
... And ... and ... and ... The Transversal Politics of Performative Encounters

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Abstract

This paper examines Guattari's notion of transversality through a creative and ambiguous form of political intervention, the performative encounter. Drawing from Guattari's work on subject groups, in combination with Deleuze's conjunctive '*and*', via contemporary theorisations of creative activism and affect, it maps out a movement that destabilises categorical dualisms between activists and non-activists, artists and non-artists. It proposes that transversals such as those enacted by the performative encounter open spaces for the emergence of new subjectivities, relations and worlds. In doing so it critically extends Guattari's conceptualisations of political organisation, group subjectivation and aesthetics into radical political terrains that are antagonistic of the nation-state and capital at the same time as being affirmative of possible present and future conditions.

Keywords: transversality, performative encounter, aesthetics, activism, affect

We can no longer separate the prospect of revolutionary challenge from a collective assumption of responsibility for daily life and a full acceptance of desire at every level of society.

(Guattari 1984: 272)

A certain form of 'politics for politicians' seems destined to be eclipsed by a new type of social practice better suited both to issues of a very local nature and to the global problems of our era.

(Guattari 1995: 121)

Questions of politics infused the work and life of Félix Guattari. They were very particular articulations of politics, however. For Guattari, the political was always bound to processes and forces of subjectivation, organisation and desire (Guattari and Rolnik 2008); a position that was often neglected in the logistical and psycho-corporeal operations of the institutions and groups he was embedded within and witness to. In his early work on the clinic Guattari began to develop a concept of transversality related to subject groups that was to later inform his theoretical and practical experiments in revolutionary organising. Critical of crystallisations of organisational power and fixed role hierarchies, he proposed that a transversal movement, which would be achieved 'when there is a maximum communication among different levels and, above all, in different meanings' (1984: 18), could fracture tendencies toward reification. In this movement, he argued, space is opened for the self-determined engendering of collective and singular subjects. This is why transversality was seen to be the 'ideal limit of all activity' (Bosteels 2001: 156).

Guattari's vectoral approach challenged the strictures of the totalising 'militant' circles and the psychotherapeutic settings in which he moved. He found one prototype for the subject group in the early radical practices of the Situationist *enragés*. It is from within such practices that a radical political potential for the transversal unfolds.

This paper will examine the transversal through one such practice, what I refer to as a performative encounter:¹ a collective, creative articulation that is inherently political in its focus (in this configuration, having a militant engagement and critical relationship to the nation-state, law and bureaucratic repressive apparatuses); that uses tactics of humour and play, hoaxing and faking; that is ambiguous in identity (taking place in realms or contexts disassociated from orthodox aesthetic and political activity); that is dedicated to activating new relations between people, and is affirmative of autonomous and convivial ways of living and being.² It focuses specifically on some of the ways in which the mobile nature of the encounter makes visible the compositions of subjects through the formation of subject groups, transversal identities and categories, and affective worlds. I begin by introducing two performative encounters of collective appropriation (or

collective stealing, occupying and re-claiming) launched by the German Umsonst (for free) campaigns. I then turn to Guattari's early readings of transversality and subject groups to illustrate how the organisation of the encounter gives rise to new modes of relating, followed by Deleuze and Guattari's conceptualisation of the conjunctive *and* to argue for the encounter as a mechanism for the production of transversal subjectivities. Because the encounter is understood as a world-making *dispositif*, the affective political spaces and relations it constitutes must be included; by bringing a discourse of affect into an exploration of the performative encounter, the spatial and temporal geographies of the encounter's mobilisation can also be considered.

I. A Performative Encounter of Collective Appropriation

A performative encounter is a multidimensional event that creates subjects.
(Rosello 2005: 2)

The positing of the new cannot be anything else but the positing of different modes of exercising and articulating social powers . . . we need to extend the realm of commons in more and more spheres of our social doing, at any scale of social action, to . . . run our lives as free social individuals.
(De Angelis 2007: 12)

We don't want to make reforms and we don't want to beg, all we want to do is to say: not like this! Now we will take what we want: fun, culture and life.
(Berlin Umsonst in Kanngieser forthcoming)

In 2003 the network Berlin Umsonst (Berlin for Free) launched Nulltarif in protest against public transportation fare increases, which saw counteraction through the mass distribution of forged train and bus tickets. In 2005 the more sustained campaign of Pinker Punkt was instigated. Responding to repeated fare increases and the restructuring of the student discount card, Pinker Punkt encouraged commuters to travel for free collectively. The name 'pinker punkt' was strategically conceived as a way to dislocate and queer the racist and criminal connotations from practices of 'schwarzfahren'/riding black or fare evading. On designated days commuters on various Berlin lines were met at the platform by people carrying large pink circular signs. These marked aggregation points for collective travel. Each group had participants that were informed of their legal rights and equipped to deal with state repression. Commuters on the trains were told what was happening and why, and were invited to take part. Over its

duration, each collective journey attracted anywhere between three to fifty participants.³

In 2004, the MoMA came to Berlin. Dismayed by the exorbitant entry costs and long queues, avoidable only for VIPs, Berlin Umsonst launched the MoMA Umsonst action. The first part of the campaign involved Umsonst participants donning suits, distributing fake entry tickets and successfully entering the exhibit for free. Following this, over two thousand posters were printed closely resembling the official MoMA advertising, stating in German, Turkish and English that on 17 April the MoMA would be open to all. The campaign received citywide media coverage, and on the day between four to five hundred people were in attendance. As the 'activists' were visually ambiguous, dressed in suits and smart clothing, a media furore ensued; reporters were uncertain whom to target for interviews and commentary. This destabilisation of identity also displaced the force of state apparatuses, for it was unclear whom to charge for instigating the event. As one of the constituents explained, 'in Berlin at these large rallies, somehow the police are always managing to beat people up ... fun makes it more difficult for them ... You dance around and confuse the police, who can never be quite sure: is this a political action or a cultural action? It's good to break down these clear divisions' (Eshelman 2005).

'Alles für alle, und zwar umsonst/everything for everyone, and for free': this was the influential slogan that accompanied the Umsonst campaigns, which arose from the European radical left in 2003 as an atypical form of 'activism' employing creative gestures of resistance, participation and liberation through direct action. Enacting encounters of collective appropriation inspired by a long tradition of auto-reduction and refusal (Virno 1996; Tronti 1980; Negri 1984; Cleaver 1992), Umsonst was a critical response to the precariousness of everyday life and labour, one aspect of which was manifest through the increased costs and privatisation of public services, spaces and cultural resources.⁴ Central to the campaigns was the capacity to tap into collective and common points of dissatisfaction. This was seen in their rhizomatic and populist autogenetic character, and resulted in the promulgation of similar campaigns across several German cities over the succeeding years. The intra-national circulation of the Umsonst agenda helped to open discussions on social protest and appropriative political action within radical left movements, to both greater and lesser acclaim.⁵

Unlike many of the current German alternative movements, the Umsonst campaigns followed a socially directed method intent on discovering imbrications between public resentment against state-imposed

regulations and micro-political, often individual, covert acts of appropriation based on anti-capitalist sentiment such as illegally entering pools and public buildings, fare evasion, sneaking into cinemas, petty theft and so forth. According to the initiators, these individual tactics were politicised through a visible, collective presence in an attempt to establish everyday practices of resistance (Kanngieser 2007). This shift from what Augusto Illuminati referred to as ‘individual defection’ to ‘collective exodus’ (1996: 181) pointed to the subversive aspect of the activity, both for its strategic reference to historical social protest, and for its composition of affective spaces of common struggle come together through circuits of collective desire.

In these struggles ‘for the re-appropriation of social wealth produced by the working class but unpaid by capital’ (Ramirez 1975), such encounters were designed to agitate flows and crystallisations of power and strategically intervene in and redirect them. An emphatic commitment to public engagement meant that the methods and concerns of the Umsonst encounters were framed in a language far more exoteric than those usually associated with ‘leftist’ politics. This was apparent in campaigns around public transport such as *Pinker Punkt* (2005) and *Nulltarif* (2003) outlined above, and around cultural resources such as *MoMA Umsonst* (2004), amongst others.⁶ The rationale for this was simple, as a member of Hamburg Umsonst explained: ‘we address whoever is there and sees what we do, and we invite people to re-think and to join us’ (Kanngieser forthcoming). For Umsonst, the uncertainty of participants in the encounter signalled the necessity for a flexible political discourse, which was partially apprehended through the rejection of an encompassing political ideology in favour of what was described by a Berlin Umsonst campaigner as an ‘orientation-less left’. This was further ameliorated through the incorporation of organisational techniques, such as relatively open and publicised meetings and facilitation, which when enacted in coordination with creative, pleasurable tactics including hoaxing, drag and occupation, enabled an inventive, a-centric platform for collective enunciation.

This reasonably mobile and unfixed organisation and a connection to public and popular sites of dissent through a playful form of encounter indicate some of the ways in which Umsonst instigated movements across differential social groupings and structures, art and politics, urban spaces, and political nodes and institutions (Kanngieser 2011). By creating these encounters what was set into motion were ‘forms of resistance to subjectification which, in producing novel alliances and connections, are also creative of new possibilities of life, new

modes of existence and types of practice' (Armstrong 2002: 49). Following Guattari and Deleuze we can look to these in terms not of 'recommending the liberation of "life" from all forms of molarity and subjectification' but as a means of theorising 'a "becoming-revolutionary" pursued in a piecemeal fashion at the level of the local or sub-political' (Armstrong 2002: 49). To look at this process of 'becoming-revolutionary' it is useful to begin with transversality in terms of the subject group, through which Guattari first sought to express this movement, and its implications for thinking about subjectivation.

II. Transversality and Subject Groups

Transversality belongs to the processual subject's engendering of an existential territory and self-transportation beyond it. The key concepts involved are: *mobility* (traversing domains, levels, dimensions, the ability to carry and be carried beyond); *creativity* (productivity, adventurousness, aspiration, laying down lines of flight); *self-engendering* (autoproduction, self-positing subjectivity), territories from which one can really take off into new universes of reference.

(Genosko 2002: 55)

The production of 'new universes of reference': this is a phrase that both Guattari (1989) and Gary Genosko (2002) deploy when they write about transversality and its effects on the individual and collective subject, or as Genosko puts it, the 'processual subject's engendering of an existential territory and self-transportation beyond it' (2002: 55). For Guattari, transversality pertains to the production of radical collective subjectivities, in one sense by enabling what he described in his early text *Molecular Revolution: Psychiatry and Politics* (1984) as subject groups. Through his appraisals of subjectivation, Guattari sought to depart from both Freudian and Marxist traditions. These traditions reduced 'sociopolitical relationships to the personal unconscious' in the former case and interpreted 'cultural productions as being overcoded by the material environment' in the latter by arguing for causal, linear and unilateral structuralised definitions of society and subjectivity (Bosteels 2001: 151). In contrast, Guattari was keen to map complex operations of power informed by and informative of the ways in which subjectivities, social codification, ecologies and capitalist regimes mutually produce one another. What the concept of transversality provided for Guattari was a way to 'think the interactions between ecosystems, the mecanosphere, and social and individual universes of reference' (1989: 135).

For Guattari transversality became a central institutional and conceptual tool, employed clinically for 'heightening and maximising an institution's therapeutic co-efficient', existing in its 'bureaucracy and officialdom, structures, roles and hierarchies' (Genosko 2002: 55). Guattari conceived of transversality operating in a clinical setting as

a measure (a so-called coefficient) of how much communication exists between different levels, in different directions, of an organization. The goal is to increase the coefficients of transversality, that is, to reduce blindness and bureaucratic-mindedness, in favour of openness, overcoming the impasses of both vertical and horizontal organizations, by means of creative organizational innovations. (Genosko 2002: 200)

A means by which to induce this co-efficient or measure is through the modifications of relations, forces and environments between groups (and their effects) within and across institutions. Within these institutions Guattari was intent on discovering the sites of latent power, often not coincidental with the structural distribution of roles, being held in the relationships between subjects.

Through his work at La Borde clinic Guattari developed a thesis of group formation within institutional environments in which he (non-absolutely and non-judgmentally) distinguished two types of group: the subjugated group and the subject group. The subjugated/dependent group are those constantly subsumed to Power in some form (which is correlative of their desire for authoritarianism), and are usually linked to molar activity, being totalising and, as Mark Seem puts it, 'global in ideology' (1974: 38). The principal characteristic for Guattari is the group's heteronomy, seen in their incapacity for statement, their determination from outside and the subsequent withdrawal into protective group phantasy and insularity (1984: 14). This is the problem that confronts the ultra-leftist militant, who according to Genosko, gets swept into the phantasms typical of the subjugated group and tends to get 'hung up on the significations produced by the leadership rather than producing their own signifiers and speaking in the name of the institutions they create adequate to the course of their actions' (2002: 96).

Group subjects/subject groups are conditionally opposed to subjugated groups. These groups are molecular by nature, localised, and generative of processes of becoming-action rather than of encompassing structures. Unlike the external determination dictating the subjugated group, the subject group 'endeavours to control its own behaviour

and elucidate its object, and in this case can produce its own tools of elucidation' (Guattari 1984: 14). Put another way, it upholds an active position in terms of its own project. This suggests that for those constitutive of the subject group, the means for articulation and signification exist in interdependence and difference, synchronously aggregated through the collective process. 'The subject group', Genosko proposes, 'is a kind of group in fusion . . . come together in 'the flash of common praxis,' in mutual reciprocity rather than mutual Otherness' (2002: 86).

Through Genosko's description of the collective affirmatively arising out of 'the flash of common praxis' we begin to sense the potential that Guattari envisaged in this new organisational structure: a rhizomatic, non-representative, non-programmatic assemblage of singularities. The campaigns of Umsonst established the terrain for a potential subject group in the performative encounter through their dedication to the composition of a collaborative and transitory collective. For Guattari, 'a subject group is not embodied in a delegated individual who can claim to speak on its behalf: it is primarily an intention to act, based on a provisional totalization and producing something true in the development of its action' (1984: 33). From their genesis the campaigns of Umsonst disinherited the models of organisation usually associated with so-called militant practices. Conceptualised as a series of *campaigns* rather than a group, there was no real possibility for permanent unification. Rather the collective converged around individual encounters addressing the privatisation of cultural and public resources and spaces, state discourses around economic rationalism and later, the precarisation of life and labour.

Bringing to the fore the economic and class delineations leveraging the segregation of necessity from luxury, each encounter was a direct retaliation against the disenfranchisement vested by the neo-liberal rhetoric of scarcity rampant in Germany. At the same time the encounter acted to live out more desirable conditions—free transport and free cultural events, for instance. These resources and services were employed by variegated demographics, and hence had broadly felt effects, meaning that these were not isolated nodes but, rather, multiple constellations for contestation and re-imagination. Because what was at stake was the encouragement of a 'culture of everyday resistance'—the self-valorisation of constituents through the subversion of capitalist conditions—it is clear why an exclusive or ideologically demarcated group was not considered strategically appropriate. Recalling Guattari's subject group, Umsonst was 'primarily an intention to act' (Guattari

1984: 33), without the entropic, socio-systematic category of the individual entitled to comprise the action.

The flexibility within the organisation of the Umsonst campaigns does not imply what might be understood as a fixed horizontality, in the same way that management and facilitation cannot be reified into a vertical hierarchy. Each campaign required significant planning phases conducted by small committees, and there were oftentimes around a dozen 'initiators' to each encounter. There is nonetheless a marked difference between how these encounters were calibrated and the orthodox 'militant' subjugated groupings identified by Genosko. The campaigns of Umsonst tried to maintain as malleable as possible the range of collaboration, with a disposition of transparency and accessibility. The saturation of the encounters with spectacular and novel elements, such as slogans, costumes, stickers and props, generated diffuse interest leading the proliferation of the moniker and modus throughout other collectives and networks. Although the publicity of the planning stages was tempered by the illegality of the interventions, which prohibited the relay of certain decisions, there was wide solicitation for the materialisation of many of the encounters. At the same time, such emphasis could not eliminate constraints on the constitutive body, both in terms of those differently-abled and those made precarious by state documentation risking deportation or repression, and the limitations arising from mass-media conservatism.

To facilitate collaboration and participation to the most viable extent, the development of the encounters stressed integrative methods including open workshops, research groups and discussions to build solidarity between groups such as minimum wage earners and underemployed workers, those on age and disability pension, students, artists, interns and the like, that the accelerating processes of privatisation specifically made precarious. While these did not always proceed or conclude as initially envisioned in terms of sustained community relations, recurrent endeavours were persevered with.⁷ Networks of autonomous groups targeting the specific areas that the individual campaigns responded to – public transport, education, cultural resources, casualised labour, housing – were also invited to co-convene workshops; as one campaigner recounted, 'we always approached other groups that were working on these specific conflicts, we ran workshops with them and tried to develop this appropriation perspective together' (Kanngieser forthcoming).

These collaborative workshops arose as an experiment to move beyond prescriptive, abstracted or ideologically based narratives, and intended to forge connections between activists and non-activists, as

well as those engaged in different lines of struggle. Emphasis was placed on inviting people to examine the effects of structural reform on their everyday lives, and co-creating spaces for collective, self-articulated protest. It was proposed that common direct action could make this dissent visible, and it was hoped that such political visibility would inspire pluralistic flights of organisation beyond the borders of recognised activist spheres.

From even this brief introduction to the organisation of Umsonst, the transversal dimension of the encounter, and its tendency toward subject groupings, begins to emerge. By identifying common sites of unrest, and by committing to an unfixed organisational format, the encounter of Umsonst animated collaborations that connected minor compositions into new formations.⁸ Further vital to this assemblage is the way in which the participants were considered to be the very *conditions* through which the encounter is constituted as such.⁹ This signals a shift away from hierarchical and closed conceptions distinguishing those that ‘would’ (activists/artists/specialists in social and political change) from those that ‘wouldn’t’ (non-activists/non-artists/non-specialists), fundamentally reconfiguring the contours of the activity along with its processes of subjectivation.

In this way transversality has immediate consequences for how such practices transform the textures of conventional organisation; transversality becomes a tool for ‘creatively autoproducing themselves as they adapt, cross, communicate and travel, in short as they transverse different levels, segments and roles’ (Genosko 2002: 55). This is a significant juncture, and one that requires further teasing out. In Guattari’s later conceptions of transversality, he emphasises its congruent accents, which coupled with the Deleuzian conjunctive *and* allows for a reading of how productions of subjectivity take place in the performative encounter, as we shall shortly see.

III. Political Artistic Transversals and their Radical Organisation

New social practices of liberation will not establish hierarchical relations between themselves; their development will answer to a principle of transversality that will enable them to be established by traversing, as a rhizome, heterogeneous social groups and interests.

(Guattari and Negri 2010: 123)

Through crossing and reconfiguring ‘different levels, segments and roles’, theories of the subject group and transversality may link to

radical political organisation. But it is not only in the production of experimental politics that transversality acts as a mutational force: it is also present in the domain of aesthetics. It is interesting to think about aesthetics here both for the inherently creative nature of the encounter, and the new subjectivities, relations and worlds it instigates. In *Chaosmosis* (1995), Guattari elaborated the movement of transversality with respect to artistic creation. For Guattari, ideal aesthetic praxes and activities are not limited to professional artists and are made up of transversal lines that affectively engender ‘unprecedented, unforeseen and unthinkable qualities of being’ (1995: 106). The lines that activate these qualities of being are thus notable in what Guattari calls a new aesthetic paradigm, as well as in political organisations without coagulated hierarchies.

The specific manner in which Guattari sets up these thematic vectors of aesthetics and politics, and the processes of subjectivation implicit to them, has been usefully taken up by Gerald Raunig. Throughout his writings Raunig employs several of Guattari and Deleuze’s conceptual apparatuses to explore European historical and contemporary politico-aesthetic events, institutions and methods of organisation. In these explorations he configures aesthetics and politics via an assessment of the exchange between ‘art machines’ and ‘revolutionary machines’. He contends that when art and revolution come into contact, temporary overlaps between the two are catalysed. These overlaps do not entail incorporation, but rather indicate ‘a concrete exchange relationship for a limited time’ (2007: 18), which is transversal insofar as it transforms the terrains of both aesthetic and political regimes, institutions and categories. The affective and transformative labour of the transversal occurs through the accumulative linkage of singularities and collectives in experimental new relations, modalities and co-operations without the goal of permanent synthesis (Raunig 2002: 4). Echoing Guattari’s thesis, Raunig’s notion of transversality implements radical gestures that fundamentally challenge the limits of these categories and institutions.

If we acknowledge this analytical proposition, rather than concentrate on art forms that are thematically concerned with political struggle but are un-reflexive in their processes of production and dissemination, we can turn to aesthetics that are organised from the perspective of liberatory politics.¹⁰ This is particularly pertinent given that encounters are as reliant on their creative and relational elements for their operation as they are on their political elements. What is most significant is how these processes function with respect to the reconfiguration of organisation, and how this describes a movement between categories and

subjectivities. For Guattari, the transformative nature of the transversal brings about a parallax shift in discussions on aesthetic constitution and subjectivation, because ‘the emphasis is no longer placed on Being... it is placed on the manner of being, the machination producing the existent, the generative praxes of heterogeneity and complexity’ (1995: 109). That is to say, the transversal renders visible the vectoral nature of subjectivation, showing that there is no fundamental subject form but rather movements and compositions. When considered in terms of politico-aesthetic organisation, a transversal exchange can be found both in the ambivalent and critical relationship to the institutions being moved through, and in the structure of the creative political collective itself.

The performative encounter, as a politico-aesthetic phenomenon, is demonstrative of such an exchange. Encounters such as *Pinker Punkt* and *MoMA Umsonst* move across and between the boundaries enforced by disciplinary regimes (art, politics) of recognition and naming, situating these interventions in a process of constant transformation and re-territorialisation of artistic and political activisms. The performative encounters of *Umsonst* negotiate impasses around hierarchical or discrete categories of identification by transversing art, life and collective identities – becoming both activist *and* non-activist, artist and non-artist, in addition to innumerable and mutable other possible identities and relations.

Through this exchange the encounter furthermore unequivocally calls into question the dynamic between power and resistance. Being spatio-temporally transitory, indeterminate in its classificatory status and peripheral in its actualisation, the encounter generally circumvents channels of documentation and solidification through its ambiguity. As such the encounter challenges the hierarchising logic of both the capitalistic market and the institutionalisation of creative and political insurrection. What transversality and ambiguity help to generate in the encounter is a perpetual contradistinction between power and dissidence. Transversal structures and lines avoid the reproduction of dominant flows and regimes of power because rather than vertical or horizontal, hierarchical networks they compose a-centrally. That is to say, they do not necessarily move down given pathways or channels, they do not necessarily connect multiple centre points. Rather, they elide systems of coordination, crossing anywhere, everywhere and nowhere, in flight. What organisational models such as the campaigns of *Umsonst* are thus inclined towards are momentary overlappings and linkages, stratifications of political organisation that have no discrete beginning or

end. This is why we see the creation of relatively decentralised, flexible and diffuse political territories, which do not operate as a hermetic unit but are open for participation, further discussion and re-appropriation.

From this position, it is evident how transversal organisation can jettison seemingly immutable hierarchies wherein an individual or elite group would claim organisational authority over its participants. Posited as a move away from orthodox structures, transversal organisations signify a critical departure from models of organisation predicated on statist and vanguardist forms and ideologies. Moreover, transversal modes problematise hierarchies invisibly embedded in alternative 'activist' discourses, that find it difficult to reconcile the rhetorics of inclusivity and poly-centralism with actual practice. These are mediated via malleable and non-specialist modes of engagement that attempt to overturn stratifications of value based on expertise. This overturning challenges the often hidden meritocracies lurking in activist organisation that (self-)delegate tasks according to systems of legitimation based on recognition within activist subcultures. In taking on experimental transversal methods of organising within the encounter, what is given priority is diversity through the acknowledgement of different skills, knowledges, desires and socio-cultural affiliations.

IV. Political Artistic Transversals and Accumulative Subjectivities

Transversal movements can... be launched by extraordinary actions, astonishing occurrences, and traumatic events that challenge subjective territory, permeate its borders, make the familiar strange, and turn the world topsy-turvy.

(Reynolds 2002: 18)

The changing relationship between how the artist/activist conceives of herself in relation to the public is where we find correlations between organisational transversals and the making visible of processes of subjectivation. Through these junctures, the roles generally upheld in differential hierarchical structures (artist/revolutionary over public/masses) are problematised. This problematisation can be seen both in the categorical indeterminacy prompted by the encounter's transversality through the arenas of politics and art, and through its accumulative aspect: what can be attributed to the Deleuzian conjunctive *and* (1987). This *and* is of paramount importance, for it helps us to think about how art and revolution, artist and non-artist, activist and

non-activist, occur in simultaneous profusion. In this promulgation, subjectivities and categories that seek to multiply rather than to subsume or homogenise boundaries of identification are engendered. Here we can see that by recognising multiple contours to identity, individuals and collectives can valorise and orient themselves as heterogeneous and motley agents.¹¹

The multiplication of categories, and their ensuing ambiguity, invoked by Deleuze's *and* can be made visible through practices such as the performative encounter – in terms of the form itself and the subjectivities produced through, and productive of, it. This association is best captured by the Critical Art Ensemble, a US-based tactical media collective, and is worth quoting at length. They write that participants in creative encounters and initiatives such as those of Umsonst,

are neither fish nor fowl. They aren't artists in any traditional sense and don't want to be caught in the web of metaphysical, historical, and romantic signage that accompanies that designation. Nor are they political activists in any traditional sense, because they refuse to solely take the reactive position of anti-logos, and are just as willing to flow through fields of nomos in defiance of efficiency and necessity. In either case, such role designations are too restrictive in that the role boundaries exclude access to social and knowledge systems that are the materials for their work. Here may be a final link to invisibility: these participants value access over expertise, and who really cares about the work of an amateur? (Critical Art Ensemble 2001: 3–4)

The performative encounter does not act as a permanent unification between productions of subjectivities and fields. Rather, it sets up temporary meeting points, which transform the parameters and textures of identities, categories and disciplines in the process. As observed above by the Critical Art Ensemble, this variability means that creative political practices that are predicated upon transversal modes are difficult to recognise within conventional semiotics. This is because they neither fall definitively into the category of traditional activist or political practice, nor into traditional artistic practice; to recall the words of one Umsonst constituent, 'you dance around and confuse the police, who can never be quite sure: is this a political action or a cultural action? It's good to break down these clear divisions' (Eshelman 2005). The dynamic of displacement at work here flags what is at once the most risky and the most substantive aspect of such practices. As they do not arise from legitimised spaces and ways of operating but rather erupt from new inventions of actions and procedures, and as they cannot be easily defined, such encounters are susceptible to invisibility. At the

same time, it is this ambiguity that affords a flexibility that constantly challenges the limitations of boundaries, giving such encounters and practices the capacity to ‘push against and even re-organise the institutional and political structures of... recognition and production’ (Kelly 2005).

In this mutual movement of deconstruction and re-figuration, the transversal produces subjectivities and ‘self-engendering practices that seek to create their own signifiers and systems of value’ (Kelly 2005). With this accent on self-determined value systems that complement those attributed by Guattari to subject groups, it is clear why such conceptualisations of transversality have been instrumental in opening up new vocabularies and discourses. These are especially helpful when seeking to understand creativity in terms of radical subjectivities that inhabit multiple collective identities. This is because qualities of these subjectivities – such as their heightened adaptability to contingency and mutability – inherently infuse them with possibility.

This is precisely where we can see Deleuze’s *and* come into play. ‘Neither fish nor fowl’ as the Critical Art Ensemble write: hence, not the disjunctive ‘artist *or* activist’, ‘specialist *or* non-specialist’, but instead the conjunctive ‘artist *and* activist’, ‘specialist *and* non-specialist’. Here we can recognise some third (or fourth or fifth) subjectivity that transverses and transforms these categorical concatenations (Deleuze and Parnet 1987). For Raunig, this *and* should not be thought of as a means by which to escape contradictions through the chance connection of random elements in some act of political propaganda, but 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’ (2002: 4).

It is useful to reflect for a moment on the productivity of contradiction here. For, while evoking ‘new terrains of open co-operation between different activist, artistic, social and political practices’ (Kelly 2005), transversal modes do not signify a permanent interdisciplinarity but instead create temporary mutant coalitions through a movement of accumulation (not absorption), inherently changing the fields and institutions in the process. What is important to remember is that this *and* simultaneously negates mass unification, as well as factionalisation and splintering. As such transversality is a vehicle of rupture and convergence in a constant state of becoming, a form or mode of operation constituted through events, collective alliances and transitory organisations. Umsonst, as a collation of temporary subject groups, enacts this creation of becoming-subjectivity through its transversal

elements, which can produce, as Guattari contends, autopoietic and self-valourising modalities of signification.

What is revealed in this additive process is not a forced synthesis or unification of the parts into some 'whole', nor the negation of singularity, or the specificity of experience. It does not seek to assimilate – quite the opposite – for as Deleuze comments, even when there are only two terms the *and* is 'neither one nor the other, nor the one which becomes the other, but which constitutes the multiplicity' (1987: 34–5). When thinking about these accumulations as 'temporary alliances' it becomes possible to imagine how, through a transversal between politics and art, the many roles and identities enacted by individuals are made apparent. These roles and identities are distributed across different contexts – sometimes in commonality, sometimes in alterity – without being subsumed into one or the other. What also becomes clear is how this movement threatens narratives of identity and subjectivity that privilege a univocal, individuated subject. However, as we have seen, the challenging of a cohesive concept of the subject does not simply imply a rejection of the possibility of resistance. Rather, what a visibly accumulative, processual subjectivity marks out is political potential itself. This potential is recognised through a radical *collective* ontology, radical for the proliferation of connections and relationships it opens up.

It is a transversal between politics and art, and this radical collective ontology, that performative encounters, such as those of Umsonst, generate to make visible and fracture normative discourses of agency. In these collective processes of struggle and articulation, and in the development of such moments, possibilities are opened out for new permutations of subjectivation. Self-conceptions and repetitions of identities, behaviours and perceptions, the 'stiffening of the existential refrain' (Berardi 2008) can be reconceived as multi-scalar and polyphonic through the act of resistance that is in the same breath an act of affirmation.

Transversal organisation runs alongside the additive forms of identity and disciplines that the performative encounter engages. The ingenuity of this style of praxis lies in its border-crossing character, which deliberately sidesteps reductive paradigms of categorisation in favour of mobility and perhaps adversely, ambiguity. While traditional political organisation uses ideological doctrines and activities as a validating measure, transversal modes trouble such strict lines of classification. What Deleuze's accumulative *and* does for the performative encounter is emphasise that in the act of collectively constituting the encounter, in collectively riding for free, or demanding access to cultural resources

with hundreds of others, a radical political event unfolds. In this event, the self-identification as an activist/artist is no longer the issue. Through the encounter, the possibility of constituting artist *and* activist *and* non-artist *and* non-activist within different scenes and circumstances is realised. Thus, what is at stake is the self-valorisation that comes through the constitution of such actions. In this way, transversals between art and revolution apprehend political agency, self-determination and collective enunciation.

V. Political Artistic Transversals and Affective Exchanges

The State is a condition, a certain relationship between human beings, a mode of behaviour; we destroy it by contracting other relationships, by behaving differently toward one another.

(Landauer [1910] 2005: 165)

In speaking about the subjectivities and relations that the encounter is generative of and makes visible, it is important to recognise how these cooperations and alliances—these new collectives and collaborations—are assembled in time and space. By this I mean how they are brought forth and into exchange to invite worlds that affirm conditions alternative to those present; how they act as what Bryan Reynolds calls a ‘transversal territory’, a ‘catalyzing and transitional space from which new experiences, subjective reconfigurations, and, by extension, dissident mobilizations can emerge’ (2009: 287).¹²

The argument proposed by Stevphen Shukaitis in his essay *Affective Composition and Aesthetics: On Dissolving the Audience and Facilitating the Mob* (2007) begins to set up a response via a discourse of affect. Shukaitis uses affect to speak about the task of political art as a creative production of common spaces and public realms ‘through intensive engagement not circumscribed by accepted identities and positions’ (2007: 1). These geographies are activated through the affective potential that transversalities between aesthetics and politics open up. Such potential is predicated on a notion of aesthetics that is attenuated more to the relations and transversal places that arise from the process of collaborative production than to the content or the culmination of the product. This is an understanding of aesthetics, that, as Shukaitis explains, ‘is focused on the relations of production not as a concern secondary to the content of what is produced, but rather as the explicit process of self-institution and the creation of a space where the art of politics is possible (1).

What is pivotal here, as is for Guattari and Raunig, is an idea of aesthetics that concentrates on a 'process of collective creation' and on relations of production, again, the *how* of what is produced through intensities of affect. To understand how this works we must understand affect as a mobile and transitive extra-human threshold of potential, closely tied to thought in action or process (Thrift 2004: 60). This sees affect moving through and across events, bodies, spaces and experiences, in excess of individual or community, and eluding any kind of capture. Affect is in this sense a force that arises out of and through relationality and exchange, through contacts between myriads of singularities and their assemblages (Deleuze 1988).

This conceptualisation helps draw attention to the experimental dimension of the performative encounter as an affective political event. The experimental and transversal aspect is what in this instance affords affect potency across different terrains and events—such as politics and aesthetics—giving rise to intensities (Massumi 2002b). The immanence of affect can be traced out in the potential for intensity. Affect, argues Massumi, underlies and accompanies every event, from the exceptional to the quotidian, and is sensed in the 'perception of one's own vitality, one's sense of aliveness, of changeability' (2002a: 36); this gives a feeling of embeddedness in one's experiences and perceptions (2002b: 214). The changeable nature of affect, and our sense of it, intensifies our experiences and our positionalities. Moreover, affect as intensity is both a catalyst for connection and rupture: it is transformative in that it can break open socialities, and it is connective through the new relations and worlds it compels. Simply put, it is catalysed by, and further catalyses, change and transduction. The ethical crux of affect, suggests Massumi, can be found here: in a concentration on the immersion and participation in the world, in belonging to the world and to *each other* as a lived self-affirming reality independent from the value of bureaucratic, state or religious apparatuses (2002b: 242).¹³ This is why an 'aesthetic politics' for Massumi is one whose 'aim would be to expand the range of affective potential' (2002b: 235).

So how is this understanding of affect as intensity taken up in a reading of aesthetics and politics, and how does it pertain to the performative encounter of Umsonst? What is key is a reinterpretation of aesthetics and the spaces of politico-aesthetic engagement, which invites the living out of possible worlds. This reframes aesthetics as the affective composition that comes out of, and produces, relations and experiences from common processes. Rather than isolating the encounter and its content, what is central is the transversal movement in its development.

That is to say, the additive inter-subjective element that is contingent on the relations of individuals, environments and experiences in its event. The transversal spaces and territories created and reconfigured through this—the train platform and carriage in Pinker Punkt, the museum courtyard in MoMA Umsonst, the workshop and discussion spaces—are affective and ‘common’ spaces, vital to the emergence of connections and conversation beyond the usual designated zones.

Such framing reveals the encounter as a political as well as an aesthetic event that mobilises new relationships between people and their environments. These relationships question and antagonise the logics of the nation-state and capitalism at the same time as affirming shared imaginaries of possible present and future conditions. If we follow Shukaitis to argue that ‘the task of politics is precisely the creation of common space through intensive engagement not circumscribed by accepted identities and positions’ (2007: 2), then the performative encounter as a conduit for the creation of affective spaces is a fundamentally political gesture (Massumi 2002b: 234). The encounter is political in its generation and transformation of subjectivities and relations through affective modes of communication and interaction that are based on reciprocity and mutual exchange, which envision alternatives to capitalist and statist socialities.

This political dimension is stressed even more so if we understand these spaces as spaces of ‘affective composition’ (Grindon 2007; Shukaitis 2007; Read 2011): a term linking affect with an autonomist Marxist reading of class composition. In bringing a class perspective to affect, a capitalist critique is added as ‘the notion of political composition identifies *as political* moments of otherwise invisible or illegible performative social relations’ (Grindon 2011: 86). Composition in this sense places the development of forms of capitalism and labour as occurring in synchronicity with, and response to, daily forms of resistance and self-determined organisation (Wright 2002). The double movement of capitalism and its discontents is seen in the constant dance of displacement and re-structuration of both capital and those myriad struggles against its domination (Mezzadra 2007: 5). As such, this argument stresses the multidirectional processes that contribute to productions of class, labour, subjectivity and agency. Consequently, it engenders a theory of ‘revolution’ not only as a mass event of crisis, but also as an ongoing progression of resistance and creation such as seen in the Umsonst campaigns. This demonstrates the complexity of the relations between production and capitalism, and the possibility for spaces and sites of alternative self-managed activity. In this way,

what gets opened up is what Massumi refers to as ‘that margin of manoeuvrability, the ‘where we might be able to go and what we might be able to do’ in every present situation’ (2002b: 212), which explains ‘why focusing on the next experimental step rather than the big utopian picture isn’t settling for less’ (212).

Coming back to the ‘experimental step’ of the performative encounter and following the arguments presented so far, it is possible to understand why, in terms of the encounter and other examples of transversals between politics and art, to use affective composition as a conceptual tool means to ‘examine the capacities they create, and how they contribute to the development of forms of self-organization’ (Shukaitis 2007: 2). Affect, and especially affective composition, provides a means by which to understand how the performative encounter generates new relationships and connective junctures between people and environments that agitate systems of value. It does so by heightening intensities of experience, by implicating each person in the collective constitution of the encounter, and by accentuating singular and collective sites of power and resistance. As a vehicle for reciprocal connection and communication the encounter operates along lines of organisation that depart from usual models reliant on distinct and reified conceptions of hierarchy, roles and specialisation.

The lines of exodus charted out by the encounter are not without discrepancy, however, nor are they predictable. They are prone to stutters and collapse as much as they are coalition and concatenation, which is why Shukaitis insists that:

the compositional capacities of these ruptures are not unlimited, for they too through repetition become ritualised and fall back into solidified patterns of circulation. The question becomes one of keeping open the affective capacities of the created space: to find ways to avoid the traps of spectacular recuperation and the solidification of constituent moments and possibilities into fixed and constituted forms that have lost their vitality. (2007: 5)

The element of crisis that this illuminates, namely the impasses of reification and recuperation faced by affective spaces and geographies, the fleeting nature of these interventions in precariousness, privatisation and gentrification, might leave us questioning what kind of response a transversal ontology can actually offer—a political disposition that foregrounds movement, processuality and transformation, an ontology of ‘becoming’, so to speak.

VI. Conclusion

It was like everything was thrown up in the air for a moment and people came down after the shock in a slightly different order, and some were interconnected in ways that they hadn't been before.

(Massumi 2002b: 234)

Writing about his participation in the various collectives and political work he was involved in at the time, Guattari once commented, 'whether there was a real effectiveness doesn't matter; certain kinds of action and concentration represent a break with the habitual social processes, and in particular with the modes of communication and expression of feeling inherited from the family' (1984: 29). The point he makes is one that I would like to reflect upon here. When asking what kind of political effect a transversal organisation may have, such as that in the performative encounter, we need to relinquish conceptions of success and failure that linearise and evaluate activities on the basis of pre-existing or external qualifications. What we might look to, rather, are the relations that such encounters open us up to, the breaks in habits and conditioned uses of space and place they provoke and create. The performative encounter, like that of Umsonst, is an experiment. It is a tactic that complements more sustained praxes of organisation, one whose value lies in its potential to construct shared geographies that challenge hegemonic flows and concentrations of power, at the same time as making visible and intervening in processes of subjectivation.¹⁴

If we trace out a trajectory linking Guattari's concept of the transversal, from his early work in the clinic and its translation into the political realm, to Deleuze's conjunctive *and*, we can think about how the encounter radicalises subjectivities. By further turning to a concept of affect as intensity, as a connective force, and by politicising this through a reading of affective composition, we see how the spaces of the encounter give rise to radical ways of being and relating that invite alternatives to the nation-state and capital. By forming a common rhythm from a common cause, a common praxis, the subject groups that make up the encounter invent new languages that place less emphasis on the categorisation of identities and more on their destabilisation.

The importance for such a conjunctive and transversal approach to political activism cannot be overstated. Over a decade ago, after the 18 June global day of action in London in 1999, a now notorious text entitled *Give up Activism* was circulated. What made this paper so significant was that it challenged the presumptions held about organisation in contemporary political work. According to the author,

while radical organisation had been moving away from the hierarchies of vanguardist politics the roles connected to these hierarchies had been retained: there was still an overwhelming tendency to distinguish the activist from the non-activist, a distinction based on an ‘activist mentality’ which designated the activist as ‘a specialist or an expert in social change’ (1999: 161). This had a twofold effect: not only did it segregate and elevate the activist over the non-activist as a political agent, it also divided her from her own participation in a wider social body, from her own desires and her own ‘non-activist’ life.

The performative encounter that I have introduced here directly counterposes this segregation, a segregation that is still present in dominant modes of radical organisation, speaking from a position in the ‘global north’. By opening up to transversality, the encounter emphasises desires to move through and beyond political circles, to work on issues that affect people on a day-to-day basis, and to participate in self-determined and shared struggles. The encounter achieves this through its constitution by, and of, a movement that does not fit easily into the traditional categorical discourses of art and politics. These feature creative political praxes that take as their prerogative the disruption of the borders between artist and audience, activist and non-activist, politics and everyday life, amateur and professional, alternative and mainstream. In a final text, Guattari wrote that ‘new collective assemblages of enunciation are beginning to form an identity out of fragmentary ventures, at times risky initiatives, trial and error experiments: different ways of seeing and of making the world, different ways of being’ (1995: 120). In the assemblage of the encounter we see some of these different ways of seeing and being unfold, and it is only through their continual invention, their disintegration and renewal that this unfolding can continue.

Notes

1. To speak of performativity is to also recall the field of performance. Important work has been done in performance studies on Deleuze and Guattari, particularly by scholars such as Bryan Reynolds (2002, 2003, 2009), Laura Cull (2009), Stephen Zepke (2009) and Anna Catherine Hickey-Moody (2009). It is crucial to note that the performative encounter does not fit easily into the tropes of performance, hence the lack of its objectification as a theatrical form. In fact one of its central characteristics is that it is impossible to delineate precisely what the encounter is as it cannot be defined within the parameters of art, nor within the parameters of politics. Many of its constituents do not understand it as performance in any significant way. It is my contention that it is this very

border-crossing and mobile character of the encounter that enables its political potential.

2. I adapt the term, 'performative encounter' from Rosello (2005). Drawing upon fictional literary and filmic texts connected to the North African region of the Maghreb, Rosello uses 'performative encounters' to identify a new potential emerging in Franco-Algerian relations that stands to counterbalance a violent history of colonisation. Rosello argues that this potential is linked to the transformations that performative encounters effect on subjectivity.
3. For more on the Umsonst campaigns see Kanngieser (2007, 2011). See also Panagiotidis (2007).
4. Perhaps most popular of this genre was the recent Spanish-based group Yomango, who staged spectacles in banks, supermarkets and public squares. The Swedish collective planka.nu also adopted this tactic in their fare-dodging campaigns. More widely contemporaneous to these, politico-aesthetic tactics infused experimental sections of the radical left resulting in anti-capitalist performances such as those of CIRCA, The Vacuum Cleaner and the Laboratory for Insurrectionary Imagination in the United Kingdom, and Die Überflüssigen and the Hedonist International in Germany, to name but a few.
5. This was polarised because critics saw the method of appropriation as reproductive of, or doubling, principles of consumer capitalism and commodity fetishism. At the same time, it was contended that such methods could not affect the central conflict of labour and capital. However as one constituent refuted, 'practices of appropriation reduced the pressures to work', adding that while Umsonst were capitalist critical they were more intent on finding proactive means of subversion than opposition (Kanngieser forthcoming). An additional point of disjunction lay in that, unlike many of the current German alternative movements, the Umsonst campaigns maintained a socially rather than ideologically directed focus.
6. The Umsonst campaigns included Berlin, Dresden, Freiburg, Cologne, Mannheim, Kiel, Munich, Kassel, Dusseldorf, Luebeck, Goettigen and Jena amongst others.
7. This last issue directly confronted Hamburg Umsonst during a day of action against state threats to unemployment insurance in 2004 where difficulties in communication led to conflict between initiators of the encounter and job seekers. This was in part due to the fact that many of those involved in the solidarity event were not unemployed themselves at the time, and many of the job seekers were older and felt disconnected from the protest. Such points of contention signal issues around maintaining a movement between fixed and unfixed organisation and constitution in the Umsonst campaigns.
8. For more on this see Kanngieser (2007, 2011).
9. For more on the idea of the constituent of the encounter and its importance see Kanngieser (2011).
10. Over the past decade a vocabulary has been developing in Europe around such crossovers including 'tactical media' (Garcia and Lovink 1997), 'radical aesthetics' (EIPCP 2005) and 'communication guerrilla' (Autonome A.F.R.I.K.A. Gruppe 2002). See Kanngieser (forthcoming) for an extrapolation of this.
11. This is, of course, not to suggest that subjects prior to the encounter are somehow immutable or enclosed. It is more to draw attention to the ways in which the encounter makes visible the variability and processuality of subjectivation.
12. The reader might also recall Hakim Bey's (1991) writings on temporary autonomous zones.

13. This 'each other' has significance for Massumi who argues for a political response imbued with an ethics of care and hospitality. Because of the uncertain nature of affect this is all the more imperative (2002b: 240–1).
14. The situation of the encounter within, and commitment to complementing, more ongoing and instituted forms of organisation is imperative, for as Guattari writes, 'these mutating militant machines for transversal and singularized spaces of freedom will not have any claim to durability. This way, they will come to terms with their intrinsic precariousness and the need for their continuous renewal, supported by a long lasting social movement of great scope' (Guattari and Negri 2010: 126).

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