

## **Conference Report on "The Diagrammatic Practice of the Micropolitical – the Spatio-temporal Expression of Play between Power, Knowledge and the Aesthetics of Existence"**

Zürich University of the Arts (ZHdK), Zürich, 14 - 16 November 2013

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## Conference Report on "The Diagrammatic Practice of the Micropolitical – the Spatio-temporal Expression of Play between Power, Knowledge and the Aesthetics of Existence"

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"I can't get it out of my mind – how would it be to have a good fuck in an art gallery?" (ADRIAN RIFKIN, Goldsmiths College, London). This was one of the questions raised at the symposium co-curated by Dimitrina Sevova and Christoph Brunner at the ZHdK, in cooperation with the research project Opportunities for Outdoor Play? Playground – New Spaces of Liberty (The Question of Form) of the Kunsthoff Zurich. Another question raised at the symposium was: "How can we develop an analysis still centred on capitalism, without remaining trapped in a dialectical form of thought? How can we think our present?" (ROBERTO NIGRO, ZHdK, Zurich).

This is but a meagre illustration of the heterogeneity of approaches and themes tackled in the presently reviewed symposium. Yet the problem might be tied not so much to the approximate nature of this illustration, as to the illustrative mode of writing itself. Illustrative, analytical, disputational, descriptive, critical ... can the standard modes of academic enunciation, anticipated by the genre of a conference report, accommodate the emphatically micropolitical nature of a conference on micropolitics – and play? In other words, can the present article successfully relay the playful and micropolitical nature of the symposium at the ZHdK, which was performed through the tight intertwining of its formal and social dramaturgy with the theoretical and practical problems tackled? If we want the event to resonate in writing, however, we can try to take writing as precisely such a practice – of play, trial, and experimentation, aimed at conveying the play, trial, and experimentation, the micropolitical dynamics of the event written about. So here we go again:

### (Try Again, Fail Better)

Not necessarily wanting to give a concise answer to the questions tackled during the symposium and sketched above, but rather wishing to outline how the symposium performed its own theoretical and (micro)political concerns, we could nevertheless say that the first question which opened this review somehow gestures towards the approach the symposium as a whole took towards the second question. By this I do not mean to say that the symposium merely created a platform for a playful (if not leisurely) intertwining of more essayistic approaches and theoretical contributions, performances, and film screenings; neither that it created a cosy environment for a languid consensus of such heterogeneous approaches. The symposium was no spectacle of academic superstars, and neither was it ornamented by artistic contributions. Rather the contrary: premised as it was on rethinking a micropolitical approach to politics and play, borrowing the concept from Deleuze and Guattari, the whole symposium dispositif seemed to be geared towards the micropolitical practice of actually drawing "new lines of alliance, new spaces of liberty" (see Félix Guattari and Antonio Negri: *New Lines of Alliance, New Spaces of Liberty*, 2010) at the intersection of its academic and artistic context. More concretely:



### (Try Again, Fail Better II)

The concept of micropolitics, as outlined in Deleuze and Guattari's joint work is not a micro-logical view of politics; it does not confront us with a question of scale, size or quantity, but a qualitatively different conception of what doing and living politics is. Or rather: how it happens and evolves (Deleuzian notions, as we are often reminded, should not be thought of as nouns, but as verbs, for they do not indicate static entities, but evolving processes). How can we think of political processes which unfold beyond or rather besides what we commonly perceive as politics, that is besides (pre)given identities and subject positions, besides the representations of fully formed ideological positions? Indeed, as Roberto Nigro argued, Deleuze, Guattari and Foucault most explicitly tried to think this 'beside', which is also a beyond – beyond the crisis of classical (macro)political Marxism. To repeat: "How can we develop an analysis still centred on capitalism, without remaining trapped in a dialectical form of thought?"



## (Try Again, Fail Better III)



The concept of micropolitics is hence one attempt at such an analysis, and it saw several conceptual modulations at the present symposium. GERALD RAUNIG (ZHdK, Zurich) expanded upon the concept of commu/onism, drawing on Guattari and Negri's joint rethinking of communism from a creative, "ethico-aesthetic" (as Guattari would have it) approach. ISABELL LOREY (University of Basel, Basel) scrutinized practices of "presentist democracy" developed in the last waves of anti-capitalist protests as creative responses to the crisis of the social reproduction of life, triggered by the progressive precarisation of the always already precarious conditions of life by neoliberal policies in late capitalism. JOSHUA SIMON (Goldsmiths College, London) advocated the rethinking of the concept of the "dividual" as a way to think of individuation and

subjectivation as open processes which never give rise to fully constituted and separated subjects and/or individuals, but entail an intrinsic metastability (as Gilbert Simondon would have it) of the "dividual" and its close connection to its milieu or environment, its inseparability from it. This also calls for a radically different, post-representational, post-subjective and post-dialectical approach to ethics and politics – to how we inhabit the world as dividuals, never fully one, never fully self. KUBA SZREDER (Loughborough University, Leicestershire) on the other hand tackled the politics of the "serious play" of academic and other precarious cognitive workers, while CARMEN MÖRSCH (ZHdK, Zurich) reflected on queering the practice of art education in museums – both in their own ways tackling the politics of education and educational institutions; thus implicitly tying the common topic most closely to the specific milieu we (all the participants of the symposium) were situated in (an art academy and an 'academic' conference). And this milieu, or rather the way it has been carefully co-orchestrated by the organizers, can be viewed as an explicit expression of the micropolitical approach to politics (of art, of knowledge, of life) the symposium put forth:

## (Try Again, Fail Better IV)

As I attempt to argue for the fourth time in a row now (trying again, failing better), the conference dispositif itself embodied its own thematic concerns. To outline the content of the theoretical contributions (as I have done above) or even to describe the performances and film screenings would thus not even come close to appropriately rendering the specific "diagrammatic practice of the micropolitical" at which the symposium was aiming. "The question of form" was all but secondary for the symposium. The close connection between theoretical papers, artistic presentations, film screenings and performances was enabled by the specific dramaturgy of the event. Again, this didn't resort to confining the artistic

programme to the evening hours and the theoretical contributions to morning work-shifts, but rather intertwined both, creating a playground for theory and some serious artistic plays and displays. This connection was also achieved through several contributions which dwelled in the sombre region between both: Adrian Rifkin's meditation on the libidinal charge of art, laughter and sneezing, MICHAEL HILTBRUNNER (ZHdK, Zurich) and his performative reading of Isidore Isou's mixture of smut literature and avant-garde (lettrist) poetry (from *La Mécanique du Femmes*, 1949) or CHRISTINA GOMEZ BARRIO's (Berlin) poetic presentation of the evocative work of discoteca flaming star "Agora." But not only were theoretical, political and artistic practices intertwined and viewed as distinct yet immanently interconnected technologies of subjectivation, as appropriate to the specific theoretical framework of the symposium. What turned the symposium into a real micropolitical "aesthetics of existence" was also the care and attention devoted to organisational everyday matters, usually dealt with in a by-the-way, protocol-following approach: the lack of an explicit hierarchy not only between artistic and theoretical practice and research, but also among the presenters themselves (who exchewed the academic valorisational protocol of keynote lecturers as emphatically distinct from 'regular' contributors), as well as the blurring of the usually impermeable division between presenters and the audience. The audience was not pushed into registration protocols and fee payment on the one hand and to silenced listening on the other, but rather invited to share the common space of watching, listening, discussing, playing, eating, drinking, making connections. Ironically, playfully or dead-seriously, the conference performed its own implicit theoretical-political and ethico-aesthetic assumptions.

Expanding upon the micropolitical consequences of the performative nature of the symposium, we could notice how the symposium did not contrast the widely discussed progressive precarisation of academic and artistic labour (the blurring of the boundary between work and free time via the commodification of the everyday, affectivity, relationality and creativity) with a reactionary criticism aimed at reinstating a historically failed and libidinally restrictive solution. On the contrary, we could view its micropolitical performative strategy as pushing certain liberatory tendencies of the "factories of knowledge" in late capitalism even further, yet astray, creatively twisting them to foster new "lines of alliance and spaces of liberty": a shared space of commu/onal experience where art, theory, politics, life and friendship coexist, mutually enrich each other in an immanent process of commu/onisation. Serious play in face of the late capitalist dictate of joyful work: a welcome refreshment in face of the (too) many theories of art and/as labour. And yet...

## (Try Again, Fail Better V)



The micropolitical aesthetics of existence of commu/onisation enabled by the specific ethico-aesthetic dispositif of the conference by no means meant that a harmonious, self-applauding consensus was the result. Quite the contrary. Instead of leaving the conference with our own opinions once again represented (or not), maybe informationally enriched, but not significantly modified, it was a pleasant surprise to see so many divergent opinions exchanged, so many vivid discussions sparked, so many controversies opened, especially considering the presumably roughly common theoretical frameworks and ideological backgrounds of the participants (and the audience). MAURIZIO LAZZARATO's (Paris) advocacy of the refusal of work as a micropolitical strategy of resistance (to the productivist, futurist and patriarchal late capitalist ideology, but also to the political mechanism of ideology itself, to the requirements of representation and identity/ification of representational democracy and/as the society of control) created genuine controversy, especially his reading of Duchamp as a precursor of artistic laziness and refusal of work, as well as his embrace of what some viewed as a problematic privilege to be lazy. Meanwhile CHIARA FUMAI's (Milan) 'exorcist' reading/performance of Carla Lonzi's Let's Spit on Hegel and I Say I offered a highly antagonistic rendering of feminist thought. The performance did not settle on widely agreed topics which can be easily accommodated by liberal-democratic 'feminists' (violence on women, wage inequality, political representation); instead Fumai insisted on an antagonistic division, pointing at the heart of the question of what it means to be a feminist today – and why. And this is to name just a couple of instances of the most antagonistic manners in which the symposium 'eventuated' (to stay true to the dictum of turning Deleuzian nouns into verbs), for it indeed 'eventuated' also in less antagonistic manners of bond-making and experience-sharing, even if this might have barely crossed the threshold of perceptibility.

Maurizio Lazzarato's reconceptualization of the notion of the event might thus be appropriate to express the micropolitical way of functioning of the symposium: "A political event does not in the first place change either the world, or society; it limits itself to operating a reversal of perspectives of subjectivity and opening a passage from one mode of existence to the other. The event-driven rupture constitutes but a sketch, a start whose realization is undetermined, improbable, and even 'impossible' following the principles of the established powers."

## (Try Again, Fail Better VI)

To conclude again:

Mon/ defending as one's own life

Tue/ moving as weeping King Kongs

Wed/ harbouring as part of a collective

Thu/ shooting for documents of imagination

Fri/ playing for some loving serenity

Sat/ remembering

Sun/ relinquishing everything as a discrete dancer"

(discoteca flaming star: "Agora")