09 2002

Transversal Multitudes

Gerald Raunig

Translated by Aileen Derieg

> "Which are the new types of struggles, those that are more transversal and immediate than centralizing and mediating? Which are the new functions of the more 'specific' than universal intellectual? Which are the new ways of subjectivation, more free of identity than identifying?"[1]

With loose references to the struggles in and around Paris May 1968, Félix Guattari, Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze posed similar questions in different (con)texts and sketched out suggestions of a concept of transversality. These traces, which are less theoretically constructed than directly and explicitly embedded in the political context around 1968, are to be addressed here. Our intention is not necessarily to establish connections to general issues of cultural and identity politics, such as those that resurfaced in English under the term "transversal politics"[2] in the late nineties, nor to carry on Wolfgang Welsch's[3] considerations based on a critique of reason, nor the faded allusions, with which the concept of the transversal corresponds to French everyday language, and certainly not to recall memories of geometry lessons. [4]

The minimal definition, the minimal development of the concept by Deleuze and cohorts, the casual use as an auxiliary term in their

landscape of concepts, is not a lack, but rather opens up an opportunity, in that transversality becomes available for being newly charged in globalization-critical contexts. Transversality, not at all in a metaphorical sense, is intended here to contribute to shifting the discussion from the definitory to the contextually organizing, from the whether to the how of the movement. In our case, the whether is found mainly in the question of whether the counterpart of economic globalization, its themes, its dissemination and its manifestations, is also to be understood and termed as global or not. In terms of concepts, this is expressed primarily in the argument about whether this involves anti-globalization, anti-globalism, or rather a "different" globalization, a "grassroots globalization", so to speak.

The concept of transversality subverts this not overly effective question. The global development of the transversal multitude is, in any case, hardly to be understood as a status quo, but rather as a constantly changing perspective; yet what is more desirable than any notion of the world ultimately being completely covered by Empire and/or Multitude[5], is the insistence on movement, on becoming, on becoming revolutionary. Transversality reinforces the concepts of this tendency toward unclosable movement and implies its formal and organizational quality. What are the components of the concept, though, and how does transversality occur concretely in the movement?

transnational: overcoming the multinational building-block set

To put it quite simply and in Foucault's words, transversal struggles are not limited to one certain country, so they are transnational.[6] This sounds entirely reasonable and seems to

suggest a practice that has long since become commonplace anyway, but that is not the case. Transnational cooperation is still an ace in the hand of the world of capital, not a matter of common sense, not a form of collaboration open to everyone, not a widely tested praxis of resistance. The Austrian example of resistance against the black-blue government (i.e. the coalition between the conservative Austrian People's Party - symbolized with the color black - and the right-wing Freedom Party of Austria - symbolized with the color blue) in 1999/2000 shows - just like innumerable other, more current hotspots of resistance against right-wing populist and radical right-wing parties in Europe - that many actors, even if they take a fundamentally anti-national position themselves, remain more or less trapped in their structural localisms and nationalisms. In the discussions around "February Zero"[7] (February 2000, when the "black-blue" coalition government was formed in Austria), there were arguments about a "different", "better", "actual" *Austria*; at the relevant demonstrations, left-wing patriots celebrated with their equally patriotic friends from France or Belgium, and representatives of the "other" Austria ultimately marketed themselves as typical Austrian resistance and exported themselves abroad, to panels, conferences and front pages. What took place in the process was by no means a transnational transversalization; no intensive debates arose between the scenes and on the various traditions of power and resistance in the various countries. Instead, the opportunity of transversality got lost in multinational parallel actions, as these were carried out alongside one another without exchange.

Even the proliferation of counter-summits, the protests against the G8, WEF, WTO summits, the summit hopping from Seattle 1999 to Genoa 2001 (and beyond) remains a superficial phenomenon in this image of a hardly cohesive patchwork of resistance, which by

itself could be understood as an effect of general societal spectacularization. It is only against the backdrop of growing *continuous* activities that the anti-globalist large-scale demonstration becomes an occurrence that briefly breaks through this continuity and gives it new directions. In between such spectacular jet flames, nomadic practices of wandering caravan artists, for instance, indicate a transversalization within and in the framework of protests against economic globalization by attempting to fill the gaps between the major events with expansion experiments at the various borders.[8] Although the transnational praxis of the Noborder network and the border camps repeat some of the problems of political organizing[9], it is still a strong indication of the extent to which particularly younger activists seek non-reformist and non-representationist approaches to self-organization.[10]Overcoming the multinational building-block set emerges most strikingly in the rare situations, when migrants and self-organized migrant groups enter the scenes of activism as protagonists, exploding the national framework, as it were, from the inside, as they also draw *one* line of protest against economic globalization: a line that can be traced at least since 2001, for instance in the election campaign actions of the "Wiener Wahl Partie"[11] or in Genoa at the "Migrants' International March" in conjunction with the manifestations against the G8 summit.[12]

transsectoral: a praxis of traversing social fields

As the precarious practices of the Noborder network, the border camps and caravans work to overcome national frameworks, their transversal lines also break through the hermetic of particularist partial public spheres and exclusive subcultures. This means something substantially more than and different from the stale

terminology of interdisciplinarity or transdisciplinarity and the practices that have academized this concept. In the field of art, for instance, it no longer means the dissolution of the boundaries of disciplines in the diverse practices between happenings and performances, but rather cooperations between artists, theoreticians, activists, etc. all across the different fields. As transversal lines tend to transsectorally cross through several fields, they link together social struggles and artistic interventions and theory production and ... This AND is not to be understood as haphazardly stringing together random elements to cover up contradictions, as a political propaganda display of social fields, but rather as a multitude of temporary alliances, as a productive concatenation of what never fits together smoothly, what is constantly in friction and impelled by this friction or caused to evaporate again.[13] At the same time, this AND resists merging into a large unified front and against splintering, portioning and fractioning.[14] In other words, it does not work like the gluttonous inclusion mechanism, which generates a freedom from contradictions in the insatiable apparatuses of political parties through imperatives of conformity, nor in the style of the mainstream of *attac*, as a hybrid of Greenpeace and unions, greedy for members on the one hand, but on the other very clever in founding sections. The division of the movement into economic policy, agricultural, artistic, feminist, etc. "sub-unions", the limiting of respective specific competencies to the clichés of their subsectors (for instance, the [self-] limitation of artists to illustrations or recruiting celebrities) are exactly the opposite of the additive function of transversality. Contrary to the principle of delegation according to a division of labor, transversal lines pose a praxis of traversing. Contrary to the old strategies of networking, fragmenting and unifying, the concatenation of diversity needs

neither fragmentation nor consensus, at most a constantly renewed differentiation between power and resistance.

molecular: multitude and non-conformist mass

In the seventies, Deleuze and Guattari asked how the capitalist system's repressive concatenations of wishes, the restraining politics holding back the creativity, the wish production and the initiative of the masses could be overcome, without replacing it with equally repressive concatenations of wishes of a bureaucratic system, without instrumentalizing the wish energy of the masses for fascist (self-) destruction. What they are searching for are events and places, where the "*notion of mass is a molecular notion* operating according to a type of segmentation irreducible to the molar segmentarity of class."[15] The significance of the search for these kinds of non-molar concepts of mass and crowd, as well as the concomitant phenomena in the movements grows with increasing deterritorialization and the prevailing of post-fordist working conditions and forms of cooperation. When everyone, even the most conservative organizations remodel themselves from hierarchies into "decentralized networks", then the condition of distinguishing the organizational forms of Empire and Multitude, of power and resistance, of constituted power and constituent power, becomes the most important question.

Contrary to openly hierarchical networks and pseudo-non-hierarchical networks, which also seek to cover up hierarchies as *poly-centric* networks, transversal lines develop structures that are *a-centric*, that do not move only on the basis of given strands and channels, never from one point to another, always right through, in between the points, in a completely different direction. In other

words, transversals are not at all connections between multiple centers or points; they are lines that do not necessarily even cross anywhere, lines of flight, fault lines, continuously eluding the systems of points and their coordinates.

The notion of connecting already existent points corresponds, albeit covertly, to the structure of hierarchical, molar systems. In comparison, the a-central forms of organization and linkages of transversal protests work with temporary overlappings and superimpositions that are based on a flowing political organization with an open end. Suitable metamorphous vessels are needed for these overlaps, the development of which changes in more cadre-like, closed forms or open labels, depending on the situation. The transformations of these vessels of organization and communication must specifically take the manifoldness of the multitude into account; the multitude less as a "Menge"[16] (crowd) than as a "non-conforming mass: non-conforming as an incomprehensible totality in their stance against [...] state power, non-conforming in their rejection of uniformization, in their insistence on the difference of individuals"[17], and yet still regaining their capacity for community in the midst of difference capitalism and competitive individualism: the cancellation of mass and individual in the non-conforming mass of protests is one in which both poles tendentially retain their full significance, without being resolved in something more sublime in keeping with the pattern of dialectic.

specific: new modes of subjectivation

"The intellectuals to come will not be individuals, not a caste, but rather a collective concatenation, in which people are involved, who do manual work, intellectual work, artistic work."[18] The

intellectuals to come, as Guattari describes them here, do not correspond to the commonplace images of intellectuals now thirty years later either; on the contrary, the type of the "media intellectual" and his function of giving a spectacle-like and depoliticized commentary on anything and everything have increasingly prevailed.[19] And yet primarily the collective experiences of several generations have again and again produced new, alternative notions of linking competencies and knowledge: transversal struggles generate specific modes of subjectivation, require specific competencies, demand specific potentials, rather than the universal of a universal proletariat or the "universal intellectual". In a certain way, the concept of transversality has become the counter-pole of a totalizing concept of universality in this respect. Deleuze picks up on Foucault's understanding of the attribution of the universal particularly to the changing status of the intellectual, who

"for a long period of time from the 18th century to the end of World War II (through Zola, Rolland ... perhaps even to Sartre) has been able to assume the role of the administrator of the general: to the extent that the uniqueness of the writer correlated to the position of the 'jurist or notable', the 'man of justice, the man of law', who counterposes all the abuses of power and wealth with 'the universality of justice and the equity of an ideal law'. If the intellectual (and also the function of writing) has taken on a different shape today, then it is because his position itself has changed and now runs more from one certain location to another, from a singular point to the next, if he is a 'nuclear physicist, geneticist, computer scientist, pharmacologist ...' and thus now achieves effects of transversality rather than universality, or functions as a preferred relay or intersection point. In this sense, the intellectual or even the writer (this is no more than one

possibility) can all the better take part in the struggles, in current resistance, as they have become 'transversal'."[20]

In the deposition of the hermetic autonomy of ivory tower artists and exemplary intellectuals, transversality first emerges in the linking or superimposition of specific competencies. This model primarily has the advantage that transversal modes of subjectivation can be imagined beyond the position of intellectuals: intellectuals no longer have a monopoly function in explaining and championing the world. These functions are diffused or even become unusable in contexts, in which specific competencies are interlayered in collective and a-centric networks.

Transversality thus ultimately also implies a precondition for evolving new forms of collectivity, or rather: for dissolving the opposition between the individual and the collective. There is no longer any artificially produced subject of articulation; it becomes clear that every name, every linkage, every label has always already been collective and must be newly constructed over and over again. In particular, to the same extent to which transversal collectives are only to be understood as polyvocal groups, transversality is linked with a critique of representation, with a refusal to speak for others, in the name of others, with abandoning identity, with a loss of a unified face, with the subversion of the social pressure to produce faces.

[1] Gilles Deleuze, Foucault, Frankfurt/Main 1992, p. 162.

[2] Cf. in general: Soundings 12, Summer 1999: Transversal Politics (published by Stuart Hall, Doreen Massey, Michael Rustin, Cynthia Cockburn and Lynette Hunter), in the field of Gender Studies Nira Yuval-Davis, Gender and Nation, London 1997, or in

the field between cultural politics and Cultural Studies: Tony Bennett, Differing Diversities: Transversal Study on the Theme of Cultural Policy and Cultural Diversity, in: ibid., Differing diversities, Strasbourg 2001,p. S.7-69

[3] Cf. Wolfgang Welsch, Vernunft. Die zeitgenössische Vernunftkritik und das Konzept der transversalen Vernunft, Frankfurt/Main 1996

[4] Cf. Oliver Marchart, Der durchkreuzte Ort der Partei oder Politik *more geometrico*, in: MALMOE 04/2002, p. 20

[5] On the concepts of Empire and Multitude: Michael Hardt/ Antonio Negri, Empire, Cambridge, MA, London, 2000.

[6] Michel Foucault, Warum ich die Macht untersuche. Die Frage des Subjekts, in: ibid., Botschaften der Macht, DVA 1999, p. 165.

[7] Cf. Gerald Raunig, Wien Feber Null. Eine Ästhetik des Widerstands, Vienna 2000, especially p. 118-124: Epilog ... Etwas anderes als Österreich!

[8] Cf. Gerald Raunig, A War-Machine Against the Empire. On the Precarious Nomadism of the PublixTheatreCaravan, in: UNDER [DE] CONSTRUCTION. Perspectives Cultural Diversity in Visual and Performing Arts, p. 132-138 (http://www.eipcp.net/transversal/0902/raunig/en) and Gini Müller, Transversal or Terror? Moving Images of the PublixTheatreCaravan (http://www.eipcp.net/transversal/0902/mueller/en)

[9] Cf. Gini Müller, op.cit. and Ralf Homann, Perpetual Restart. On the Hybrid Praxis of no one is illegal (http://www.eipcp.net/transversal/1202/homann/en)

[10] Cf. also Harald Kuemmer, Border Camp // Strasbourg // July 19 to 28, 2002 (http://www.eipcp.net/transversal/0902/kuemmer/en)

[11] Cf. Ljubomir Bratic, Gleiche Rechte für alle! Zur transversalen Praxis der Wiener Wahl Partie, in: Kulturrisse 02/01, p. 8-11

[12] Cf. Gerald Raunig, Im Sommer des Protests. Fortschritt zwischen Gipfel und Grenzcamp, in: Der Standard, 19.7.2001, p. 35

[13] Cf. Gerald Raunig, Wien Feber Null. Eine Ästhetik des Widerstands, Vienna 2000, particularly p.24-33: Front statt Volk! Metamorphe Gefäße

[14] In contrast, cf. Hito Steyerl, The Articulation of Protest (http://www.eipcp.net/transversal/0303/steyerl/en) and in contrast to this: Gilles Deleuze, Negotiations, New York 1995, S.44/45: "Neither a component nor a collection, what is this AND? I think Godard's force lies in living and thinking and presenting this AND in a very novel way, and in making it work actively. AND is neither one thing nor the other, it's always in-between, between two things; it's the borderline, there's always a border, a line of flight or flow, only we don't see it, because it's the least perceptible of things. And yet it's along this line of flight that things come to pass, becomings evolve, revolutions take shape..."

[15] Gilles Deleuze/Félix Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus, London/New York, p. 213.

[16] Cf. the translation of the concept of multitude in the German version of Michael Hardt/Antonio Negri, Empire. Die neue Weltordnung, Frankfurt/New York 2002.

[17] Cf. Gerald Raunig, Wien Feber Null. Eine Ästhetik des Widerstands, Vienna 2000, p.46-52: Der Aufstand der Massen, Reverse Mode. Massenhafter Nonkonformismus als Aufhebung des Gegensatzes von Masse und Individuum, here p. 51.

[18] Félix Guattari, Wunsch und Revolution, Heidelberg 2000, p. 88

[19] Cf. my thoughts on the function of intellectuals: Menasses Freiheit, in: Falter 20/00, p. 6; Süßstoffland ist abgebrannt. Österreich im Zeitalter des Zuckers - Eine Replik auf Slavoj ?i?ek, in: Elisabeth Nemeth, Silvia Stoller, Gerhard Unterthurner (Ed.), Philosophie in Aktion. Demokratie - Rassismus - Österreich, Vienna: Turia + Kant 2000, p. 142-149; Wien Feber Null. Eine Ästhetik des Widerstands, Vienna: Turia+Kant 2000, p.53-56, p. 71-77

[20] Gilles Deleuze, Foucault, Frankfurt/Main 1992, p.127f.