

# Re-Territorialize!

## New Dimensions of Present Forms of Activism

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**Against the background of Foucault's analyses of the philosophical significance of the cynic, philosophers Christoph Brunner, Roberto Nigro and Gerald Raunig at the Zurich University of the Arts are investigating present-day forms of activism such as the Occupy movement. By means of three themes – creating new forms of living, inventing new modes of organization and re-appropriating time – they show the pioneering potential of such activism.**

It is 17 September 2011. A demonstration march through lower Manhattan chooses as the destination of its *dérive* a small park near the enormous construction site of the World Trade Center. Zuccotti Park is a formerly public, now privatized square belonging to the real estate corporation Brookfield Properties, named after its chairman John Zuccotti. On older maps of the financial district, however, this square has a different name: Liberty Plaza. The demonstrators have not chosen to occupy this territory because of a universalist invocation of freedom, but rather because they want to set a further component of the abstract machine in motion that has drawn lines of flight throughout the entire year, especially through the Mediterranean region. And the most intensive line of this abstract machine was probably the Egyptian part of the Arab Spring with its centre in Tahrir Square, the 'Place of Freedom'. By purposely occupying another place of freedom at the edge of Wall Street, the precarious occupiers seek not only to interrupt subservient de-territorialization, the flows through the global financial centre, but they also take up the practices, with which current activists de- and re-territorialize their times, their socialities, their lives in new ways.

At the end of the 1970s the work of some authors like Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari – to name only a few of a larger movement – engaged in a trajectory focusing more and more on the analysis of the transformations that trouble a society and require a new type of political organization. In a word, they were addressing questions concerning the transformation of the political. At issue was the search for new forms of existence, new lifestyles, different types of social and political organization as a result of the deep changes that shook the ground of our contemporary societies. All in all these issues involved a major question concerning the production of subjectivity, which also include struggles against subjection, against forms of subjectivity and submission.

The ground on which these reflections took shape was the crisis of the two extreme models of political organization, which dominated the history of the twentieth century: Leninism and anarchism. By the time these authors were writing, they were phantasms of defeat, voluntarism and disenchantment. Their collapse left open the question of the machines of struggles that the movement must make use of in order to be capable of winning.<sup>1</sup> It went hand in hand with the crisis of global projects of society, based on closed ideologies. It was no longer a matter of founding political projects in abstract syntheses, but in open processes of analysis, critique, verification and singular realization.

The focus on concepts and practices such as molecular revolution, transversal struggles, minoritarian becomings and microphysics of power, among others, is to be situated in the wake of these social, political and intellectual displacements. Foucault's elaboration of the notions of government and governmentality, which emerged in 1978, should be interpreted in connection with such issues.<sup>2</sup> In fact, on the one hand, his reference to the question of governmentality called for a different approach to the problem of the constitution of the state and to the analysis of mechanisms of power; on the other, it called into question the effectiveness of a kind of revolutionary utopianism and the efficacy of some political experiences.

Foucault showed that the state does not have a unity, individuality and rigorous functionality; that it was probably nothing more than 'a way of governing, a type of governmentality, a series of relations of power that gradually take shape on the basis of multiple and very diverse processes'.<sup>3</sup> However, by the same token, his critique aimed at the heart of the social and political transformations of struggles, since his analyses suggested that from a molecular point of view, each attempt at ideological unification of struggles was an absurd and indeed reactionary operation. To be sure: such a critique in no way prevented Foucault from looking for what the different forms of struggle may have in common.<sup>4</sup>

Foucault recognized the immediacy and transversal character of the new forms of struggles emerging in the last decades of the twentieth century. He draws our attention to the fact that these struggles are more and more centred on the status of the individual and are struggles against the 'government of individualization'. His attentiveness to the peculiarities of the new forms of struggles emphasizes the political and philosophical meaning of his last analyses, in which 'the critical ontology of ourselves . . . must be conceived as an attitude, an ethos, a philosophical life in which the critique of what we are is at one and the same time the historical analysis of the limits imposed on us and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them'.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, the reference to a sort of ontology of actuality is not the attempt to give back a *static* picture of what is going on in a society; it is rather the attempt to make a diagnosis of the forces crossing a society; the attempt to map out the lines of actualization emerging in a society. Foucault's analyses of new forms of struggles are all the more important since they sketch out lines of forces at the forefront of the contemporary political scene in the movement of movements crossing the worldwide spread of conflicts.

Today the struggle against the forms of subjection, against the submission of subjectivity is becoming more and more important, even though – as Foucault stresses: 'The struggles against forms of domination and exploitation have not disappeared. Quite the contrary.'<sup>6</sup> This focus on subjectivity and its forms of struggles raises questions on the status of individual and processes of individuation. By the same token, these issues need to be situated in the context of their genesis, that is in the development of liberal and neoliberal societies, because of the importance such societies attribute to the notion of the individual. Foucault devotes consistent analyses to the development of liberalism and neoliberalism as the general framework of biopolitics, and of the politics of the self.<sup>7</sup> His last effort to go through an analysis of the Christian hermeneutics of the subject and the Hellenistic culture of the self represents the attempt to figure out new political practices for the creation of a new subject and a new politics.<sup>8</sup>

In no way it can be suggested that Foucault's reading of liberalism was liberal. Such an interpretation would entail a profound misunderstanding of Foucault's argument, which, on the contrary, orbits the attempt of figuring out ways of going beyond actual forms of existence and of producing new spaces of freedom. The question that resonated in Foucault's last problematizations of an aesthetics of existence as production of new forms of subjectivity echoes with the contemporary Occupy movements around the globe.

In his last course, with the title 'The Courage of Truth',<sup>9</sup> Michel Foucault explored the

scandalous life of the Cynics, to which he applied the colourful term of 'philosophical activism'.<sup>10</sup> It was not his intention to attribute a privileged position to the activity of the philosophers, even less to reduce activism to a cognitive capacity. Rather, the Cynic philosopher served as a backdrop for a more general form of activism, of changing the world, of newly inventing worlds. For Foucault in later years, philosophical activism was an 'activism in the world and against the world'.

The Cynic philosopher is, first of all, the exemplary, anecdotal, almost mythical figure of Diogenes, with no permanent residence, at most a tub, living his life completely in public, scandalously all the way to masturbating in public, practicing *parrhesia*, the manner of 'saying everything', even if it is associated with great risk, which in Cynicism conjoins the art of existence with the discourse of truth.<sup>11</sup> Foucault's endeavour of a 'history of life as possible beauty' situates this old Greek Cynicism as the pivotal point of a whole genealogy of scandalous, disobedient, self-forming forms of living.<sup>12</sup> Foucault sees historical actualizations of Cynic activism in the minoritarian heretical movements of the Middle Ages, in the political revolutions of modernity and – somewhat surprisingly – in the theme of the artist's life in the nineteenth century. And here we would add to the Foucaultian genealogy the new activisms of the twenty-first century: the anti-globalization movement, social forums, anti-racist no border camps, queer-feminist activisms, transnational migrant strikes and Mayday movements of the precarious. And since last year there has been a tremendous intensification of these new activisms in the wider Mediterranean region: from the waves of university occupations to the revolutions of the Arab Spring, all the way to the movements of occupying central squares in Greece, Spain and Israel. Day-long sit-ins at the Kasbah Square in Tunis, revolutionary occupations of Tahrir Square in Cairo, Acampadas in the Puerta del Sol in Madrid, tents in the Rothschild Boulevard in Tel Aviv. Much could be said about what these new activisms have in common. They are all about appropriating real places, about a struggle against precarization, against extreme competition and against the drivenness of contemporary production, largely dispensing with representation and weaving a transnational concatenation of social movements. There are, however, three specific vectors on which these activisms enter new territory: in their search for new forms of living, in their organizational forms of radical inclusion and in their insistence on re-appropriating time.

## 1. Inventing New Forms of Living

When Foucault brings art into play, following the revolutions in his genealogy of the Cynics, it is not classical aesthetics or an existentialist theory of art that concerns him, but rather art that is 'capable of giving a form to existence which breaks with every other form', a form that forms itself, newly invents itself, an 'aesthetics of existence'.<sup>13</sup> Aesthetics as ethics, as the invention of new modes of subjectivation and of new forms of living (together), existence as aesthetic object, life as a beautiful work. This ethico-aesthetic aspect of forming life is by no means to be understood as an individualistic stylization of life: even though dandyism and existentialism certainly also belong to the genealogy of the aesthetics of existence, the term does not refer to an aesthetization of the artist's existence. Instead, Foucault's examples go in the direction of relationship, of exchange, and not in the direction of the pure and autonomous implementation of a self-relation. Forming life as living together takes place at the microphysical and the macrophysical level, in the forming of the individual body, in the forming of social relations. In his lecture, Foucault explicitly says about this: 'By basing the analysis of Cynicism on this theme of individualism, however, we are in danger of missing what from my point of view is one [of its] fundamental dimensions, that is to say, the problem, which is at the core of Cynicism, of establishing a relationship between forms of existence and manifestation of the truth.'<sup>14</sup> Philosophical activism is not about a model of philosophical or artistic life beyond relations, at the edge of the world. Cynics live in the midst of the world, against the world, with the horizon of an other world; in Foucault's words, they have 'laid down this otherness of an *other* life, not simply as the choice of a different, happy, and

sovereign life, but as the practice of an activism on the horizon of which is an *other* world'.  
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This understanding of an other life enabling an other world applies all the more to the collective Cynicism, or rather: the molecular Cynicism of the new activism today. In this kind of molecular Cynicism, it is not the individual philosopher, not the dandy-esque artist, not the existentialist activist that is at the centre, but rather the exchange relations of singularities testing disobedient, non-subservient, industrious forms of living. Such an activism based on relation does not succumb to a logic of connecting or accumulating individual points to make a whole. On the contrary, molecular Cynicism is based on its primary relational mode of existence. Relation defines a qualitative *other world* where experimentations of what life might become or what a body can do are more relevant than a pre-figured capturing of situations through moral categories of good/bad, beautiful/not beautiful – hence the remarkable refusal of 'demands' in current Occupy movements around the globe.

If today's revolutions are not only taken as molar, as – in a narrow sense – political projects, but rather also as molecular revolutions, then the aesthetics of existence takes its place alongside the political project as a 'continual and constantly renewed work of giving form [to life]', to living together.<sup>16</sup>

A contemporary concept of molecular revolution requires the ethico-aesthetic level of transforming forms of living into a beautiful and good life, as well as the becoming of forms of living together across continents: micro-machines, which in their singular situativity form disobedient modes of existence and subjectivation, develop arts of existence and life techniques, as well as translocally dispersed, global abstract machines. What accounts as beautiful in these practices is not a universal quality put into form, but a successful process of self-affirmative subjectivity that interlaces different modes of existence according to their very situated ecology. An aesthetic of existence as self-affirming defines the constitution of another world within and among existing worlds, not a subtraction or subsumption but a multiplication. Self-affirmative subjectivity moves beyond the individual through collective modes of expression – expression not as a unique form(ation) but a relational multiplicity 'self-enjoying' its existence.<sup>17</sup> Such a process puts its operation into direct resonance with the capacity of heterogeneous elements to become collectively in and with their immediate social, mental and environmental ecology. An aesthetic of existence manifests nodes of truth and reality through the collective process of expression.

The molecular revolution also comprises the 'ethical revolution' that is called for at the end of the manifesto of the Spanish occupiers of M-15. The multitude that occupied the many main squares of Spain beginning on 15 May for several weeks is not particularly interested in gaining symbolic space and media attention. The occupiers take over the occupied squares, they appropriate them and make them their own, even though they know they are only there for a certain time. This time, however, is decisive, an extraordinarily important time of their lives, the time of assemblies and the social time of living together, of residing and sleeping in the occupied squares. It is a time of finding and experimenting with heterogeneous and polyvocal truths/realities and new modes of collective expression. Their new ethico-aesthetic paradigm seeks revolution in the forming of their own lives and of living together. The call for an ethical revolution is thus not at all a kind of first demand for different, better politicians, nor simply the obvious demand that corrupt politics should resign as a whole. Instead, it is a demand to themselves, a call for fundamental transformations, for the fabrication of non-subservient machinic modes of living, for disobedient industries, for non-conforming forms of living together. Their ethico-aesthetic mode of existence becomes a 'laboratory of thought and experimenting for future forms of subjectivation'.<sup>18</sup> The ethics of such new forms of life and their experimental exploration yield an ethics of the event rather than a human ethics. As Félix Guattari points out, an aesthetics of existence 'has ethico-political implications because to speak of creation is to

speak of the responsibility of the creative instance with regard to the thing created'.<sup>19</sup> Ethics is not a human affair but concerns the event of the creative instance with regard to the thing created. Machinic modes of living address mental, social and environmental ecologies as co-emerging. Experimental explorations for non-conforming forms of living therefore transform political and social ecologies through ethico-aesthetic practices across modes of existence without predetermining their actualization.

## 2. Inventing New Modes of Organization

When today's activism turns against a one-sidedly molar procedure, this does not mean that they neglect aspects of organization and re-territorialization. Yet the streaking of time and space finds its own molecular procedures. Molecular modes of organization are not organic, but rather orgic-industrious, not centred on representation, but non-representationist, not hierarchically differentiating, but radically inclusive. Molecularity does not focus on taking over state power, but it takes effect in the pores of everyday life, in the molecules of forms of living, across different materials of enunciation and technical modalities. Molar organization arises as striating re-territorialization, it focuses struggles on a main issue, a main contradiction, a master. In a molecular world of dispersion and multiplicity, a different form of re-territorialization is needed, inclusive and transversal, beyond individual or collective privileges. Transversality means that the movements of re-territorialization and de-territorialization do not pursue particular goals, they do not establish and secure privileges. Instead they smooth and streak territories by crossing through them. The special rights of every single singularity are diametrically opposed to all individual or collective privileges. Yet these special rights only exist where every singularity can fully live its own specialness, try out its own form of concatenation, streak its own time. There is no privileged position for the intellectuals, for art or activism. Molecular struggles are struggles that emerge incidentally and spread further through what is incidental to the incidentals. No master heads the molecular organization.

The Cynic philosopher is an anti-king. Philosophical activism is not practiced in the form of sects, communities, in the form of small numbers. Instead, there is no community at all in Cynicism; the Cynic form of philosophical activism is, according to Foucault, 'in the open, as it were, that is to say, an activism addressed to absolutely everyone'.<sup>20</sup> This kind of openness evolves in the practice of the new molecular activism. In the language of the activists it places radical inclusion at the centre of assemblies, discussions and actions. An 'activism addressed to absolutely everyone', and yet nevertheless not operating universalistically, but transversally, like the tent camp in the Rothschild Boulevard in Tel Aviv, for example, following which the largest demonstration for social justice in the history of Israel took place in early September 2011. Radical inclusion means here, most of all, establishing an open milieu, in which the right to a place to live is not only demanded for everyone, but also acted out straight away in protest. The tent assemblages, the assemblies, the discussions are already living examples of the radical inclusion and transversality of the movement.

In the case of #occupy wallstreet, the tendency to radical inclusion is evident primarily in the invention and development of general assemblies. These are not so much 'general assemblies' in the conventional sense, but rather transversal assemblages of singularities, which renew the grassroots-democratic experiences of the anti-globalization and social forums movement, further developing them into a form of polyvocality – for instance in the invention, almost by chance and out of necessity, of a new procedure of 'amplification': because the police forbid them to use microphones, megaphones or other technical means, they began to repeat every single sentence from the speakers in chorus. The functionality of this repetition consists, first of all, in making the speech intelligible for hundreds of people in an open air setting. Yet the chorus as amplification here is neither a purely neutral medium of conveyance nor a euphoric affirmation of the speakers. It can happen that the chorus, whose voice is speaking the same thing, proves to be radically

polyvocal and differentiated: one voice supports the speaker with hand signs, the next declares dissent with other hand signs, and the third has turned away from the speaker to better ensure the amplifying function for the others listening.

Another striking example of the self-affirmative and re-singularizing collective and inclusive practices of contemporary protest are the transversal modes of expression across different forms and media. Both form and media are detached from their representational function and turn into open platforms for expression. While techniques of the self through bodily amplification generate a-signifying means of enunciation a similar process occurs in the use of digital technologies. The singular-collective form of protest across the globe has given birth to new ways of living collectively through live video-streaming, writing and conceptualizing in de-territorialized online-zones and the actual occupation of physical space with its own modalities of living and producing together. The mass of digital technologies opposing the wall of policemen during marches in downtown Manhattan or the live capture of police violence against a sit-in at UC Davis are just one node of collectively constituting a differentiation of truths. Not one truth dominating the others, but a heterogeneous and singular multitude of enunciations. The technologies or technical assemblages insert themselves into the social and environmental ecologies as part of the new movements. The 'incorporeal materialism' of the digital inserts a layer of immediacy and at the same time the multiplication of timelines and spaces to the singular and local struggles and concerns at stake.<sup>21</sup> The processual multiplicities of these machines for enunciation operate aesthetically as much as ethically. In their aesthetics they self-enjoy their polyvocality in the videos produced on the ground of #occupy wallstreet and elsewhere, not representing particular groups but putting the immediacy of collective engagement into resonance with the expressive capacities of video itself. In other occasions through live streams the webcam and the activist's moving body, the architectural outline and the image processing develop into what Guattari calls 'existential operators'.<sup>22</sup> Such existential operators are forms of live, minority becomings, beyond the signifier and the sign moving towards a machinic productivity of self-affirming practices. This fundamental shift in the appropriation of time and space and their simultaneous collective sharing across different singularities calls forth a 'post-media' practice as part of the new and experimental aesthetics of existence.

### 3. Industrious Re-Appropriation of Time

Just as the Cynic philosopher seeks scandal in the offensive transparency of his life, the new activisms speak clearly by taking the empty promise of 'public space' at its word. This is the exercise, as widely visible as possible, of deviant modes of subjectivation, not or not only in the nakedness, placelessness and promiscuity of the Cynics, but most of all in playing with the paradox of the public: public space does not exist, and most of all not in the smooth spaces of urban centres, whether they are the touristic non-places of the Puerta del Sol or the Rothschild Boulevard, whether it is the privatized sphere of Zuccotti Park or the heavy traffic of Tahrir Square. And yet, or specifically because of this, the new activisms occupy the central squares, turn them into common-places, as a paradoxical provocation of normativity and normalization. And beyond this spatial re-territorialization, it is primarily the re-appropriation of time that marks the protestors' modes of action. In the midst of the nervous poly-rhythms of precarious life, in the midst of this mixture of drivenness and melancholy, they invent a surplus, in the midst of subservience they create a desire to not be taken into service in that way. In the midst of hurried timelessness, the precarious strikers insist on different time-relations, they streak the time in the patience of assemblies, in spreading out living, residing, sleeping in the squares, feeling their way to the first rudimentary possibilities of a new form of resistance, the molecular strike.

The occupiers take the space and time seriously that they set up, striate, streak, taking time for long, patient discussions and taking time to stay in this place, developing a new

everyday life, even if only for a short time. In an otherwise boundless everyday life, the molecular strike spreads out these small new durations of everyday life. Its institution, however, first requires an eventual break with subservient de-territorialization in machinic capitalism. The molecular strike is both: duration and break. It is not leaving, not dropping out of this world, no time-out. The molecular strike is the breach in the time regime of subservient de-territorialization that we drive in, in order to try out new ways of living, new forms of organization, new time relations. No longer a struggle merely to reduce working time, but rather for an entirely new streaking of time as a whole. In machinic capitalism, it is a matter of the whole, the totality of time, its entire appropriation. The molecular strike struggles for its re-appropriation, its streaking, piece by piece. The new Wobblies will not be Industrial Workers of the World, but rather Industrious Workers of the world, a gigantic industry carrying everything along with it, not submitting to subservient de-territorialization, at the same time a re-territorialization, an industrious refrain, a dangerous class that will no longer let its time be stolen.

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## Footnotes

1. See Félix Guattari and Toni Negri, *Communists Like Us* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1990), 103.
2. Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France 1977-78* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).
3. Ibid., 248.
4. Michel Foucault, 'The Subject and the Power', in: J. Faubion (ed.), *Power* (New York: The New Press, 1997), 326-348.
5. Michel Foucault, 'What is Enlightenment?', in: P. Rabinow (ed.), *Ethics* (New York: The New Press, 1997), 319.
6. Foucault, 'The Subject and the Power', op. cit. (note 4), 331-332.
7. Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France 1978-79* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 22.
8. In this regard, see Maurizio Lazzarato's critical remarks on subjectivation and micropolitics in I. Lorey, R. Nigro and G. Raunig (eds.), *Inventionen* (Zurich/Berlin: Diaphanes, 2011), 161-173.
9. Michel Foucault, *The Courage of Truth*, trans. Graham Burchell (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).
10. The original French term 'militantisme' is translated in the English version of the course as 'militancy'. For another recent development of 'activist philosophy' see Brian Massumi, *Semblance and Event: Activist Philosophy and the Occurrent Arts* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011).
11. 'You recall that, etymologically, *parrhêsia* is the activity that consists in saying everything: *par rhêmia*. *Parrhêsiazesthai* is "telling all"'. Foucault, *The Courage of Truth*, op. cit. (note 9), 9.
12. Ibid., 162.
13. Ibid., 187.
14. Ibid., 180.
15. Ibid., 287.
16. Ibid., 162.
17. The notion of self-enjoyment is taken from Alfred North Whitehead. Whitehead describes self-enjoyment as the very process that enables an experience to come into itself, affirming its existence as what it is – relationally emergent and singular. On an activist philosophical scheme this activity of self-enjoyment is similar to Foucault's remarks on *parrhêsia* as the practice of manifesting truth or a world within and among other truths and worlds. On the concept of self-enjoyment, see Alfred N. Whitehead, *Modes of Thought* (New York: Free Press, 1968), 151. For an activist philosophical development of self-enjoyment see Massumi, *Semblance and Event*, op. cit. (note 10), 2-3.
18. Félix Guattari, 'Entering the Post-Media Era', in: Sylvère Lotringer (ed.), *Soft Subversions* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2009), 301.
19. Félix Guattari, *Chaosmosis: An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm* (Bloomington/Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995), 107.
20. Foucault, *The Courage of Truth*, op. cit. (note 9), 284.
21. Félix Guattari, *The Guattari Reader*, ed. by Gary Genosko (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), 176.
22. Félix Guattari, 'Postmodern Deadlock and Post-Media Transition', in: *Soft Subversions*, op. cit. (note 18), 300.

## Tags

Activism, Autonomy, Biopolitics, Capitalism, Philosophy

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