

ON MOVING: NOMADISM AND (IN)SECURITY

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- + 'Freedom's just another word for nothing left to lose' (Janis Joplin)
'To think is to voyage' (Gilles Deleuze)

Diminishing Spaces

It has always been important for me *to move*. I was born and brought up in Europe, in the closed and narrow confines of the Tyrolean Alps, yet what has always drawn me to North America is the longing for the vastness of its space, the desire to remain itinerant on an ever shifting trajectory, to become imperceptible under an open horizon. At junctures in my life I have sought out those unusual physical or mental spaces which disrupt established procedures of living and thinking. At times I have half-jokingly referred to my life as a permanent state of exception. The patterns that emerge can be followed only in hindsight; they constitute a series of positions and trace a path on a map that is constantly being redrawn.

I know how to move in the very sense denoted by its use as verb: as a practice, a doing. Also when used as a noun, *movement*, *motion*, for me is implied is not so much as a quality which a body can possess (to 'have' movement), but rather as a being in motion. 'Having motion' implies a pre-given body to which motion is just added as an additional quality. It propels a body through a medium (like space or time), with the body remaining self-identical throughout the movement. 'Being in motion', however, turns moving into a productive category. The being

is then not a stability but a becoming. Being in motion is a process of change and transformation in which there is no longer a pre-given stable being that could be defined independently of the motion.

This activity of moving thus affects both living and thinking. It implies an itinerant form of subjectivity that is perceived as a permanent, ongoing becoming. Seen from such an itinerant perspective, freedom is shaped by the extent to which one is able to think and live differently. It is defined by the always concrete space available for becoming and for the question *how else could I still live and think?* Now, the very facts of living and thinking already imply an opening up of freedom, because without this opening no life and no thinking would have been possible in the first place. Freedom is thus a permanent condition of our existence. Yet it is not unlimited. If moving enables ever-new ways of living and thinking, then the extent to which moving is possible also defines our horizon of freedom.

Recently I find my spaces to move diminished, encroached upon. Driving on the highway I am aware that the Austrian road control system makes it possible that my trajectory is being plotted and followed. Taking the subway in Vienna I am conscious of the surveillance cameras, opening the newspapers I read about new security laws. During air-travel the enforced rituals around embarkation have long surpassed the ridiculous and are approaching the bizarre. The contours of my data-body can virtually be traced in a world of cookies, data mining and the possibility to intercept e-mails. And all of this is from the extremely privileged position of a male, white, Western, middle class academic and does not even yet touch upon the questions of visa regulations, immigration, restrictions of movement for those termed foreigners, immigrants or asylum seekers - all of which I am also painfully aware of in my personal as well as professional life. Thinking differently, as the recent persecution of Steve Kurtz from the Critical Art Ensemble has shown, is increasingly precarious as it constantly teeters on the border of being labeled a security threat and thus penalised. Security, as many authors have already astutely remarked (Agamben 2001, 2005; Echavarría

2006; Jabri 2006; Sützl 2007; Wæver 1995) has become the paradigmatic legitimisation for politics with all the problems and - as Agamben argues - all the totalitarian dangers this entails. What is being restricted in this process is movement, the possibilities of becoming through the governmental (Dillon 2007) regulation of life-species circulation, contingency and connection (Dillon 2005). The politics of security foreclose all the spaces for the in-between. And this is no mere question of a restriction of physical movement. If moving is understood in the larger sense as possibility of freedom (to be different), then those restrictions touch upon the very possibilities available for continued 'subjectivation', they touch upon living and thinking and the concrete shape of being-as-becoming (Dillon 2005; 2007).

Here the postmodern forms of critique and celebration of plurality still hold pertinent as political positions of resistance. Postmodern living and thinking call for a perpetual need to open spaces. This can take the form of a local, contingent and relational practice, a dislocating movement that refuses the ascription of exclusive and unifying identity markers, while at the same time celebrating the multiplicity of culture, language, (trans)gender, class, religion as possibilities for impure becomings (Jabri 2006). In this paper, I will attempt to sketch what such an affirmative practice could look like, using the Deleuzian notion of the nomad as chiffre, as exemplary form which encompasses both the notions of resistance against homogenisation and the affirmative plurality of becomings.

Methodological Considerations

The method deployed in this paper closely follows the concept of transpositions as detailed by postmodern feminist and theorist Rosi Braidotti (2006). According to Braidotti, transpositions have a double history in genetics and music and imply:

'an intertextual, cross-boundary or transversal transfer, in the sense of a leap from one code, field or axis into another, not merely in the quantitative mode of plural multiplications, but rather in the qualitative sense of complex multiplicities. It

is not just a matter of weaving together different strands, variations on a theme (textual or musical), but rather of playing the positivity of difference as a specific theme of its own. As a term in music, transposition indicates variations and shifts of scale in a discontinuous but harmonious pattern. It is thus created as an in-between space of zigzagging and of crossing, non-linear but not chaotic, nomadic, yet accountable and committed [...].’ (Braidotti 2006: 5)

The term transposition itself is made up of two parts. The prefix trans- derives from Latin and signifies across, beyond, through (Walch 2002: 120). *Position* refers to a concrete site or place, but also to being in one place, or locating oneself. Dealing with positions by way of an across, beyond or through implies establishing a movement in which single positions can still be discerned, yet no ultimate goal or final reference point emerges. Transpositions thus describe a process which, while acknowledging single positions, also transcends them through a perpetual movement. Positions can still be held and it is still possible to locate oneself. To speak metaphorically, the own location can still be traced on a map. Yet, since movement in the end always carries on and since each movement makes the whole map change, each location on this map does not remain self-identical but is constantly *twisted* and thus becomes different.

The two key features for transpositions are movement and difference. Transpositions carry out a perpetual form of movement in which, as Braidotti (2006: 5) puts it, the “positivity of difference” becomes a specific theme of its own. Deployed as a method in academic writing, trans-positions imply a perpetual, nomadic movement through concepts. In a series of differentiations and approximations, local points of reference (*trans-positions*) can be established while the guiding question is kept open as impetus. The movement so continues without ever finally settling on any one of those reference points (*trans-positions*).

Transpositions carry on in a non-linear manner in order to achieve, through variations and shifts of scale, a pattern that is discontinuous yet not without

harmony. Moves of transposition trace a path which appears to ‘proceed by leaps and bounds’ but is not ‘deprived of logic and coherence’ (Braidotti 2006: 5ff.). Transpositions in short, proceed in a rhizomatic fashion (Deleuze & Guattari 1987) and imply a movement of approximations, partial fusions with – yet also differentiations between – several related concepts. They are a ‘becoming-nomadic of ideas’ and carry out a Deleuzian ‘deterritorialization’ (Braidotti 1994: 37).

This Nomad’s Life

‘The desert is a gigantic map of signs for those who know how to read them, for those who can sing their way through the wilderness.’ (Rosi Braidotti)

The modern, dualistic philosophy of the subject dates back to René Descartes. The term is derived from the Latin *subiectum* for the ground, the fundamental. The subject’s coherence is guaranteed no longer by God, as had been the case previously, but by the - for Descartes indubitable - fact that *I think*. Everything else derives from this first fact of thinking. Being is a consequence of thinking and the subject therefore is defined as the thinking, self-reflecting, perceiving being.

With the theory of the subject, Descartes inaugurates a division between this reflecting subject (*res cogitans*) on the one hand and the outside world, the to-be-observed object (*res extensa*) on the other (Dietrich 2008; Capra 1988). The subject (observer) and object (the observed) so form two separate entities. From the point of view of the subject, everything else - including other humans - is an ‘outside’, an object. The world is so divided dualistically in I and not-I. Between subject and object, between every ‘I’ and ‘not-I’ a chasm opens up which in principle can no longer be bridged.

Mediated through the works of John Locke and Immanuel Kant, the discourse of modernity echoes these foundations (Dietrich 2008: 35off.). The modern legal order proceeds from the foundations of the stable, autonomous and individually

responsible subject just as well as modern positivist science or the political frame of democracy within the nation state, which is built on the individual right to vote.

The French philosopher Gilles Deleuze and his co-author Félix Guattari (1983, 1987) challenge these modern foundations in a postmodern vein. Deleuze and Guattari use different models to exemplify a difference between *nomadic* and *sedentary* living and thinking. In light of the above discussion on spaces and movement, one of those models – which might be called the *topological model* – seems especially pertinent for approaching this differentiation. Deleuze and Guattari therein differentiate the nomadic and the sedentary by two different types of space that correspond to the two forms of existence. The sedentary form of existence, they contend, is inherently linked to a certain form of space which relies on the state as instituting principle. The task of the state is essentially one of control over its territory and everything therein, including its people. This control is achieved by dividing and organising space, by parceling it out:

‘One of the fundamental tasks of the state is to striate the space over which it reigns, or to utilize smooth spaces as a means of communication in the service of striated space. It is a vital concern of every state not only to vanquish nomadism but to control migration and, more generally, to establish a zone of rights over an entire “exterior”, over all the flows traversing the ecumenon.’ (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 385)

Once more, some definitions are in order: *smooth space* stands for the plains and deserts as horizon for nomadic trajectories. As concept, smooth space is open-ended and without center. There is no longer any division between the earth and the sky as in the vast open spaces one directly melts into the other. The horizon then is a line of flight but no confining limit. Smooth space subsequently is unbounded. It is defined by the trajectories that traverse its surface. It thus knows points of reference, yet no overall fixed structure:

‘The sand desert has not only oases which are like fixed points, but also rhizomatic vegetation that is temporary and shifts location according to local rains, bringing changes in the direction of the crossings. [...] Their variability, the polyvocality of directions, is an essential feature of smooth spaces of the rhizome type, and it alters their cartography.’ (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 382)

In *smooth space* the cartography remains variable and is defined in terms of the trajectories that are possible at a given moment. Routes and movements fluctuate. Smooth spaces are defined by the relations and movements that traverse them. Relations and movements are not just something added to an already pre-existing space but are its characteristic. It is the apparatus of the state that turns smooth into *striated space*, installing the grids and divisions of cities, fixed roads, provinces and countries. Striated space is structured, patterned and hierarchical. It enables fixity, certainty and stability. Smooth space is not undifferentiated, yet its cartography is not organised according to pre-given categories but made up by the multiple movements that cross it. Smooth space is shifting and mobile – it transforms together with the patterns and relations of movement that define it. Striated space is organised in fixed patterns according to a pre-given unitary logic, that of the state.

Deleuze and Guattari use the concepts of striated and smooth not only as denominations for physical spaces. The process of striation is not only a matter of a territorialising geography but also of producing corresponding subjectivities. Striation introduces sedentariness and stability in both living and thinking. The statal apparatus produces disciplines and tools for a certain form of subjectivation just as it just produces borders and territorial divisions. A sedentary subjectivity is produced via schools, barracks, and prisons until psychoanalysis as method of mental normalisation. Striation implies a molding of concrete subjects according to the pre-established, supposedly universal, cast of the Cartesian subject.

Movement, as far as it exists in striated space, follows pre-determined and

approved channels; proceeds along well-defined and invariant physical and mental pathways. In light of the definition of moving offered at the very beginning, this movement is not the kind that leads to new becomings, but turns into a property ascribed to an otherwise stable entity. Rather than being in motion, in striated space one *has motion*. Rather than proceeding by transpositions, the modern method is to proceed by reasonable, linear movement.

Smooth space, on the other hand, corresponds to *nomadic subjectivities* (Deleuze & Guattari 1987; Braidotti 1994 2002, 2006). The nomad is the permanently itinerant and voyaging form of existence. The nomad of Deleuze and Guattari is also an answer to Kant, who lamented certain kind of barbarism that had allowed 'for a kind of nomads who abhor all permanent cultivation of the soil' (Kant, quoted after Colebrook 2005: 180). Nomadism is defined by movement and difference, leading to a subjectivity that is an ongoing, open and fluctuating becoming. Nomadic subjectivity is not conceived as a coherent substance but as a shifting assemblage of diverse parts. Nomadic living and thinking still can be located in concrete surroundings at a given moment in time, yet those surroundings successively change as nomadic mobility implies a trajectory that no longer knows any final goal or ultimate resting point:

'The nomad's identity is a map of where s/he has already been; s/he can always reconstruct it a posteriori, as a set of steps in an itinerary. But there is no triumphant cogito supervising the contingency of the self; the nomad stands for diversity, the nomad's identity is an inventory of traces.' (Braidotti 1994: 14)

Nomadic consciousness re-introduces smooth, open, space into the striation. It disperses the subjectivity that the Cartesian cogito tries to make stable and coherent. Nomadic consciousness resists this Cartesian subjectivity point by point: instead of stability and sedentariness, the nomad is based on a movement leading to becoming and transformation. Instead of the subject-object duality, nomadic subjectivity is an ever shifting multiplicity in which the borders between self and other are constantly displaced. Nomadic subjectivity is never singular,

never individual, but always a multiplicity in relation to itself and with other co-subjects, and the nomadic strategy is one of a temporary and fluctuating becoming-in-togetherness, a co-emergence (Ettinger 2006). Even when by her/himself, the nomad is never single but always a multiplicity – a tribe, clan or pack. The nomad so forms a mobile subjectivity that fragments and dissolves the unity of the Cartesian subject. Nomadic movements challenge the striated distribution of spaces.

The nomad is not an essential category – one is not born a nomad. Becoming nomad arises out of a 'critical consciousness' (Braidotti 1994: 5) which seeks temporary linkages of (political) affinity to standpoints that share a common concern without, however, conflating this affinity into a sameness:

'the nomadic subject functions as a relay team: s/he connects, circulates, moves on; s/he does not form identifications but keeps on coming back at regular intervals. The nomad is a transgressive identity, whose transitory nature is precisely the reason why s/he can make connections at all. Nomadic politics is a matter of bonding, of coalitions, of interconnections.' (Braidotti 1994: 35)

From such a vantage point it becomes possible to sketch the outlines of a nomadic politics vis-à-vis the striation introduced by the security discourse; a politics that follows the rhizomatic characteristics of connection, circulation and movement and that draws its impetus from being transitory and transgressive, yet for all that still remains committed.

Nomadic Politics

Nomadism today seems to be more important than ever, in a time when contemporary geo- and biopolitics of security aim at intensifying striation, at producing sedentary, stable - and thus predictable – subjects (Dillon 2007). While in the past, nomads of all stripes were forced to become settled under the master-signifiers of progress, enlightenment, civilisation or development, striation these days largely builds on the emotion of fear. Activating the

memories of past traumas, security discourses narrate threats into existence, which it afterwards pretends to fight. 9/11, terrorism, Muslim fundamentalism are the chiffres around which this fear can be crystallised and what it turns into are much broader categories - fear of the Other, fear of difference and of the uncertainties of becoming. Those strategies aim to incite subjects to invest in the identity positions so fabricated – the one of fearful citizens clamoring for security. The biopolitical move of striation is thus to *make* a certain form of life that corresponds to the needs of the security apparatus for fearful citizens, which then democratically provides it with the necessary legitimacy. Yet whenever power takes life as its object, as Gilles Deleuze succinctly remarked, it is inevitable that life becomes resistance to power (1988: 92).

A nomadic politics would therefore aim at re-introducing smooth space into the striation. At stake are concrete forms of living, possibilities of expression, of living and thinking *differently*. If fear is the primary incentive to accept striation, then refusing to let one's actions be guided by it turns into a political statement. Yet this fearlessness can not be born out of certainty, out of a superior position which knows better, but on the contrary out of embracing the very insecurity of existence which striation tries to banish. Openness, fluidity, risk, connection and circulation are acknowledged as parts of daily existence and welcomed as such, instead of feared. Not giving in to the striation also implies an openness towards transformation, a willingness to let the new emerge out of the concrete situation. This way the possibility for smooth space arises.

In a nomadic politics the stake is always also the own becoming. Nomadic living and thinking lead to a form of resistance that tries to safeguard the possibilities inherent to movement and the becoming-differently that it might engender. As such, it is a risky strategy, for what is at stake is always the own becoming, the continued possibilities for the own living and thinking.

From the above rendering, it finally also follows that no *prescriptive* recipes for action can be forthcoming. Nomadic becomings are notoriously hard to predict

and enact rhizomatic fluctuations instead of following the pre-given paths of the sedentary. This will be a disappointment for everybody looking for universal 'how-to's' and global strategies of resistance. Instead, responses will have to be *elicited* (Lederach 1995) from the concrete situation. What is necessary is situational awareness instead of pre-given strategies, nomadic movements of displacement, which change together with the conditions. Just as smooth space is formed with the paths that traverse it and thus remains constantly emergent, nomadic movements cannot be charted once and for all. They affirm and create insecurity, instead of opting for the sedentariness and stability of the secured. Therein lies their exhilarating freedom, their potential for becoming and therein also lies, for whomever so inclined, their potential for resistance.

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