the capital in their relation to the body of the emperor. The law as a whole is a repeat performance of the emperor's act, and is struck with the same centripetal-centrifugal tension as his body is: it is embedded in the territory and at the same stroke recedes into the center, which once again becomes unlocalizable, for by dint of doubling it is everywhere at once. The law also repeats the unification-dismemberment dilemma. It must be forever sealed, but in order to be implemented it must open itself to copying, and to defend itself must open itself to and register excitations. It is at once absolutely singular and essentially double, open and closed, whole and traumatized, hidden and manifest. Materially so. As before, these are less metaphysical contradictions than a dynamic of accelerating physical alternations. The law, like the emperor, is irrevocably body-bound.

There is one way the law cannot be replicated: by speech. "If above the ruler of men makes laws, but below the inferior people discuss them, the laws will not be definite and inferiors will become superiors." [D 333/KH 26:182] Only superiors can speak the law. The August Superior. Underlying the writing of the law is the invisible voice of the despot, which cannot be doubled but does disappear.

Divinity

What makes the Son of Heaven noble (in the eyes of his people) is that they hear only the sound (of his voice), and none of the subjects can obtain a view of his countenance. Thus he calls himself divine. [SJ 87:2558/Bodde 1938:44]

This explanation of the Emperor's transcendence was given after his death by his closest advisor, Li Si, to his heir, eager to learn how to emulate his father. It was in response to the question: "How can I give free play to my impulses and broaden my desires, so as to enjoy the empire for a long time to come without harm to myself?" [SJ 87:2553-54/Bodde 1938:38] "All talented rulers," says Li Si, "must be able to oppose the world and to grind usages (to their own liking), destroying what they like and establishing what they desire. ... The intelligent ruler makes decisions solely himself ... so that within the palace, he alone sees and listens. ... Therefore he is able for himself alone to follow a mind of complete unrestraint. ... Only in this way can one be said to be capable of ... practising the laws of Lord Shang." [SJ 87:2557/Bodde 1938:42]

The ruler alone will rule in the empire, and will be ruled by none. He will succeed in reaching the apex of pleasure. ... To possess the empire, and yet not throw off all restraints, is called making shackles (for oneself) out of the empire. [SJ 87:2554/Bodde 1938:39]

What is embodied in the unified territory and its organized bodies is the ruler's desire made law.

If the absolute state is an idea, the idea is a desire. It is the despotic desire to be one in order to dominate the other, to infuse in order to transcend all outside limitations. Or is it to dominate the other in order to be one, and to transcend in order to infuse? It amounts to the same thing.

Either way, despotism overlooks the fact that for there to be one through domination there must be an other to be dominated. That makes two. Once the second is subjugated, another other must come for the unification to continue: three. Oneness reposes on multiplicity.

This fundamental paralogism of the absolute-state desire for unity in no way militates against its status as idea. On the contrary, it constitutes its ideality. It defines it as a serialized drive to overcome a contradiction that is resolvable only at an ideal point of synthesis. In other words, not at all. The absolute state is the Law of nonresolution behind the voice behind the law. It is the exaltation of a recurrently embodied but nonetheless impossible idea.

The double-bind of the one and the multiple and the manic quest to overcome it is common to many social formations, all of which could broadly be termed fascist. "Oriental despotism" is perhaps the first, perhaps the most extreme, but by no means the last embodiment of fascist desire.

It would be a mistake to attribute fascist desire to an individual body. The idea returns, eternally. Wherever the ideology of unity is, there is fascism, in one form or another.

It could be asked of the First Emperor if he had an empire, or if the empire had him. And of the emperor's Oedipal son, in his many reincarnations throughout the course of history: did you inherit your Father's desire, or did your Father's desire inherit you?

Ruler and empire, father and son, are united by the Holy Ghost of fascist desire.

One, if not two--in which case it is three--is double disappearance.

Why have you abandoned me? cries the son of heaven at the height of his Passion.

* * *

1. Individuality? The Qin state constituted the "individual" as a standardized unit enslaved in a megamachine of war, a process precluding individuality in the modern Western sense of the word.²⁴ The parameters of social existence the Qin state established were without exception supra-individual. This is most clearly visible in the five-man or five-family units--a kind of collective superego.²⁵ The reduction of the people's drives to imperial predation in the name of the Law of the emperor's desire can be seen as a collective id. There was no individuality as we know it because these mechanisms not only did not require the people to internalize them, but actively discouraged them from doing so: internalizing the Law leads to the formation of a semi-autonomous command post that can "perversely rely on itself and return to its own house." This fosters exactly the kind of louse-like moralism the Qin state strove to stamp out. The practical effect of the forbiddens and perpetual doubling of the ever-receding law was precisely to prevent internalization. The fact that the West would invent 'Oedipal' mechanisms to miniaturize this kind of structure and (in Deleuze and Guattari's terms) "apply" it to the individual human body does not necessarily mean that it was part of an internalization process in China. On the contrary, it calls into question whether Western individuality effectively constitutes an interiority.

The emperor's objectification of his subjects could be seen as an attempt to retain a monopoly on individual subjectivity for himself. But he disappeared into his own black hole. It may be recalled, however, that modern Western thought, from Hegel [see Kojève 1947] to Nietzsche to Sartre to most forms of poststructuralism [in particular Lacan and Foucault] places the emergence of self-consciousness squarely in the camp of the "slave," not the "master." If there is no individuality among the people, it is certain that there will be none on the side of the emperor.

Desire as we are using the term is not contained in an individual body or mind. It is nothing other than the "inter-dynamism" we set out to find: a pattern of interrelationship that can only be thought of as the in-between of bodies and concepts (and texts and events).

2. Divinity as the fulfillment of patriarchy. According to Marcel Granet [1930], it was not until the Qin dynasty that patrilineal descent coupled with effective paternal power in the home and the public sphere was firmly established in China. He relates the transition to patriarchy to religious changes culminating in the divinization of the emperor.

Granet offers a highly imaginative reconstruction of early Chinese society organized around a matrilineal kinship system.²⁶ According to Granet, the primary tie, however, was not one of blood but of territory. All of the inhabitants of the same village, he says, bore

the same family name, and were united as a clan by their religious bond to the presiding mother-goddess. When men married, they joined the household of their wives, whose name and clan affiliation they adopted. Lineage therefore passed from mother to daughter. It was forbidden to marry relatives (fellow clan members, even if unrelated by blood), but also to marry complete strangers. The custom was marriage between cousins: since brothers and sisters ended up in different clans after marrying, their children were considered unrelated and could marry one another. The result was a permanent alliance between two clans who exchanged their sons generation after generation. (In anthropological terms, the kinship system was based on exogamous clans joined by endogamous matrilineal cross-cousin marriage alliances.) The fabric of regional power consisted of two-clan alliances in rivalry with similar alliances in the vicinity. Within each clan, kinship terms were collective, designating not individuals but cohorts: "the word 'mother' itself applies to a large group of people: if it be taken in an individual sense, it is used to name, not the woman who has given one birth, but the most respected woman of the generation of mothers ... the affinities of relationship have a universal character" [1930:155]. The system of cross-cousin marriage meant that fathers and maternal uncles belonged to the same cohort and shared the same appellation, as did sons and nephews, and brothers and cousins. Marriage itself was collective: ceremonial group marriages apparently took place during seasonal fertility festivals of "communions, orgies, and games" [1930:160-70].

Granet emphasizes that the kinship system and fabric of alliances and rivalries was profoundly conservative, favoring social and political stasis. Moreover, since they "recognized neither personal ties nor an hierarchy" [1930:155], they were incompatible both with the family as we know it with state organization. The state could only have been imposed from outside. An adequate summary of Granet's theory of state development is beyond the scope of this article. Briefly, he theorizes that male corporations developed parallel to the kinship and political system described above, eventually arrogated to themselves the supernatural properties of the tutelary spirits and holy places, then superimposed their fundamentally different system of alliances and rivalries upon the territorial clans. The progression was as follows: the formation of fraternities based on male activities (such as metalworking, in particular the manufacture of weapons); rivalries among fraternities, expressed through jousts, other competitions, and ritual warfare; hierarchies based on the results of the competitions, which displace the fertility festivals; the head of each hierarchy assuming mythic stature by usurping the powers of mother-goddesses and other nature deities; formation of a tributary kingship serviced by court aristocrats. The transformation of the symbolic leadership of the tributary king into effective administrative control took place in border regions, in particular in Qin, and was directly related to changes in military organization brought about by contact with 'barbarians' [1930:220-24]. (See "Nomadic Carriers" below)

The feudal kings went the mother-goddesses one better, claiming not only to embody the powers of the earth but of the skies as well: the king was the "Son of Heaven." Men's usurpation of divine powers, which took the form of male ancestor

worship, favored patrilineal descent, but remnants of the old clan order interfered with the transmission of either family name or social position from father to son (they tended instead to skip a generation) [1930:209-211, 312-20; also Chang 1977b:179-81]. "The feudal and agnatic order came into being as soon as the military codes had permeated the relations between families and cities. ... Nevertheless, as long as the feudal order lasts, the notions of domestic authority and filiation do not arrive at a combination sufficiently close to produce the idea of paternal authority." The son had to establish his right to be his father's inheritor. This he did by establishing a vassal-lord relationship with him [Granet 1930:320-43]. The father-son relationship is a derivative of a political-religious structure. "It is precisely the absence of kinship [between father and son] which makes it possible for [the son] to infeudate himself" [1930:320].

The final ascendancy of the Father had to wait until male hierarchy, male religious authority, male descent, and male political authority fused into a solid structure at all levels of society. This fusion was achieved by the First Emperor: "he gave the rule of the separation of the sexes a significance favorable to the development of marital and paternal authority. ... He aimed at making the authority of the father the sole basis of domestic order in all classes of society" [1930:417]. The monoliths he erected at the borders and atop sacred mountains--rising pointedly heavenward from a mother earth now overlaid by patriarchy--broadcast the new sexual politics:

"He conclusively separated the interior from the exterior," they boasted. "Man and woman conform to certain rites" (i.e., the fertility festivals have been suppressed and the man no longer moves into his wife's household, under threat of banishment). "He has forbidden and suppressed debauchery ... Everything has its station."²⁷



The Emperor's Second Death

A Perfected Being enters the water without getting wet; he goes through fire without getting burned; he rides the clouds and through the air; he is as eternal as the sky and the earth.

The emperor, explains the Taoist sage, should be such a godlike being. But not until he disappears will he attain that state of eternity. Not until his whereabouts in the palace are concealed from all will the elixir of immortality be his [SJ 6:257/MH 2:177]. The emperor was willing, for "he could not bear talk of death" [SJ 6:264/MH 2:191].²⁸

The palaces were connected, the emperor hid, and divulging his whereabouts was made a capital crime. But the elixir was not found.

A shooting star fell from the sky he should fly through without falling. A carved inscription appeared on it: "When the First Emperor dies, the territory will be dismembered" [SJ 6:259/MH 2:183].

The emperor had a dream in which a "human fish" rose up from the water he should swim through without getting wet. He slew it with a mighty cross-bow. "The gods of the sea," explained the scholars, "are invisible but may take the form of giant fish." Earlier expeditions to the Eastern sea had been prevented by sea monsters from crossing to the isles of immortality, and had therefore failed to obtain the elixir. Evil spirits were standing in the emperor's way to eternal life. The obstacle would have to be removed. He ordered a mighty cross-bow made, then traveled to the sea where, as predicted, he encountered a giant fish. He shot it, promptly fell ill, and died. [SJ 6: 263/MH 2:190-91]

On the long trek back to the capital, his body began to decompose. To disguise the stench of death, dried fish were heaped in his coffin [SJ 6: 264/MH 2:193]. When his body was sealed in the tomb, it was lit by long-burning torches fueled by "human fish" oil (presumably seal oil) [SJ 6:265/MH 2:195].

Fish are to the ocean as feet are to the army. Fish are pre-amputated sea organs. Their identity with emperors is expressed by their fragrance and shared place of final rest. Emperors are human land-fish.

The elements of smoothness promising the immortality of absolute union speak death and dismemberment through meteors and sea monsters. When the emperor strikes forth into smoothness to find eternal life, he encounters his death in the form of his own evil fish-twin, ultimate enemy of the State. The sea-god met by the would-be land-god is following an equal and opposite trajectory to his: from invisibility to the rigidity of organic existence. Their paths cross at the shore. The emperor slays his death, but dies nonetheless. Having pre-disappeared, like his mirror-image twin, he did not have a leg to stand on.

True to the oracle, when the First Emperor died, the empire crumbled, taking his son down with it. He was not equal to his father [SJ 6:267/MH 2:198]. Unable to continue his work, he joined him in death.

* * *

A fish is a foot. The First Emperor's fateful battle with the fish involved the firing of one of the most extraordinary machines of war of his day. He is the first man known to have fired an arcuballista. This was a massive crossbow mounted on an eighty pound brass stand. The weapon simultaneously shot ten ten-foot harpoons, fitted with ropes. The harpoons were loaded onto the crossbow with a winch, and were pulled back in with the same winch after firing. [Yates 1980:43-44] The footsoldier's crossbow was one of the machines of war used by the emerging empire to fight its archenemy, the nomadic mounted archer, whose methods the state adapted to its own eastward campaigns of conquest. Here at the end of his spiral of self-destruction, the First Emperor fires upon the great fish, an organ of the sea, and a watery nomad.

From the Steppes to the Sea

The Qin empire was a vector of conquest sweeping into the striations of sedentary space from the smooth expanses of the western steppes. The absolute state corresponded to the reinvention of sedentary space by a nomad-derived war machine that entered it as if entering a foreign medium. Unable to traverse it as it found it, the war machine reinvents it and is itself reinvented, in a process of mutual conversion that carries the striations of sedentary space to such an extreme that they reach the point of smoothness. Out the far end of the State spiral is emitted a singular vector of conquest akin to the nomadic one that entered it--but increasingly weakened by the siphoning off of energies into the transcendence necessary to achieve the forced becoming immanent of striation to smoothness. When the war machine, reborn as a restless imperial army, finally swallows up all of sedentary space and reaches the next smooth space, it does not have the strength to launch into it. It has poisoned itself as the price of its own success. It dies by the contradiction it lived by, in an interim that surreptitiously assumed the face of eternity.

Why did the empire fall?

Because it failed to realize ... that the power to attack and the power to retain what one has thereby won are not the same. [Jia Yi 1965]

No state ever fully comes to that realization. The unified state is always a moment in the trajectory of a foreign dynamic, a war machine originating outside it and against it, and destined to destroy it. If the end of the state does not come from without, it will come from within. In the most extreme cases, in states approaching the absolute, it will

come from both directions at once. An insatiable black hole at the center combines with the ever-presence of an insistent enemy at the periphery to bring the empire to the brink. The end comes when the black hole at the center (land-fish) and its fraternal enemy at the periphery (sea-fish) are joined at the shore. Fascist absolutism is the purest expression of the unity-in-division of the State desire for dominion.

Fascism promises an oceanic experience on land. In fact, the only harmony it can deliver is atmospheric: a mingling of odors of death.

* * *

1. Nomadic carriers. The state apparatus that was to take the unification of China to the sea arose at its opposite edge. Actually, at the edge of that edge. Not only was the conquering state of Qin a western border state, but the administrative model it imposed on the empire was elaborated at its outermost borders, in the military garrison colonies or commanderies set up to protect sedentary society from 'barbarian' attack from the steppes.²⁹ The machinery of the unified state originated on its margins, and moved inward. (The eastward displacement of the Qin capital was described above in "Accelerating Timeline")

It is significant that before the founding of the empire, the people of Qin, although technically Han people or 'civilized' Chinese, were themselves scoffed at by the central states as 'barbarian.' They not only lived in close proximity to 'barbarians' but even shared certain habits of dress and religious beliefs, and frequently intermarried [Creel 1970a:201, 210-217]. "Qin has the same customs as the Rong and the Di," complained a minister of a neighboring state in 266 B.C. "It has the heart of a tiger or a wolf..." [SJ 44:1857/MH 5:179]. From the very beginning, the empire-to-be exhibited the predatory proclivities of the war-machine. "Rong," in fact, meant "military" [Creel 1970a:198]. Qin directly acquired elements of the military apparatus it would later use to conquer China from the Rong and the Di (and their descendents the Hu and the Xiongnu). Other elements it acquired from them indirectly, in interaction with them and against them.

In the first category are the crucial military advances that made the conquest of China possible. Chief among them was the shift from the ritualized, fixed-position, chivalric chariot battles of the Spring and Autumn Period to the strategic mobility of armies composed of mounted archers and foot soldiers--'barbarian' ideas both. In Qin in 541 B.C. squadrons of foot soldiers were used instead of chariots in difficult mountain terrain to fight 'barbarians' who did not play by the rules of 'civilized' warfare. By the 4th century, old-style chariot battles were a thing of the past [Maspero 1978:242; Hsu 1977:chap. 3; Shaughnessy 1988]. But Qin alone had fully divested its army of its chivalric trappings. "Qin had organized a light and mobile army in which horse and foot soldiers predominated. The other states continued to make use of chariots, and conducted war

according to the rules of feudal tactics. They made great demonstrations of strength, then disbanded their troops. Qin made war relentlessly." [Granet 1930:95]

The mobility associated with the nomads of the steppes ("they swoop down like a flock of birds, but when they find themselves hard pressed and beaten, they scatter and vanish like the mist" [SJ 110:2892/RGH 2:165]) was paradoxically used to fortify the state. When sedentary society shakes itself from its torpor long enough to attack, it marks the place with a substantially more rigid, small-scale version of itself: the border garrison. Increased mobility accompanied by hardening of the arteries. The commandery can be viewed as a concretion, a kind of precipitate, marking the spot where sedentary society meets its nemesis. It is a new formation carrying the state that gave rise to it and to whose protection it is dedicated to an incomparably higher power. Its internal organization is a virulent hybrid combining the hierarchical leanings of the sedentary proto-bureaucracy and the flexible-response capabilities of nomadic military organization: the five-by-five cell structure of the Qin dynasty was a direct descendent of the five-man squadron instituted in state armies when the cavalry-infantry configuration was adopted. The commandery, cell structure, and a host of other militarist mechanisms (described earlier in this article) represented a volatile mix: fortification circle plus line of attack: a uniquely unstable formation that sprang up on the margins and then spiralled inward: a unification machine that swallowed up everything in its path, beginning with the state of Qin itself, then its neighboring states, then all of China, at which point it shot out the far side into the other nonsedentary space, the sea.

The absolute state is the form the nomadic war-machine assumes when it enters sedentary space and transforms it--and is transformed by it. The imperial war-machine is the sedentary translation of nomadism. The cavalry, the single most important instrument of the Qin conquest and centralization [Granet 1930:411; Lattimore 1962: 422; Shaughnessy 1988], was a sort of nomadic carrier infecting the territory of China. It brought with it a nomad germ that mutated at the frontier, inducing a monstrous rebirth of its new host body.

It is simplifying things to explain the militarist centralization of China by the state's need to protect itself from an outside enemy. First, because nomadic attacks, while a constant irritant, never fundamentally threatened the stability of the state [Lattimore 1962:441]. Secondly, and more suggestively, the nomads themselves were creations of the state.

The Rong and Di 'barbarians' were probably not to begin with racially distinct from the Han [Chang 1977b:397]. They were distinguished by their mode of subsistence and political organization. The racial divergence was the result of their being squeezed out toward the steppes as Qin consolidated its hold over the 'wastelands' within its borders in order to expand food production based on state-controlled intensive agriculture [Lattimore 1962:39, 167-68, 328, 453]. Although Sima Qian's Records of the Grand Historian and other historical records are not clear on the distinctions between the 'barbarians' indicated by the terms "Rong" and "Di," and the later "Hu" and "Xiongnu," it appears that the former were remnant populations of mixed agriculturalists or pastoralists

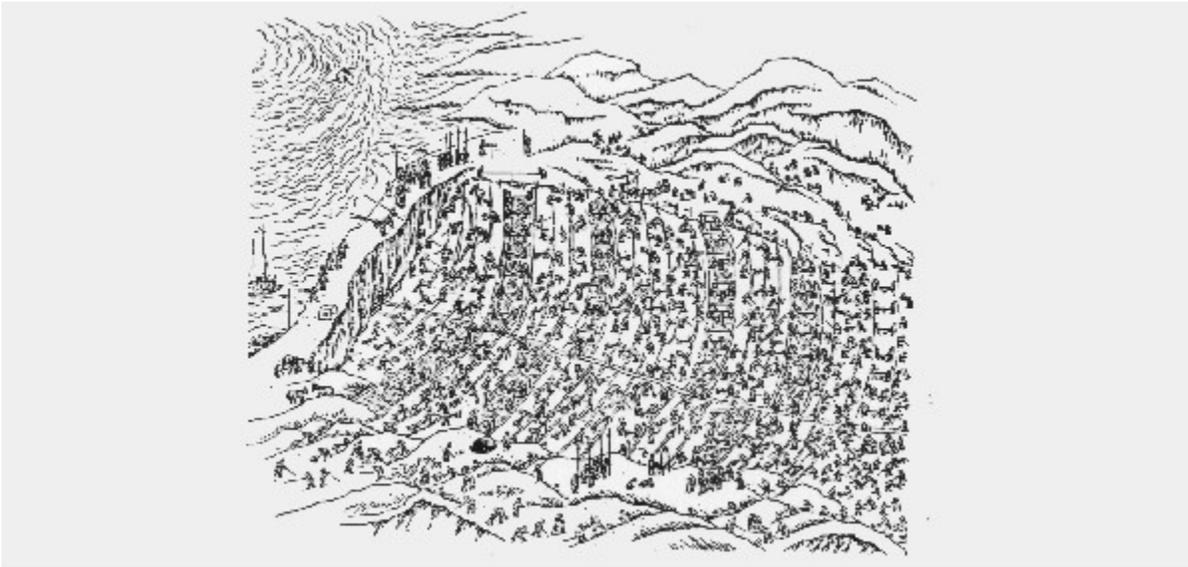
within the Qin territory, while the latter were those same populations after taking to the steppes and transforming from sedentaries and transhumants into true nomads. After adapting to their new environment--inventing a mode of social organization with technologies all its own--the nomads turned back against the centralizing sedentary space of the state from which they were expelled. The Qin confronted the newly-arisen nomads around the 4th century B.C., at the point that its westward territorial expansion reached the edge of the Central Asian steppes [Lattimore 1962:168-69].

Despite Chinese fortifications the frontier areas never formed an impermeable shell, but continued to be a porous site of two-way exchange of people, goods, and techniques [Lattimore 1962:468; SJ 110 *passim*]. The frontier should be seen less as a limit between territories than as the crucible and mutual conversion site of two social vectors moving in opposite directions.³⁰ This is graphically illustrated by the fact that the feudal aristocrats who were exiled by Qin to the border--and often deserted to the nomads--were replaced in the interior by hardened border troops and re-sedentarized nomads in the direct service of the state [Lattimore 1962:420-21, 433; SJ 110 recounts numerous instances of desertion to the nomads in the early years of the Han Dynasty]. The two-way movement was not limited to people. The nomads' technical contributions to the state were returned in the form of metallurgical innovations such as the crucible steel saber (the favored instrument of imperial dismemberment, which was retransmitted by the nomads to other states, moving from its birthplace in the Qin dynasty to India, Persia, and Arabia by way of the Scyths [Mazaheri 1958:678-80]). The commanderies were also a base of trade with the nomads, and across their lands with Europe and the Middle East. According to Lattimore [1962:174, 492], such trade, culminating in the fabled Silk Road, must be seen as the result rather than the cause of China's imperial policies since it primarily concerned luxury items (which were anathema to the Qin but a natural outgrowth of its economic consolidation). When an object of sedentary origin remained in the hands of the nomads (and vice versa), it was converted, reinvented to fit its new milieu. For example, the use of gold in nomadic art is so different from that of sedentary society that it must be considered a different cultural element [see Deleuze and Guattari 1987:492-99]. (The same could be said of horse riding and the stirrup, regardless of which side of the cultural divide they originated on.)

Of the scholars who have written on early China, it is Lattimore's work that is closest in spirit to our own in its relentless attention to material detail³¹ and simultaneous insistence that there is no adequate empirical explanation for historical events. He steadfastly maintains that both the future nomads who refused to submit to the empire-in-the-making and the sedentaries who ejected them chose their destinies.³² Ultimately, it was a question of "lifestyle," or what we would reinterpret in terms of supra-individual desire. Two modes of desire, two social machines, found themselves in the same geographical space and entered into conflict. Both were radically transformed in the process, one spinning outward from their common crucible and continuing conversion site, the other inward. Simultaneously attracted and repelled by the other, both were energized by the tension of their interaction, impelled by it to carry the logic of their

respective desires to its extreme conclusion. Both founded empires. An empire of the steppes stretching all the way across Asia arose in strict simultaneity with the Chinese empire: two mutually determining mirror-image megamachines at opposite extremes of the range of possibility of human social organization--and of terrain. Both found (created) their ultimate geosocial space. The smooth versus the striated. In an external tension which is endlessly recapitulated within the borders of the unified state, in a continuing tribute to its bastard past.³³

2. Land channels and open seas. Sima Qian remarked that Qin was maintained by the Water Element: "The First Emperor ... believed that the authority of Zhou had been supplanted by Qin because Qin's element was water and Zhou's fire. So began an era of the Power of Water. ... He renamed the Yellow River the Powerful Water." [SJ 6:237] Although he was able to harness the flow from west to east across the land, the First Emperor was at a loss when confronted by unchannelable expanse of the sea. The cascade toward imperial perfection had run its course.



3. Revenge of the lice. The Qin dynasty did not long survive its founder, with whose body it was so intimately bound. It fell four years into the reign of the Second Emperor, after a massive revolt by escaped conscripts joined by remnants of the feudal aristocracy.³⁴

4. Modified Hydraulics. The next dynasty knew how to separate the power to attack and the power to retain: by accepting bounds, by accepting a degree of internal striation and the existence of semi-autonomous, yet carefully circumscribed, realms of interest. The Han resurrected the louse of morality from the ashes of Confucian wisdom, and with it the feudal aristocracy from which it sprang. The Han injected a state-subordinated feudal

family morality into the structure bequeathed by Qin. The Han did not fundamentally redraw the logic of the Qin flow-chart, only added measured impediments to its reaching its extreme conclusion. It cooled the Qin dynamism down with gentleman scholars and aristocrats, freezing it at a lower level of virulence, moderating it to create a sustainable, if imperfectly liquid, imperial apparatus.

5. Water cycle. All of the working pieces whose interaction would shape China for the next two thousand years were in place. Chinese history would be a series of dynasties drowned by sudden takeovers originating at the edge of the steppes or destroyed from within by rising tides of peasant rebellion. In every case, after arriving at the eye of imperial power, the conquerors would become the conquered. The imperial apparatus would invariably convert its enemies to it, sucking them into its freeze-frame whirlpool. The eternal return of the outside of the State, from which the State arises.

The empire would always resuscitate, largely intact only under different management. Until 1949. The internal nomadism of the Long March would finally deal a decisive blow to the old machinery, thirty-seven years after the empire formally died. The spiralling stopped. Or did it? When the Cultural Revolution was losing momentum in the mid-1970s the debate on whether to continue it was couched in terms of an alternative between the Legalism of Lord Shang and the Confucian Middle Way [Li Yuning 1975, 1977]. Mao died, and the Cultural Revolution ended. Confucian "moderation" was back. The Great Helmsman, pickled to eternity, lies dead-center in the Square of Heavenly Peace, within earshot of the Forbidden City. "Square of Heavenly Peace": Tiananmen. The events of June 4, 1989 show that even a "moderated" imperial apparatus does not renounce the use of brute force against democratic "lice." Has the spiralling stopped?

State-Extreme, Extremist State

The path of Lord Shang's despotic desire has led us in a vortex to the center of Empire, in an arrow out to sea, caravaning back across the steppes to Europe and the Levant, and forward in time to the Cultural Revolution. Questions inevitably arise as to the range of applicability of the mechanisms we have charted, and in particular the nature of what we have variously called "absolutism," "despotism," "fascism," and the "State Idea." Some preliminary suggestions:³⁵

1. State-Extreme. The motor of the move toward empire was a collective drive for a synthesis of the disparate elements of the social and physical environments into a unified whole belonging to a single body. Since that goal is constitutionally impossible, it must be treated as Ideal--provided that ideality is not understood as a final cause inhabiting a realm apart from physicality. The only transcendence we saw (that of the emperor's divinized body) was the result and not the cause of the drive to empire. The emperor's transcendence, like the process it culminated, was irreducibly body-bound. The impossibility of the drive that it brought to its apogee was materially figured in a dialectic of manifestation and disappearance. It was less transcendence as traditionally understood than a manically accelerating alternation of bodily states striving to blur, like the spokes of a wheel, into an optical illusion of unity overcoming dismemberment. That optical illusion is the "State Idea," or, expressing its reality as a limit-state never attained, the "State-Extreme" (what Deleuze and Guattari call the "Urstaat" [1983:217-221]). The drive constituting it can be called many things. "Absolutism" would do fine, or "despotism," or "fascism." As long as these are understood not as empirical modes of production or political systems but as a desire common to many formations. Best for our purposes would be the term "State desire." That desire is material, but not empirical, since it can express itself only in the in-between of a multiplicity of things and states of things in motion. It is a Way: the way in which disparate elements hold together, and the road they travel together, their mutually determined direction. Consistency plus vector. Although State desire may tend toward transcendence, its functioning is always immanent to the parts it tries to overcome.

State desire can be resolved into two contradictory drives: for Unity and for Dominion. The contradiction resides in the fact that for there to be dominion there must

be an other, in which case there is no unity. The State-Extreme is the logical outcome toward which that antagonism tends, but which it never reaches. It is the expression of a tendency in the Bergsonian sense: a self-propelling drive inscribed in matter.

The despotic drive whose vicissitudes we have charted played itself out on the level of an entire society, gathering up among other things conscripts, horses, weapons, and grains to produce a state formation. The State-Extreme may manifest itself on other levels, affecting different materials. For example, it may gather up wood and nails to produce a monotheistic religion (Christianity). Or phonemes and penises to produce a form of interiority (the Oedipal subject). Empire, heavenly kingdom, legislating subject: phases of the same fascist dynamic.

2. Extremist state. Any state formation approaching the State-Extreme may be called an extremist state, regardless of its mode of production or political structure. The extremist state is the State-Extreme as incarnated in a concrete historical context, in other words as it exists within a realm of possibility. It is a pre-limit state moving to its impossible conclusion. Examples are state formations commonly classified as "despotic" [Wittfogel 1957], "absolutist" [Anderson 1979], "totalitarian," and "fascist." Proposing a common rubric for these widely divergent formations in no way implies that they are economically or politically identical. The aim is not to equate them, but to understand why their trajectories, in many ways so different, lead to the same end. If allowed to take their logic to its ultimate conclusion, they self-destruct. The extremist state is a suicide state. Nazi Germany stands with the Qin dynasty China as models of perfection of State desire. The Fuhrer's final bunker is a modern-day translation of the First Emperor's palace and tomb. Hitler's blow to his evil twin was more direct: his cross-bow shot a bullet through his brain.

3. Nomadic-Extreme. There exists a countervailing tendency to that expressed by the State-Extreme: the Way of nomadism. It too follows a path toward an impossible Ideal. That ideal is not dialectic but rather fluctual: Fluidity. Fluidity is Unity minus the dictate to form a single body, and separated from the unidirectional drive to Dominion. It is the unity in fluctuation of a collection of disparate elements whose disparateness is not denied (drops of water ...). It is unity liberated from the organic ideal of the State-extreme (... are not feet ...). A unity that does not preclude divergence (... and may stream to different seas). If the counter-ideal of the Nomadic-Extreme is impossible, it is not due to a contradiction in its logic but to resistances inherent in the materiality of its constituent elements (even the sea has a shore). Fascism marches duplicitously toward transcendence, nomadism undulates superficially toward immanence: channeling versus wave propagation.

Nomadism, like its statist counter-extreme, is not reducible to a particular economic or political system. It is a mode of being in geosocial space that may assume many forms, all of which nevertheless share a common dynamic. Nomadic formations are those which value motion over fixation, variation over order; which affirm the spaces between stops rather than bee-lining to a promised land; which reach a resting point only to use it as a relay to a future move; which have no finality, only process; which skim the surface rather than implanting a symbolic edifice or superimposing a code or statistical grid; which "occupy space without counting it" rather than "counting space in order to occupy it" [Deleuze and Guattari 1987:477]; which involve "arraying oneself in an open space" rather than arranging a closed space around oneself, fortress fashion [ibid. 353, 380]; which smooth without striating.

In itself, nomadism is morally neutral. A society embodying the Nomadic-Extreme may practice unspeakable cruelty. Its violence will nonetheless be of a different nature than that of the State. So much so that it will appear utterly senseless from the State perspective. It is. Not because it is disproportionate in quantity or intensity (it can come nowhere near rivalling the State on that front), but because strictly speaking it has no object. The nomadic war-machine does not fundamentally make war on an enemy. It fights stasis (running in place, the State spiral and its perpetual wheel-spinning). Violence for nomadism is not an end in itself, or even a means to an end. It is simply a means: a stop along the way, pause enough to hew an opening, like clearing a path. Nomadism is a war-machine because war is not its end. [Deleuze and Guattari 1987:416-23]



The societies of the Inner Asian steppes were incarnations of nomadism. They were not, however, entirely free either of the drive to dominion (which is why their war machine was so easily converted to State ends, and why they founded a mirror-image empire answering to the Qin), or of the dictate to fuse into a single body (that of the

khan). Examples of nomadism closer to the Extreme are provided by recent movements of basically anarchist orientation (situationists, Kabouters, yippies in the sixties; autonomists and political punks in the seventies and eighties). Nomadisms, like despotisms, are found on many levels. There are religious nomadisms both Eastern and Western (Daoism with its spiritual journeys, versus the Confucian obsession with ancestors and origins; alchemy and witchcraft with their multiple transformations, versus one-way Christianity), as well as modes of nomadic individuation (schizophrenia as defined by Deleuze and Guattari [1983]: a pragmatic deregulation that opens the body to the world in such a way as to intensify its sensations and multiply its potentials; not the pathological condition of disablement resulting from a blockage of that process). Nomadism, while morally neutral and often cruel, offers at least the glimmer of a possibility excluded by the State Ideal: a collective existence that affirms difference as such and fosters creation, unbounded.

4. Mixed Formations. No social formation can ever effectively reach either extreme. Even the nomads of the steppes, even the superfascist Qin state, were mixed formations. They stand out as examples of societies that followed their desires to a point unusually close to their respective ideals, but were in no way pure of opposite attractions (in fact, the State-Extreme by definition includes its opposite, nomadic smoothness, translated as organic unity). Most social formations fall more toward the middle range on the continuum between the Nomadic and the State Extremes. The dynasties following the Qin backed away from the limit, and lived. The tributary-state dynasties preceding the Qin (see notes 20 and 29 below) were even farther from that extreme, and dissipated. Feudal states (the Warring States period, medieval Europe), city-states, socialisms, and capitalist 'democracies' can be seen as essentially different mixes combining the same two

tendencies in various ways. What form a mix will take is determined by the social and physical materials at hand, and by the relative strength of the constitutive desires.



* * *

The flow-chart of State desire traced by Qin calls into question some common assertions about the nature of the State and its formation:

1. ¿The State is the outcome of an ordered evolution? It is true that the elements that combine to form a state are the products of gradual evolution. However, the State itself is without lineage. It is a consistency, a way in which elements hold together and move in concert. All the elements may be present without taking on State consistency. Lattimore's assertion that the peoples who were expelled to the steppes chose to resist induction into the state is seconded by the anthropological studies of Pierre Clastres [1987], according to whom the social organization of 'primitive' societies includes mechanisms that actively block the emergence of centralized power. The absence of a state is not a simple lack. It is the presence of a counter-desire. The taking on of state consistency is always an imposition on the elements inducted into the state. The State always arrives from without, and imposes itself by force [Nietzsche 1967:86-87]. When a state happens, it happens instantaneously: if the parts of the state form an organic unity no one part is logically prior to any other. The elements either consist as State desire, or they do not. The State is an empirically uncaused irruption of desire that does not preexist its object (both in the sense of the actual political apparatus it institutes and the ideal of the State-Extreme toward which that apparatus tends). The instantaneousness of the arrival of State desire is often marked by the assumption of a title (king, fuhrer) or the issuing of a decree (an act of law-giving like that of Romulus). This does not mean that the State has an identifiable origin. Its arrival can be placed in time, but its point of departure cannot. For the outside from which the State arrives is an unlocalizable in-between, an interrelating, an interval from which a will-to-power surges forth as if by magic. The spatial point of departure of State desire is also unspecifiable. It may appear to sweep in from a separate sphere (the steppes), but upon closer inspection the situation always

proves far more complex, to the point that it becomes impossible to distinguish which came first, the within of the borders or the without, conquerers or conquered. That the outside is an in-between means that it is the border, or better the act of bordering. If it can be placed, its place is on the margins--which may be interior to the state in geographical terms (taking the form of a revolutionary movement). The bordering that is the State is an unlocalizable interface between desires. State desire may appear to issue from a single individual. In fact, it moves toward one. That State desire moves in the direction of a transcendental concentration in the body of a more or less divinized leader does not belie the immanence of its functioning, which is always collective.

2. ¿The State grows from the center outward? The State proceeds from the margins in toward the center, marks the spot (as a capital, usually with sumptuous ritual, and often with a change in title for the leader, for example from king to emperor). Only then does it expand centrifugally. Imperialism is the second moment of ASate desire. It is always a rebirth, a second founding, a doubling of the origin corresponding to a change in direction of the State vector as it begins its movement toward the outside from which, this time, its death will come.

3. ¿The human bodies subsumed by the State are by nature autonomous individuals? The 'individual' in a despotic state is a working part in a megamachine--or rather, a megaorganism. The people of the empire are organs of the emperor's body. The organicity of the system is supra-individual. In other words, body parts have been abstracted from individual bodies and recast as social functions. One of those functions, the dialectic of unity and dismemberment (presence and absence, transcendence and becoming-immanent) so fundamental to the erection of the Empire, is attached to the penis abstracted as phallus. In the despotic state, the phallus is the emperor's whole body. Since that body is coextensive with the realm, which is coextensive with the law, all three are struck by strange convulsions and multiple disappearances--not the least of which is the disappearance of women from official existence in any other capacity than that of reproducers of men.

To say that organs are abstracted is not the same as saying that they are projected. Projection assumes the prior existence of an autonomous individual functioning as a unified organism--precisely what despotism takes (and gives) pains to prevent. Limbs and other physical body parts of course preexist their imperial abstraction, but their organicity does not.³⁶ As we have seen, the Ideal of organic unity is the product of an imperial abstraction process. An organ is meaningless without an organism. Organs are to the organism as the state is to State desire: they arise in strict simultaneity, and on the same collective level. Organs and despotism are not only analogical, they go phallus in hand. This is what Artaud meant when he launched the battle cry for a return to the "body without organs" and an end to "the organization of organs called the organism," which he damned as the "judgment of god." In Deleuze and Guattari's terms, organism is a despotic "overcoding" of the physical body. With the Emperor are invented the organism,

organs, and the master organ, the phallus, all in one fell saber swoop. This invention is often expressed as a new filiation. In ancient China there was superimposed upon the horizontal network of territorial clan alliances and aristocratic families a direct vertical filiation between every body in the state and the emperor, and through him, the gods: the emperor as miraculous procreative principle, Father of the territory and all its people.

The individual as modern western civilization understands it is a miniaturization of the organicity of despotic desire to fit the contours of a single human body. Actually, to fit the confines of the family. Western organs may seem to coincide with the actual limbs and other physical body parts of an individual body, but it is only apparently so. The Oedipal process that defines the modern western individual requires a differential, and this entails the participation of more than one body (conveniently grouped into a single household). The phallus as differential marker in the family context denotes less the penis as body part than an interbody dialectic--the same dialectic of presence and absence that finds its synthesis in the the optical illusion of the unity-in-dismemberment that was Empire. The phallus is an after-image of the emperor's body (not the reverse). It is a scaled-down State Idea plotted back onto the body part it anciently abstracted. The latter-day phallus is the penis transformed into a personalized organ of the State by a miniaturizing overlay onto the family of a society-wide function. Biology is a destination (for State desire), not a destiny (for the sexed body, which may or may not assume the desiring position assigned it according to which side of the penile divide it falls on).

Oedipus is a reincarnation of Empire, by way of God. The monotheistic god represents the completion of the spiritualization tendency of despotism (the perfection of the trick of simultaneous absence and omnipresence; pure transcendence). This spiritualization is a necessary condition for the application of State desire to the individual body (in which the Law laid down by the emperor-god takes the form of a conscience or superego: mind over body). The development of the superego is a necessary condition for capitalism, whose fluctuation requirements necessitate a complex scattering of ground-level command centers throughout the social field--local autonomy, but within bounds (unconstrained by conscience, capitalist bodies would slip toward the Nomadic-Extreme, and risk dissipating into anarchy). Thus begins the reign of self-dictatorship known as 'democracy.' The transition to capitalist democracy is unwittingly effected by the Christian absolute monarchy, the stated goals of which were to embody God's empire on earth and to revive the glory of Rome's [on the application of State desire to the individual in the context of the French monarchy, see Elias 1983 and Marin 1989; on the king of France as Christ figure and presumptive successor to the Roman emperors, see Apostolidès 1981:66-92]. Although the implantation of a collectively derived superego in the individual body was a condition of capitalism's emergence, it is not a necessary element of its subsequent functioning. In fact, the superego as understood by Freud is destined to dissolve under late capitalism, which requires ever-increasing social fluidity. The following chapter examines the way in which that dissolution is played out in relation to Reagan's body image.

4. ¿The State is neuter? The state apparatus is not a neutral instrument. It is gendered: masculine. State desire is by nature patriarchal. This is not the same as saying that men by nature have State desire. Men are had by State desire (and women are just plain had). State desire, all desire, is always artificial, arriving as it does from without (destination versus destiny). The near-universal affinity between men and despotism is more a symbiosis (between a morphology and a mode of social functioning) than the expression of an essential male nature. That State desire is gendered masculine does not mean that its counter-desire is gendered feminine. Gender is an organic concept that has no meaning for the modes of individuation implied by the Nomadic-Extreme (the opposition between the two Ideals is asymmetrical: they constitute a physical divergence, not a metaphysical duality). Masculinity and femininity are State concepts foreign to the "nonhuman" sex of nomadism.³⁷

5. ¿The State is a conscious and logical implementation of a transcendental principle of order? State order is the product of an unconscious transpersonal drive that can only be described as a mania. Any transcendental principles used to justify it are second thoughts, not founding inspirations. "Because it is just" comes years after "because I desire it." "I represent the state" comes long after "I am the state." Churchill and Roosevelt are kid brothers to Louis XIV.

6. ¿The end of the State is peace, happiness, and the preservation of life? Count the wars.

7. ¿The State is based on a consensus or social contract? Without exception, the law constitutes a system of torture imposed by brute force [Nietzsche 1967:57-91], the goal of which is to separate the human body from the greater portion of the potentials inherent in it and to highlight the remaining ones: to reduce the body's desire (organ-ize it). Sometimes the mutilation is subtle. In the 'democratic' capitalist state, the mutilation often passes unnoticed since it occurs before birth, taking the form of the "inalienable" "right" to vote (i.e., the dictate to refrain from direct participation in decisionmaking) and to sell one's labor (the dictate to limit one's productive activities to those monetarily profitable for others).

8. ¿All States naturally develop toward capitalism unless its growth is stunted by an insufficient economic infrastructure? Capitalism, like the State itself, is a mode of desire. Since capitalism requires a complex pattern of independent flows (fluctuation), the desire it embodies militates against the State-Extreme. For that reason, an extremist state (and all states are extreme in origin) will take active mechanisms to prevent its emergence. All of the elements of capitalism may be present, without capitalism arising.

9. ¿All states naturally develop toward democracy unless its growth is stunted by subversive elements or evil leaders? 'Democracy' is also an afterthought. It is a limitation

of State desire imposed by the rise of a capitalist counter-desire in spite of the measures taken against it. Dictatorship is not an abuse of state power. It is the essence of the State Idea.

9 a) Corollary: ¿In a democracy the individual is free? Individuals in a democracy are as free as the dictatorship of their conscience, the dictatorship of the other miniaturized despotisms their conscience directs them to enter (family, school, army, office), and their pre mutilations allow them to be.

