09 2007

Micropolitics and Hegemony

Contra the New Para-Universalisms: Pro Anti-Passive Politics

Stephan Adolphs / Serhat Karakayalı

Translated by Aileen Derieg

The starting point for this article was our joint reading of the text "1968 and after: Some Comments on Singularity and Minoritarian Politics"[1] by Katja Diefenbach[2]. While we share the orientation to defending the concept of becoming minoritarian against the neo-universalist invectives of authors like Alain Badiou and Slavoj Žižek, reading the article we started reflecting again on the problem of the relationship between becoming and history, between quantum flows and segmentarity.

Para-universalism has already been popular for several years. Its proponents are found not only in the camp of the leftists, which includes Badiou and Žižek, among others, but also in all the fields of the political spectrum. Everywhere "difference", multiculturalism and other misapprehensions are held responsible for the decline of morals, authority and class consciousness, which is ultimately attributed to 1968, the starting point of a more or less lasting

revolt, which was distinguished – worldwide – by not allowing itself to be pressed into the templates of the macropolitical. This was also Deleuze and Guattari's thesis: "those who evaluated things in macropolitical terms understood nothing of the event, because something unaccountable was escaping."[3]

Badiou and Žižek's criticism is directed against a possibility of emancipative politics that is thought to be lost along with the loss of universal instances. These instances of invoking a subject in religion as in the political are supposed to guarantee a kind of stability against the difference that is bound to the commodity form, has become arbitrary, and they are seen as the inexorable foundation of all political agency. In this kind of critical perspective, the thinking of Deleuze (and others) is exactly in line with this general loss of the political, reinforcing it instead of opposing it. Conversely, there is a broad reading of Deleuze and Guattari that understands micropolitics as a kind of "small scale politics" or anti-institutional politics. This tends to diminish the significance or the effect of the "macropolitical".

In contrast to this, our endeavor is to show that politics can, first of all, not be reduced to these instances, and secondly that micropolitics understood in this way is not capable of eluding appropriation and passivization. Both positions underestimate – albeit for different reasons – the struggles in the fields structured by power technologies and gouvernmental knowledge.

This article intends to show that hegemony and micropolitics are not mutually exclusive perspectives, but instead refer to one another. If hegemony is understood following the criticisms of 1968 of the normalizing modes of subjectification as an anti-passive revolution, then the micropolitical perspective offers important indications of an emancipatory project beyond fordist social

formations.We argue for a hegemony theory reading of the works by Deleuze and Guattari. In our view this enables reading the endeavor of the two authors, in their writing from *Anti-Oedipus* to *What is Philosophy?*, as a grand attempt to take up the "problematic" of Marxism again and reformulate it on the basis of the battles after 1968. A reading of this kind only makes sense, if the concept of hegemony is liberated from its reduction to a simple "expansion" of the concept of the state. This is a notion that rests on Gramsci's formula of the state as "hegemony armored with compulsion", because it still allows thinking of the state as something external. This is also how Deleuze' statement can be understood, that both of them (not only he) constantly "remained" Marxists – which is also a variation of the assemblage.[4]

With a perspective of this kind it could be said that, contrary to a certain reception, concepts like becoming-minoritarian, micropolitics or deterritorialization specifically do not stand for a thinking that is capable of imagining the flight from capital and state only from the catastrophic perspective of their absolute reterritorialization (their destruction, in other words). This is what the recurrent phrase refers to, "a thought that appeals to a people"[5]. Yet can a people even emerge from becoming-minoritarian? Like many others, "people" is also a term borrowed and reinterpreted by Deleuze and Guattari. The fact that becoming-minoritarian is still bound to instances, even if it is not dissolved in them, is exactly the problem that ultimately leads Badiou and Žižek to their conservative revolutionary intervention and to coupling emancipation with religion or ideology and thus with para-universalism.

Instead of thinking of becoming as the absolute other of history, which drops out of history, always threatened by meta-narratives that appropriate it, we want to ask how one can imagine historical

change and write history without omitting becoming-minoritarian. The question of history principally involves the Deleuzian question of how a new people (that is no longer a people) can be created, if the mass itself speaks, if it is in the process of becoming. It should not be denied that the relations, references and shared problems we postulate are only one side of the coin. Indeed, with our reinterpretation we wish to emphasize this, because they often appear implicit and hidden. The differences, breaks and discontinuities recede more into the background in this article, also for reasons of space. To that extent, our "disposition" of Deleuze and Guattari's concepts with the problematic of hegemony is only a first step that could yield new difficulties, but also a new productivity. This article should therefore be read more in the sense of a pragmatic framework, which we presume to be capable of triggering productive movements. We seek to achieve a translation of the concepts into one another, not a confrontation of models.

If the problem of becoming and history is reformulated in terms of hegemony theory, it could be argued that – at the level of a "poetics of knowledge"[6] – the point is to avoid certaiman passivizing intellectual styles (of thinking and writing). What has to be communicated together are narrative strategies of history (history is "narrated"), social science knowledge (i.e. a knowledge about the material constitution of the multitude), and the problem of democracy (the multitude as changing, becoming subjects). The point is a change of language-body-location, which no only accompanies everyone in the place assigned to them, but also changes the arrangement of the locations themselves, a limitation of certain practices and forms of knowledge and a revaluation of others. This problem, which Rancière sought to grasp with a poetics of knowledge, and which Deleuze and Guattari have also faced since their first collaborative book *Anti-Oedipus*, is the same

one that is also the starting point of Gramsci's work. The thesis posed here is thus that the arrangement of knowledge, language and bodies represents the core of the hegemony theory issue. For this kind of reading of the concept of hegemony, hegemony is not a different word for domination, but rather a network of practices of leadership and self-leadership, which in turn builds on a specific division of labor (between intellectual and non-intellectual practices), and which is anchored by standardization and normalization not only in everyday life, but also in the mode of production. It is also in this context that Gramsci develops the concept of the "passive revolution", i.e. "revolutions" that are responsive to demands from the basis, yet forestall a self-reliant leadership of the subalterns at the same time.[7] In passive revolutions the relations of the political and social division of labor into manual and mental labor are not challenged, but rather modernized or transformed. Passivization leads to a blocking of self-reliant and new institutional forms of state on the part of the subalterns.[8] The question, then, is who leads whom by which (political, mental or economic) means, and how those who are led can liberate themselves from this leadership. Against this background, Gramsci's concept of hegemony serves to develop a new practice of politics, which has an anti-passive effect.[9]

To be able to conceive of a new practice of this kind, Gramsci expands the conventional focus on state and politics in the direction of an expanded understanding of the state. He looks not only at the state (apparatus) in a narrower sense, but also at economy/production, culture/ideology, strategic knowledge and science that are related to the state, which can be seen as leadership practices that are not to be reduced to one another, even though they form a "historical block". The different practices – structured by the division of manual and mental labor – produce a

comprehensive mental and physical manner of living that marks the habits, behaviors and ideas of the different (mutually related) social individuals and groups. In his prison notebooks Gramsci develops his ideas about hegemony in reference to family structure, for instance, or the dispositions of how life is lived. Here he is interested in the production of subjectifying, i.e. affective and action-guiding knowledge. The subjects are not regarded as unified individuals, but rather as individuals composed and permeated by different historical layers. These individuals are to be unified in the sense of creating a new state. For this reason, it makes sense to us to read the concept of the passive revolution not as a "counter-revolution", in other words as the practice of a "ruling class", but rather to refer to the a-subjective moments of this kind of passivization: passive revolution as "reappropriation" and molecular transformation. In this sense, we understand neoliberalism, for instance, not as an instrument of the ruling classes for the destruction of the social welfare state, but rather as a specific re-coding of the flows, de-subjectifications, etc. that emerged in the battles after 1968.

Similar to Gramsci, for Deleuze and Guattari the starting point for reflection is not theorematic either, i.e. a question resulting from the theoretical axis, but rather problematic. The concepts developed here are not components of a general theory, but instead refer to historical concrete constellations. In 1972 this was the development of the battles after 1968 and at the theoretical level of structuralism or (structuralistic) Marxism and (structuralistic) psychoanalysis. In the following we will attempt to indicate the way in which Deleuze and Guattari's hegemony theory view has been taken up and further developed.

Micro-Politics of Desire

In a lecture in the early 1970s Guattari developed the concept of desire in the context of a struggle "for the liberation of desire". He opposed this to the psychoanalytical concept of pleasure and the Marxist concept of desire that only exists within a representational order. This theme also plays a central role in *Anti-Oedipus*. The micropolitics of desire is a counter-concept to the contemporary discourse alliance between psychoanalysis and (structural) Marxism. Deleuze and Guattari's criticism is that in the specific interplay of these two approaches the dimension of "real desire" is excluded from the social on the one hand, and on the other an increasingly formalized conception of language is developed that leaves no more room for other (a-semiotic) materials of expression. The consequence of this is that political action is made impossible. Here it is clear that Deleuze and Guattari's theoretical intervention is to be understood against the background of the problem of hegemony, which they circumscribe in a specific way. Whereas Gramsci extended the problem of the state to the entire formation of society, thus linking ideology to various organizational leadership practices, Althusser decentered the state in the narrower sense in his conception (in other words, the repressive state apparatus) by inseparably linking it with the element of ideology. The way the state functions is not limited only to repression. At the same time, the state must work on the ideological practices of the multitude, which emerge from class antagonism. Ideology is understood here as ritualized modes of subjectification, in other words bodily practices that cannot be reduced in any way to false consciousness. The state interpellates individuals as subjects and these are then constituted and continue to constitute themselves on the basis of a religious or juridical ideology.[10] This kind of subjectification in ideological state apparatuses is in contrast to emancipatory forms of politics. This is exactly the point where Deleuze and Guattari start with the concept of the desiring

machine: the Marxist and psychoanalytical differentiation into society and individual is anchored in the state apparatuses and must therefore be suspended. Instead of "mediation" between these instances, the desiring machine introduces manifold connections: "Everything can participate in statements here, the individuals as well as the zones of the body, the semiotic force lines or the machines branching out in all directions."[11] Suspending the separation between individual and society, micro and macro level or grasping it differently means thinking in terms of an expanded concept of state that takes the regulation of bodies as its starting point. In this sense, desire is a biopolitical dimension: it represents a vector that runs below the segmentation of population, capitalist production and individual. This is why the struggle over or against standardization, the nuclear family and certain forms (e.g. fordist) of subjectification is so significant, even if it does not raise the "question of power" in the conventional sense. In *A Thousand Plateaus* Deleuze and Guattari expand exactly this perspective to the entire societal field.

The conception of the desiring machine attempts to find starting points for politics that lie beyond the passivization of mass movements by ideological state apparatuses. In the perspective of a micro-politics of desire, the increase in complexity that is produced by the new terminology in the model of the state-ideological field of practices should serve to suspend the separation between large social contexts and individual problems and thus stop centering politics on taking over state power. A "multitude of goals that are within the immediate reach of the most different social contexts"[12] should take the place of the state. The criticism of the political party that is necessarily linked to this does not lead, however, to an abstract rejection of institution. Although they reject the party model as a guarantee for the unity of struggles,

Deleuze and Guattari stress that the perspective of micro-politics "would not a priori reject every action of the party, every idea of a line, a program or even centralism; however, it would endeavor to situate and to relativize all of this in keeping with an analytical micro-politics"[13].Hence they do not argue for pure movement politics, which sees itself as opposed to the institutions of society. Instead, since the desiring machine already subverts the opposites of individual and society on the basis of its theoretical disposition, focusing on the production of formations of society, it is a matter of conceptualizing the problem of non-representative politics in the institutions, in the state and in all areas of society. For this reason, Deleuze and Guattari expand the concept of the machine under the term of machinic assemblages to the entire natural and societal context.

Assemblages

From the perspective of conceptualization as an (anti-passive or anti-hegemonic) political practice, one could say that Deleuze and Guattari introduce the concept of the assemblage in *A Thousand Plateaus* to deal with the problem that arose with the desiring machine and for which the concepts base and superstructure were developed in Marxism. "Assemblage" is the term for a new topology. Every assemblage is connected with the other assemblages in a specific way without one determining the others (not even in the final instance). That which is the societal formation in Marxist problematic, however, is only part of the machinic universe. Biotic and abiotic nature is also considered part of the machine. A production process of the undivided whole of nature and society below the anthropomorphous form and state structuring is immanent to the assemblage.[14]

One could say that the concept of the desiring machine (in analogy to Althusser) functioned in the sense of decentering the state and because of this expansion (in analogy to Gramsci) addresses the problem of how a dissymmetrical politics (politics not leading to taking power) has to be constituted to a bourgeois hegemony. This can only be achieved, however, if one (in analogy to Foucault) includes the non-state power technologies. Against this background, Deleuze and Guattari's version of the microphysics of power is to be read as a transfer of the molecular to the level of societal organization and thus virtually as a radicalization of the hegemony approach. Instead of distinguishing between state and non-state or state and civil society, the two operate with concepts like (hard and soft) segmentation and (over-) coding. A virtuality of countless non-coordinated and contradiction-free, mutually catalysing impulses of desire and markings are inscribed in the societal structure. This a-subjective flow of desire is represented in *A Thousand Plateaus* as "smooth", "non-stratified" and "non-striated" space, which enters into the "stratified" and "striated plan of organization" of language, body and subjectivity. In this way, the social structure itself is conceived as movable and mutable; it becomes an assemblage of lines of reterritorialization and deterritorialization, of decoding and recoding. An immanent connection between various practices and structures thus becomes imaginable without having to reduce these to one another.

The societal assemblage is cut and segmented by molecular, molar and quantum physics lines and kept in motion by flows. Deleuze and Guattari distinguish a molar level – in other words centers of power with hard segmentarity that are connected with state apparatuses in the narrow sense – from quantum flows; mediated through a zone of transition evincing a molecular structure, the state apparatuses access these quantum flows, but cannot

completely master them. Between the molar lines generating a hard segmentation and the quantum flows, micrological tissues form, which enable a "realm of properly molecular negotiation", a "transduction" between the molar and the molecular.[15] This micrological tissue, which works with soft and fine segmentation, is conceived following the model of Foucault's "microphysics of power". This means that at the level of the statement regime (discursive practices) and the level of segmentation (non-discursive practices), units are generated, which can be processed without strongly centralist organizations being needed. The technologies of power integrate the quantum flows of desire through their soft segmentation and coding, yet they go beyond these technologies on the other hand, so that constantly new segmentations and (re-) codings must be undertaken to return the lines of flight back to a molecular structure. The centers of power based on hard segmentation undertake a secondary organization of these molecular structures by centralistically binding this relatively flexible level of power and security technologies, in other words recoding and reterritorializing it. The hard segmentation also affects the molecular organizations of power; classes, genders, "races", etc. form in the interplay of these two levels as structural characteristics related to the molar level. However, these are constantly transformed at the molecular level – driven by the flows.

This idea is important for anti-passive politics, because the segmentations at the molecular level of power technologies remain suspended and can be reversed and combined. According to Deleuze and Guattari, these (soft or flexible) segmentations are not coupled per se with a centralization in the sense of hard segmentation, but are instead over-coded in state societies by a central organization of power. In this way, the state is a "resonance apparatus" and an "over-coding machine" or, in the words of the

Marxist state theoretician Nicos Poulantzas, a “consolidation of force relations”[16]. Hence the state is not characterized by the distinction between private and public, but rather by a certain form of social organization: hegemony is thus a productive organization of power that permeates the entire society and is tied to centralist controlling instances. However, these only control indirectly by intervening at the molar level of molar segments and coding permeated by quantum flows. The flows go beyond the apparatuses and institutions, overflow them and lead to constant mutations.

Knowledge

The transformation of society in the sense of a renewed “politics of labor” can therefore not be understood in the sense of simplifying the conditions. The historical development of capitalist production leads instead to an increasingly accentuated “molecularization of human elements”[17]. A social transformation must therefore strive for a different connection of the levels of the molar, the molecular and the quantum flows, the effects of which must prevent passive revolutions at the same time. This is where the question of the social organization of knowledge has a central significance, leading back to the problem of universalism and the poetics of knowledge.

On the one hand, power effects are achieved at the level of knowledge through the discursive layout of social fields and object. This is where Deleuze and Guattari start with their ideas in *What is Philosophy?* By conceptualizing zones of indistinguishability between the field of (natural) science, philosophy and art, they posit the various statement regimes in connection with one another and thus create starting points for transformations in the orders of knowledge: these are to be decentered in the direction of other

dimensions and registers to change the hegemonic relation of the different discourse formations in relation to one another. On the other hand, the social knowledge order is bound to practices of social organization, which produce dispositives with disposing and a disposible subjectivity, in other words leaders and followers in Gramscian terminology. *A Thousand Plateaus* is conceived as "rhizomatic"[18] to avoid doubling the effects of this power dispositive at the level of science and theory. However, the conceptional theoretical work is characterized by an anti-style, the form of which is directed against the disciplining diction of the royal science, seeking to "do justice" to the different materials of expression at the text level with a mixture of styles. This manner of writing thus seeks to undermine the boundaries of discourse formations and their epochal blocks and to contribute to a re-differentiation of knowledge to create new modes of subjectification and living.

It is exactly this displacement of knowledge formations that is not recognized in the criticism from Badiou and others, who see in it a pure "aestheticism", a reduction of thinking to art.[19] They are only able to imagine the problem of an inversion of presumably particular demands into a universal break abstractly, logically or categorically, instead of in the sense of an assemblage, as with Deleuze and Guattari or Foucault, in which the break grows out of an addition of the forces. Badiou & co., on the other hand, see the inversion into the universal guaranteed by an absolutization of subjective decision.

The para-universalists act as though A Thousand Plateaus were to be read as an "artistic critique" in Boltanski's sense, without recognizing that the separation between this and political, economic, etc. critique was actually the result of the historical defeat of the social movements after 1968. It is only in this way

that certain moments, which are often erroneously labeled "molecular", could later be coopted by neoliberalism, which has been capable of successfully recoding the new forms of subjectification.[20] Difference or cognitive capitalism is the effect of a molecular transformism, a kind of passive revolution of assemblages and knowledge formations. The consequence of this is: 1968 can neither be repeated, nor is it sufficient to allegedly learn from the mistakes of 1968 by now focusing solely on "social criticism". The point is a change from within the assemblage, a different, better assemblage.

---

[1] Katja Diefenbach, "1968 and after: Some Comments on Singularity and Minoritarian Politics", in: *transversal* 06 2007, http://eipcp.net/transversal/0607/diefenbach/en.

[2] Whom we also thank for criticism and comments on this article.

[3] Deleuze, Gilles / Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Minneapolis/London: University of Minnesota Press, p. 238.

[4] Cf. Deleuze, Gilles, *Negotiations 1972-1990*, transl. by Martin Joughin, New York: Columbia University Press, 1995.

[5] Deleuze, Gilles / Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia,* Minneapolis/London: University of Minnesota Press, p. 378.

[6] Jacques Rancière, *Die Namen der Geschichte*, Frankfurt am Main: Fischer 1994.

[7] Christine Buci-Glucksmann, “Über die politischen Probleme des Übergangs: Arbeiterklasse, Staat und passive Revolution”, in: *SOPO* 41 1977, p. 13-35, p. 20f.

[8] Cf. ibid., p. 62.

[9] Cf. Stephan Adolphs / Serhat Karakayalı, “Die Aktivierung der Subalternen – Gegenhegemonie und passive Revolution”, in: Sonja Buckel / Andreas Fischer-Lescano (Ed.), *Hegemonie gepanzert mit Zwang. Zivilgesellschaft und Politik im Staatsverständnis Antonio Gramcis*, Baden-Baden: Nomos, p. 121-140, here p. 123-29.

[10] Cf. Louis Althusser, *Ideologie und ideologische Staatsapparate*, Hamburg: VSA 1973, p. 108-168.

[11] Félix Guattari, *Mikro-Politik des Wunsches*, Berlin: Merve 1977, p. 15f.

[12] Ibid., p. 13.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Cf. Félix Guattari, “Über Maschinen”, in: Henning Schmidgen (Ed.), *Ästhetik und Maschinismus. Texte zu und von Félix Guattari*, Berlin: Merve, p. 115-132, here p. 118f.

[15] Cf. Deleuze, Gilles / Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Minneapolis/London: University of Minnesota Press, p. 246.

[16] Cf. Nicos Poulantzas, *Staatstheorie*, Hamburg: VSA 2002, p. 154ff.

[17] Félix Guattari, *Mikro-Politik des Wunsches*, Berlin: 1977, p. 21.

[18] Cf. Félix Guattari / Gilles Deleuze, *A Thousand Plateaus*, op.cit., p. 3-25 .

[19] Cf. Alain Badiou, *Gilles Deleuze. Das Geschrei des Seins*, Berlin: Diaphanes 2003.

[20] Cf. Stephan Adolphs / Serhat Karakayalı, op. cit., p. 130-38.