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A War-Machine against the Empire

Gerald Raunig

Translated by Lucinda Rennison, revised by Aileen Derieg and Gerald Raunig

In the course of protests in Austria against the reactionary Austrian government [1] a broad assembly of artistic platforms of resistance [2] developed at the turn of the year 1999/2000, carrying out a large number of actions ranging from communication guerrilla to counter-information measures. [3] A few months later, very little was left of this hyperactive multitude. Yet, this is not necessarily to be seen in a negative light. The magic word here is transformation. Just as the resistance movement of the year 2000 did not emerge from nowhere, but referred in many ways to the interventionist art scene of the 90s [4], the experience of the individuals and practices of early 2000 were taken further in a variety of different contexts. When attacking radical right-wing populist policy on a *national* level no longer makes any sense, activist artists develop and reflect on new focuses within global protests,
against border regimes or in the fight for migrants' rights [5].

Here, in the context of the global protest movement, artistic-political practices finally seem to have left behind the dichotomy between art and activism. The activists hardly seek their own

success in the arts field, nor are they striving for special distinction. Nonetheless, they employ methods and strategies of art history or current artistic practice. These actions create a new terrain of transversality, which is neither part of the artistic field nor of the political field in its narrow sense.

The analysis and critique of these new practices in this new terrain cannot make use of old categories such as site specificity, institutional critique, interaction/participation, or even of very old categories such as authorship, aura and work of art. Instead, new categories must be developed, starting from the practices in question, in order to gain adequate insight from them. The following is an attempt to do so using one specific current example and three concepts. These concepts, in keeping with the practices examined, are borrowed from political theory rather than from aesthetic theory.

The example in question is the PublixTheatreCaravan (VolxTheaterKarawane): prepared in the spring of 2001 in a series of long virtual and real-life discussions, it set out from Vienna in June, with actions at the Austrian-Slovakian border at Nickelsdorf, in the midst of the protests against the WEF summit in Salzburg, at a border camp in Lendava (Croatia/Hungary), in front of a detention centre in Ljubljana, and finally around the G8 summit in Genoa last summer, at the end of which the members of the Caravan
were kept in custody for four weeks by the Italian police. [6]

The three concepts employed in this article are taken from the arsenal of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari: *nomadism, war machine*, and *the micro-politics of the border*.

Today, the figure of the nomad has become one of random hipness. In the 80s, Deleuze/Guattari's concept of the nomadic was misunderstood by various groups such as surfers, techno-musicians or net-artists as a welcome, flowery metaphor they could all too easily identify themselves and their activities with. The concept in its Deleuzian sense needs to be defended against such hymns to freedom and flow or the ultimate democratisation through the internet: firstly, nomadism is precarious, secondly it is offensive, and thirdly it is located at the border.

Thus, the nomadic is something precarious, existing only until revoked - its precondition is constant failure, or to put it more politely: the constitutive difference between aim and result. The precarious is a condition of the nomadic.

The precarious quality of the nomadic can be described on the basis of the PublixTheatreCaravan's struggle for an adequate, or rather *with* the only possible form of organisation: the collective. Again and again, experiences with collective planning in lengthy assemblies and collective action have proven that the implosion of the collective is inherent to it. An additional difficulty arose from the ideal that the participants of the Caravan should not be only Viennese or Austrians, but from as many different backgrounds as possible, resulting in a confusing mix of numerous languages. The third - and in the context of the topic of precariousness most important - aspect, however, was the caravan's very nature: nomadic movement in itself creates the precarious, because the collective - in contrast to traditional ideas of nomadism - travels unknown paths. Arriving in places it does not know, the collective is forced to make decisions, and to reduce complexity to a great extent: The PublixTheatreCaravan, as a collective in motion, had to work continually at managing these different levels of precariousness.

Since the late 90s, we have seen a new renaissance of the nomadic, for instance as a key concept in Michael Hardt's and Antonio Negri's *Empire*. [7] When the figure of the nomad appears once again in this explicitly political context, it undoubtedly has a different quality compared to the one it had in the context of the misinterpretations of the 1980s. However, as in *Empire* the movements of travelling intellectuals and political refugees are mingled under the concept of nomadism, Hardt and Negri tend to conceptually merge the completely different conditions of *self-chosen* and *forced* migration. Inevitably, this is bound to lead to an enormous over-estimation of the subjects of migration, who are thus built up into the most important opponents of the omnipotent "Empire".

In the work of Deleuze/Guattari, on the other hand, the molar line of power is juxtaposed with two other lines: the molecular or *migrant* line and the line of flight, of rupture, the *nomad* line. [8] This corresponds with the necessary differentiation between forced migration - fleeing from one place to another where there might be hope for new settlement (=reterritorialisation) on the one hand, and an offensive nomadic practice on the other hand. The migrant line connects two points, leads from one to another, from deterritorialisation to reterritorialisation. By contrast, the nomad line is a line of flight which, passing through the points, leads the movements of deterritorialisation into a current, a torrential motion which has nothing to do with flight in the traditional sense. Fleeing, yes, but seeking a weapon while fleeing.

The characteristic of this nomadic line, this line of flight, is the offensive. But what does offensive mean in a world that, according to Deleuze/Guattari and to Hardt/Negri, is threatening to sink into a single, comprehensive, global commonplace: *power is everywhere*

and yet at the same time nowhere. Its mechanisms function without a centre and without guidance.

Both pairs of authors suggest an answer to this situation without an imaginable "outside" of power, an answer that is repeatedly propounded especially in *Empire*: if the mechanisms of power function without a centre and without central guidance, it must be possible to attack them vertically from any place, from any local context. [9]

However plausible and attractive this thesis may appear, it is nebulous and vague as long as it remains unclear who or what exactly should be attacked. Even if the idea of "being against in any place" may seem doubly apt, since it includes both the *possibility* of opposition in *any* place and the *necessity* of opposition in *every* place, there are still places which deserve this opposition more than others. And these places must be sought, chosen and attacked, quite in contrast to the Deleuzian formula that the nomad is the one not moving at all. [10]

The intense journey in one place, this trenchant intersection between Kant and Deleuze as well, is outdated now. Today, Kant's legendary stay-at-home syndrome, avoiding anything that might have made him leaving Königsberg, and Deleuze's insisting on the non-movement of the nomad, both represent average, thoroughly normalised everyday life. In the face of this normality, there is a need for practices of opposition to the mechanisms of the information and control society using tactics, which - like the deterritorialised flows of capital - cannot be fixed in one place, cannot be settled down. Opposed to the flows of capital, however, these practices should continually create uncontrolled, self-determined lines of rupture. And here we find ourselves in the zones adjacent to artistic-political intervention within the context

of the global protests with their spontaneous actions, tactical attacks and rapid appropriation of new situations, with their lines of flight in and through nomadic space.

The PublixTheatreCaravan acts along a line of flight, it attacks, it is offensive, in brief: it is a *war-machine* in the Deleuzian sense. This is by no means an attribution of any specific form of violence. On the contrary, the war-machine points beyond the discourses of violence and terror; and it is precisely this machine that sets out to oppose the violence of the state apparatus, the order of representation. Conversely, the state apparatus attempts to force the power of representation onto what cannot be represented, for example by turning the Caravan into a "Black Block": it is exactly the war-machine that opposes these mechanisms of representation or, following Hardt and Negri, the *militant*, who rediscovers not representational, but constituent activity. [11]

When it comes to locating places of power that constantly disappear from the zones of visibility, it is the border that has an outstanding function. This does not by any means refer to the border as a metaphor, but to *concrete border lines* such as of the nation state or the inner borders of the "Empire" as much as other border lines of the state apparatus such as the police lines which are being "spaced" e.g. with the actions of Tute Bianche or Pink-Silver Blocks. [12]

On the edge of the border camps in Lendava, for example, using the dramatic means of invisible theatre and irritation, the Caravan investigated the area of the no-man's-land between the border stations. The activists - wearing orange overalls and UN uniforms - erected an additional border station between the Hungarian and Croatian border posts, stopping cars and distributing no-border passports and pamphlets among the drivers. Less an act of crossing

over, breaking through or abolishing borders, as the Caravan's slogan "No Border" suggests, this action represents the apparent opposite: erecting new border posts in order to create an oscillating, nomadic border area in the no-man's-land against the absolute borders of the national state. [13]

By means of such "micro-politics of the border" (Guattari), the diverse practices in the contexts of global protests abandon the vague phrase of the "vertical attack on the virtual centres of power", which are supposedly everywhere and nowhere. This is far more a matter of making visible, of concretely attacking virtuality, of spacing abrupt border lines, and at the same time of trying out experimental, collective forms of organisation. This characterises the war-machine: its attack on the state apparatus is always connected with a continual search for alternatives - or, based on Negri and Hardt: resistance, insurrection, and constituent power are to be thought as one indivisible process.

[1] See http://www.eipcp.net/diskurs/d04/index.html

[2] See www.gettoattack.net, www.volkstanz.net, performing resistance, etc.

[3] See Gerald Raunig, Wien Feber Null. Eine Ästhetik des Widerstands, Vienna 2000

[4] See Gerald Raunig, Charon. Eine Ästhetik der Grenzüberschreitung, Vienna 1999; Holger Kube Ventura,

Politische Kunst Begriffe in den 1990er Jahren im deutschsprachigen Raum, Vienna 2002

[5] See http://www.wwp.at/

[6] See http://www.no-racism.net/nobordertour/

[7] See Michael Hardt, Antonio Negri, Empire, Cambridge/ Massachusetts 2000, in particular p. 210-214

[8] See Gilles Deleuze, Clarie Parnet, Dialoge, Frankfurt/Main 1980, p. 147f.

[9] See Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, Tausend Plateaus, Berlin 1992, p. 583; Michael Hardt, Antonio Negri, Empire, Cambridge/ Massachusetts 2000, p. 211:"If there is no longer a place that can be recognized as outside, we must be against in every place."

[10] See Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, Tausend Plateaus, Berlin 1992, p. 524

[11] See Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, Tausend Plateaus, Berlin 1992, p. 578; Michael Hardt, Antonio Negri, Empire, Cambridge/ Massachusetts 2000, p. 413

[12] See the example of Performing Resistance's "Rechtswalzer" in: Gerald Raunig, Wien Feber Null. Eine Ästhetik des Widerstands, Vienna 2000, p. 40-45

[13] Cf. my concept of "Spacing the Line", see a.o. Gerald Raunig, *Spacing the Lines*. Konflikt statt Harmonie. Differenz statt Identität. Struktur statt Hilfe, in: Eva Sturm/Stella Rollig (Hg.), Dürfen die das? Kunst als sozialer Raum, Vienna 2002, S.118-127