

Conclusion
FIRST AND LAST EMPERORS



The transfer from the Empire of China to the
Empire of the Self is never-ending.
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1. Singular and Multiple. The State-form is not a form at all. It is an abstract process: a drive to "unity." To the extent that empirical States concretize that drive, they are one and the same. Every State is the State. The State does not evolve, nor even have an origin. It arrives, like fate, in a single stroke and fully formed, from a place that cannot be located. Over and over again. For "unity" is by nature unactualizable. The Emperor's conundrum: if the Great Unifier unifies the empire, is he a part of his own whole? If he is, then the empire is not unified: it is divisible into a subject and an object of unification. If he isn't, then the unity is not an empire: it is sovereignless. Any drive to unity is necessarily a drive to dominion, and necessarily fails. There is

always a remainder and an excess of power: an object of regimentation that escapes, a subject of regimentation that recedes. If the State-form cannot be whole, it cannot be. It does not abide, it only arrives. Again: when it arrives, it is not the same, as always. It is multiple by nature. To the extent that actual states succeed in concretizing the drive to unity, they differ from themselves and from each other. The invariant lack of self-sameness inherent in the State-form is often expressed as a split body (dismemberment: in particular, amputation and decapitation) and as a split between body and mind (disappearance: the invisibility of the soul; lack of will). Collective attempts to overcome this continual self-differing focus on the body of the ruler as exemplary site for the incarnation of the State Idea.

2. Immanent and Transcendent. Another way of putting the Emperor's conundrum is to say that the whole is either apart from or a part of that which it unifies: transcendent or immanent. A drive to unity is by design apart from what it unifies, and by default a part of it--both by nature. The State-form attempts to elevate the world to a level equal to its unifying abstraction, but in order to do so it must concretize itself enough to move brute matter. Every whole is immanent in its transcendence. Transcendence is nothing other than a particular mode of becoming-immanent to matter.

We charted three drives to unity, three becomings-immanent. Two were subsumed by a proper name--"Qin Shih Huang-di," "Reagan"--the third by an impersonal apparatus--the Bush-thing. The first two we called heteronymic, the third apparatic. The becomings-immanent subsumed first and foremost by a name seized upon markers of excess as a way of conjuring away the impossibility of transcendence. They were obsessed with the body, whose potential for death and dismemberment is a material reminder of the failure awaiting. The tension between excess and the body worked into a frenzy involving spectacular disappearances, in the

first case through a mythic quest for the other in the doubled self (the monster) and in the second case on a televised celebration of the fragmented self in the other (mass media technology)--ways of enacting the multiplicity unseen. The becoming-immanent subsumed first and foremost by an impersonal apparatus was haunted by its own premonitory signs of failure. It seized upon these, accepting the role of remainder. It melted to the point of imperceptibility on one screen apparatus only to reappear explosively on another. "Reagan" and the "First Emperor" played out the Emperor's conundrum by spinning off series of doubles and fracturings. The Bush-thing favored straddling a single split, enabling a decisive blankness where once was a proliferation of meaning and image. Each of these kinds of becoming-immanent, of course, involve names and apparatuses, myth and celebration, doubles, fractures, and splits, and many other things besides: an infinity of components. It is a question of composition, of how the components hold together. Determination is extrinsic: it is in interrelatedness.

There is at least one other kind of becoming-immanent (and probably many more): what we called nomadic desire. The difference between the becomings-immanent of the State Idea and the becomings-immanent of nomadic desire is not that between reason and unreason, or between constancy and passion. All becomings-immanent are desires, in the sense of tendings toward: they are drives or vectorial dynamisms inhabiting the in-between of bodies, images, ideas, and words, and many other things besides. The difference is that the State idea becomes-immanent in the service of unity, whereas nomadic desire openly embraces that singular multiplicity its State nemesis admits only under duress, like a dirty secret.

3. First and Last. The repetitive difference of the State Idea means that its every incarnation is in a sense immortal--or always already dead. Take your pick. It could be argued that Ronald Reagan was already present at the foundation of the Chinese empire, or that he is an avatar of the "First Emperor": that he has been alive since the dawn of history, or has died countless deaths, from fishly suicide to a failed assassination that in a sense succeeded because he walked away from it the corpse he already was. It always comes down to the same thing: equating the population with a bounded space or territory, saturating the territory with executive apparatuses, beaming onto every resulting surface projections of a despotic body whose form embodies an idea of unity as it disappears, shattered, into a dialectic of transcendence and immanence. The Bush-thing involves all of these components, but in a different mix. It takes one of them to the extreme: the apparatus (in one of its many variations). Bush has also been to China. The characteristically imperial apparatus--the bureaucracy--is an Asiatic Bush-thing with many an American cousin.

4. Alive and Unliving. The State-serving apparatus is the despotic expression of the impersonality of matter: the ordering voice of the "faceless" bureaucracy, the commanding might of the smart bomb's eyeless sight. The apparatus is matter that has been regimented as part of a becoming-immanent in the territory of the functions of the ruler, but which resists personification, in other words effective subsumption by a proper name. It is the inhumanity of the State, that which instrumentalizes State unity. Acting as the ruler's right hand without ceasing to be inorganic, the apparatus is an insistent remainder (excess) of absolute immanence. It is what the becoming-immanent of the ruler cannot entirely incorporate, but without which it cannot

function. The ruler cannot act over a distance without the apparatus. Without it, his rule would not be the measure of the social field.

Call this excessive remainder of absolute immanence force. Force is not material in the sense of being a determinate thing. And it is not necessarily negative, or prohibitive. In fact, its prohibitive mode is a special case, an exception to prove the rule, which is creative--productive of difference. For force is relational, it is the very stuff of relationality: non-coincidence, differential, vector, less a thing than matter and energy at their point of indiscernability.² Perpetual motion: as soon as a force exerts itself it has become other than it is, because its exertion alters the relationality it was. Not only is force not determinate, it is not determinable: it is the very movement of determination. It is becoming. No ruler rules without making his person coincide with selected forces gathered into an apparatus. But force is becoming, unruly. The ruler becomes-immanent in the territory to the extent that he alienates himself in an inorganic life he cannot hope entirely to control.³ The organic model evoked directly or indirectly by every image of State unity functions only to the extent that it is a becoming-inorganic: yet another expression of the Emperor's conundrum. He effectively commands only to the degree to which he unives his and others' lives.

The State Idea is always arriving, never abiding. In itself, it is outside time. It is eternal (or nonexistent, take your pick again). History lies in the alienation of the State Idea from itself: the apparatus is the history of the State. When we argued against evolutionary theories of social development, we said that the State and its transformations always arrived from outside, which we described as liminal, the in-between. That relational outside is the in-itself of force. The apparatus is an interiorization of force, its capture (regimentation, channelization) in the name of

unity. Any capture leaves traces. As Foucault has shown, it is possible to use those traces to chart "genealogies" of institutions. It is possible to write history, but only if rupture is given precedence over continuity.

The history of the State is the story of its progressive separation from itself through a proliferation and increasing differentiation of the apparatus. The only linearity in State history is this steady intensification of the becoming-immanent of the lost sovereign, the relentless "endocolonization" of the earth by materialized pre- and exhuman functions.⁴ The First Emperor had a restricted number of apparatuses at his disposal: the army, the mutual-spying machine, agriculture, hydraulics and other public works, all under the control of an overarching bureaucracy. Reagan had variations on all of these, plus many more. He made masterful use of spy apparatuses, using intelligence connections to make the famous pre-election arms-for-hostages deal that won him the presidency by thwarting a Carter "October surprise." Once in office, he could not have "healed the wounds of Vietnam" and prepared the nation for the infinite dissemination of his glorious image without ample support from such domestic apparatuses as the mass media and the police machine he mobilized for the "war" on drugs.

Two of the "First Emperor" apparatuses that have been hyperdeveloped under late capitalism are the army and the mutual-spying machine. Variations on each abound. Both are being technologized, relegating human perception and judgment step-by-step to the periphery of integrated circuits acting more and more automatically: poll responses relayed into computer analysis relayed into the mass media; satellite spy images relayed into computer analysis relayed into missile guidance systems. As human mental and perceptual functions are supplemented or even supplanted by technological translations of them, the leader and his subjects

become increasingly peripheral to their own activities. The apparatus is expelling them. The human is less and less central, occupying instead the end-points of autonomic circuits: the human gives the poll response, and receives the results in the next day's paper; a human presses a button and a "soft target" blows up. It is the humans who are at the extremities of the apparatus, rather than the apparatus serving as the right hand of the exemplary human. Each autonomic circuit peripheralizes the human only in order to connect through that human end-point with itself, initiating its next operation cycle: the publicized poll results feed back into the next opinion poll, making or breaking a political career; satellite-gathered information on missile hits and misses feed back into the next push of the button and the next "soft target" blows. The space of human intervention is reduced to the minimum, to instant reflex action: a canned answer to a prepackaged question; a programmed gesture urgently responding to incoming information.

The apparatus not only connects with itself at its human extremities; at those same points one autonomic circuit connects with another in a kind of asexual apparatic coupling: the results of successive polls are relayed into the military apparatus and launch the next war.

The human is expelled from the apparatus only to be incorporated all the more fully into it, as a relay point in increasingly integrated autonomic systems. Expelled as commander to be integrated as connector, the human is transformed by its own works from a brain legislating life to a ligament binding machine cycles. Human rule ceases to be the measure of the universe as the human is adjoined to machinic processes capable of operating on scales infinitely smaller or larger than any single human being can comprehend or control: from despotic overcoding to cosmic adjunction. The human organism has been most successfully subsumed not in the overarching name of

global unification, but by forms of inorganic life that can tap into cosmic energies, and limit human participation to local adjacency to them.⁵ Fittingly, the most advanced and publically appreciated apparatus of this kind is aimed at obliterating the human being it "services": the smart missile. Its nuclear kin marked the first recognized irruption in history of the exhuman apparatus. Nuclear weapons systems are a command-function materialization that descends into the infinitely small in order to release the infinitely large, in fatal form. The microchip is the "productive," or seductive-inductive, version of the same movement. As it continues its passage to infinity on the side of the small, it is inventing perception- and judgment-functions that may be released into the autonomic environment to be incorporated into infinitely expandable, but in principle sustainable, large-scale exhuman apparatuses (fuzzy logic, silicon neurons, virtual reality).⁶ Although the late capitalist State multiplies and intensifies army and spy machines, its trademark apparatuses are those specializing in perception- and judgment-functions applicable to civilian use as well: from the mass media to interactive media and associated technologies. It is not beyond the realm of possibility that the State's multiplication and intensification of these machines may augur its own demise.

If the history of the State is the endocolonization of the earth by the apparatus, that history may be coming to an end as exhuman functions proliferate-differentiate in every domain. Although Bush hasn't brought his thing back home yet in a big way, his repeated promise to mobilize the army to fight the "war" against drugs alongside already highly techno-militarized police forces shows that there are strong pressures to expand even the most unapologetic command apparatuses on the domestic front. If army, police, spy machines and their derivatives continue to automate and interlink, joining already interconnecting apparatuses such as

marketing research, "information economy" financial circuits of all kinds, and the mass media, forming a horizontal net of increasingly complex autonomic response capabilities, the point will be reached when the vertical dimension proper to the State's overarching drive to unity becomes superfluous. This would not, however, mean an end to power. Power is captured force, apparatusically applied. The importance of despotic command--the function proper to the State-form--would recede in favor of posthuman social control. While it would mark the end of human sovereignty, it would not be the end of power; it would be a new form of power, perhaps more effective than any yet seen. What are currently State apparatuses might retain a key role, acting collectively as something approaching a central processing unit, a machinic node coordinating capitalized autonomic processes, adjusting them to one another, mediating conflicts, maximizing profit. But this would be an immanent formation, a coordinator of heterogeneous horizontal movements on the plane of capital, rather than a structuring unity projecting its image onto the social field from a higher plane all its own.⁷ It would not be a State in our sense. The wave of social and economic deregulation sweeping the Western nation-states since the early 1980s coupled with the development of transnational trade zones in the 1990s (the European Community, the North American Free Trade Zone, the Yen bloc, and the Commonwealth of Independent States replacing the old Soviet Union) represent strong tendencies in this direction.

Then again, all that may never happen. In fact the opposite could well be the case: the new mania of State formation convulsing the world could be the State's last desperate gasp, or yet another rebirth. It would seem that the United States faces several choices: follow the Bush-thing as it jogs farther and farther into the proliferating-differentiating apparatus and away from the State as we have known it;

or rehumanize. Rehumanization would consist in forcing the population, the territory, and the executive apparatus back into a content-laden homology with the body of the leader, resubsuming the "spirit" of the nation under the proud name of organic unity. This way leads back to the liberal "representative" democracy of the 1960s and 1970s, on to a "Reagan" third term, or toward the invention of an all-American fascism (with the likes of Jesse Helms and David Duke in the vanguard), depending on how vigorously the homology is forced. Unsavory options all. Where the option of following the apparatus may lead is a complete unknown.

5. Masculine, Feminine, and Neuter. We noted a symbiosis between the masculine gender and the State-form. Despotism itself seemed best defined as privileging of maleness in collective symbolization and the preeminence of the masculine voice in collective ideation. We used the term symbiosis, and referred to the masculinity of the despot as a kind of home base to which his imagings and discourse, his vocal and visual bodily residues, return more often than not. These were ways of saying that the men and despotism go together almost without exception, that they belong with and to each other, but that this is more a complicity than the result of a shared essence: the relation between men and despotism is extrinsically determined. In other words, it is not a destiny. Bush's self-neutering in technology attests to that.

Or does it? How can we ignore the phallic resonance of the "short bursts of mute projectile motion" that make the Bush-thing most at one with himself? We can't. No matter how materialized, how inorganic, how neuter the Bush-thing is, it is still at least residually masculine, if only on one side of the split, on another screen belonging to a different apparatus than the missile (the mass media). And in the missile itself, it could be argued that masculinity is much more than residual. The

command-function materialized so expertly in the missile is a splitting image of the idea of unity--and it is precisely the drive to unity that holds men and despotism together. The dynamic of unity is the playing out of their belonging together, it is their symbiosis, their interrelatedness, their combined force. The Bush-thing can be seen as masculinity's latest ruse: shed the despotic body as a strategy for preserving its driving Idea. Inorganic masculinity: the despot's last laugh.

Any counterstrategy to the Bush-thing based on a becoming-woman would short-circuit. The feminine is as much a part of the masculine system as the neuter. None of these terms have any meaning apart from the others. The masculine is the historically predominant human expression of the excess of transcendence (the phallus). The feminine is the historically predominant human expression of the remainder of immanence (castration). The neuter is the reversal point or the vanishing point of human transcendence and immanence: it is the point toward which the irresolvable dialectic of transcendence and immanence set in motion by the drive to unity leads, as if to its solution. But it is not the solution, only the human point of contradiction. If masculinity is the phallus, and femininity is castration, then the neuter is the cut of the knife, the blast of the missile. Masculine, feminine, and neuter are all part of the same system: the personified organism. If a body precipitates toward one of these terms, it inevitably carries one or both of the others with it, eventually rebecoming what it left, or being assailed by it, haunted by it at every turn. As long as there is personification and organism, there will be gender, and where there is gender, there is masculinity, and where there is masculinity, there is almost certainly a despotic body ready for launch. A further indication that the belonging-together of men and despotism is symbiotic rather than essential is the fact that a biologically female body can sometimes serve as the launch site. The Kuwaitis

are building a museum for Margaret Thatcher--European "Reagan" turned tireless Bush-thing champion--to immortalize her pro-war activism.

The personified organism, the human, is always again a creature of the State. Gender-based subjectivity (Oedipus in its many incarnations) is a miniaturization, to fit the contours of the human body, of the transcendence-immanence dialectic constituting the State.

We have argued against privileging phallic interpretations of every cut, split, and fracture. That is because excess, remainder, and contradiction can be and are imaged in many other ways than by gender. Every level in the State system of homologies has its own way of imaging the immanence-transcendence dialectic. Insisting on reducing them to the phallus robs them of their specificity. The disappearing Emperor is a phallus, but he is also an emperor. The decapitated head is a phallus, but one that formerly wore a hat. Once again, it is less a question of is than of composition, of how a multiplicity of components hold together while retaining their singularity and separate histories.

If the personified organism is a creature of the State, and the State forever arrives and returns to a transhistorical place that cannot be located, then so does gender. Gender is an imaging and discourse system, a system of symbolizations and ideations driven by a dynamic that is in itself utterly impersonal, inorganic. The "body without an image" is an oxymoron expressing this inherence of the impersonal and inorganic in the human. "Virtual kinetic geography" is another term for it, one playing on a different level of the State system of homologies, that of the territory. The Bush-thing's privileging of the neuter, alongside of if not at the expense of the masculine, indicates that the body-State system is returning more intensely than ever to the body without an image, approaching ever closer to the inherence of the material, to

absolute immanence. It cannot go any further without flipping over into a different dynamic altogether, in which the impersonal and the inorganic completely subsume the human. In the preceding section, we speculated about one such dynamic, assuming a radicalization of transnational capitalism whereby profit eclipsed unity once and for all as the motor of social control. What is important in the present context is that the point of reversal--where the State (in this case, capital-technocratic) shades into the nomadic extreme (the first to inhabit a primarily technological smooth space)--also marks the limit of gender, patriarchy, all fixed hierarchy. That limit is less the neuter than the perpetual underside of the masculine, feminine, and neuter together, that from which they arise and into which they subside, not yet and again. Like the State, it ever arrives. But never before like this. The human is haunted by the masculine, which is possessed of the despot. But the despot is possessed of the body without an image, beckoned by it with growing insistence toward a non-place where no power abides. It is in the same movement that humanity passes to the limit of its own subjection, glimpses a new servitude, and is beckoned by its liberation.

6. Force and Potential. If apparatuses operate by capturing or interiorizing force, and if the relational outside is the in-itself of force, then the apparatus, in interiorizing force, alienates force from itself. Force = unbounded relationality = infinite connectability = pure potential: the capture of force is the reduction of potential. There is a reciprocal history to the State's progressive separation from itself through a proliferation and increasing differentiation of the apparatus: an equally complex separation of force from potential. What we called power. The actions of the State foster the crystalization of power, what Lord Shang praised as the "elimination of

strength": regimentation, channelization, induction. Walls and roads, functionalized things and allegedly harmonious movement of bodies, utility and organism: these are power phenomena, left-overs of force, post-capture. They are remainders of unspent potential, traces of unknown excess, hieroglyphs of an unreadable history of rupture shadowing, shattering the continuities of State-crystallized powers, whose linearized histories they also write, in the same words, different language.⁸

If the interiorization of force reached the limit of endocolonization, the point at which the State flips over into its own underside, if it spun out into a smooth, unbounded space of exteriority, if it actualized immanence in horizontal networks of increasingly complex interrelation . . . Could it not be made an occasion to sidestep power rather than resubmitting to it in a new way? Could the demise of the despot be taken as an opportunity to retranslate force into potential?

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7. Anti-State. We can't offer any conclusions, in the sense of final solutions. Those we leave to men of State. We can only offer a desire, counter to theirs. We can only incant: don't turn back. Call the Bush-thing's bluff. Take the drive to unity out of the missile, and the missile out of the apparatus. Do not jog. Take the remnants of self out of machinic possession. Refind "one's" strength. Return force to potential, remainder to excess, history to its underside. As the failure of Enlightenment has shown, liberation is never of the human, it is only ever from it. Invoke the body without an image in a postgender, posthuman, sovereignless world--even in the uncertainty of where it will take us. One thing is certain: we won't have "Reagan" to reassassinate anymore.