The Heterogenesis of Fleeing

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In everyday usage fleeing is something for cowards. The virtue of manfully throwing oneself with a weapon into the midst of a fight is opposed to the flight and withdrawal typical of a dishonourable attitude. In the hetero-normative everyday the sanctified mode of subjectivation for the honourable and manly fighter is a decision to take one of two sides, followed by a fight for the sublation [*Aufhebung*] of this division, and the final reestablishment of unity. Movement may only develop in this striated and stratified space between division and unity.

Yet within our narrow geopolitical-discursive space shaped by occidental-dialectical thought we find residues of a figure that affirms flight, cunning elusion, and subversion, while evading the constraint of division and sublation. There are various recent approaches in philosophy, in political practice and in art production that have developed and tested a non-dialectical notion of resistance that goes beyond the concepts of contradiction, negation and reaction. These conceptual developments stretch from various figures of flight to nomadism, desertion, and destitution, to disappearance, betrayal, and diverse concepts of exodus.[1]

I would like to draw out a specific genealogical line of this ensemble of conceptual creations which have gained special meaning in the last thirty years, not least in the field of art, where they - and this is what I wish to problematise here - have often been interpreted in an abusive manner. On the other hand my discussion will thematise the figure of fleeing in its actuality, which I would like to try to exemplify by three video works by the Spanish artist and activist Marcelo Expósito.

Lines of Flight. Some conceptual components

Already in the course of the 1970s, submerged within Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's practice of conceptual invention – as well as in Deleuze's collaboration with Claire Parnet – the notion of a line of flight begins to appear more and more frequently. In 1980, at the climax of Deleuze and Guattari's collaboration – the second volume of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* with the title *A Thousand Plateaus* – the line of flight finally became a central concept within a bundle of conceptual creations, in vicinity to and interference with other new concepts such as deterritorialisation, the body without organs, smooth space and nomadology. Whereas those notions seem to have become almost ubiquitous in certain discourses over the last decades, their specification has never reached an appropriate clarity. The effect of this inaccuracy in the adaptation of Guattari and Deleuze's concepts is on one hand a depoliticisation of these concepts (which were developed within highly political contexts), and on the other hand – and as a result –

an extensive denunciation of its authors as 'postmodern relativists', 'hippies' and 'quixotic theory-poets'.

Against this backdrop I would like to start by sketching the seven most important conceptual components of the line of flight as they appear in the writings of Deleuze and Guattari. These components have in common that they all point to a specific and central strategy, described in the introduction of their last book *What Is Philosophy?* as a *creatio continua* of concepts. This is how Deleuze and Guattari understand the function of philosophy, and I want to add to this proposition two possible forms of its actualisation. On the one hand there is the continuous practice of creating *new* concepts 'that are aerolites rather than commercial products.' (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 11) The creation of concepts functions in this first mode as a radical linguistic break that consciously creates misunderstanding and irritation. Besides this strategy of sending celestial bodies into everyday language there is also a second, no less disturbing possibility of conceptual creation: the radical *dislocation* of concepts, which I would like to discuss in connection to the figures of fleeing.

1) The concrete quality of the word 'flight' has to be investigated against the background of its manifold and misleading connotations of escapism, artistic hermeticism or political withdrawal.[2] This misunderstanding implies that the invocation of the word flight means a personal withdrawal of the subject from the noise and chatter of the world. In the philosophical perspective on the spheres of art production, the exemplary protagonist of flight, for both Deleuze and Giorgio Agamben, is Herman Melville's Bartleby, in Paolo Virno it is the figure of the 'virtuoso' pianist Glenn Gould; in the rapid digestion of these figures by the art discourse they are often quickly reduced as just personifications of individual resistance and, in the case of Bartleby, of individual withdrawal. Luckily this appropriation of the concept of flight was anticipated by Deleuze and Guattari, who unambiguously answered it. In the short eighth chapter of *A Thousand Plateaus* about the novel and its incisions, its breaks and lines of flight they state: 'As for the line of flight, would it not be entirely personal, the way in which an individual escapes on his or her own account, escapes "responsibilities," escapes the world, takes refuge in the desert, or else in art…? False impression.' (Deleuze and Guattari 1988: 225)

Fleeing here does not mean something escapist or pacifying, on the contrary it is an extremely active affair - exemplified in the quotation of the Black-Panther activist George Jackson in *A Thousand Plateaus*[3] - involving the continual search for the newest weapons: 'To flee, but in fleeing to seek a weapon.' (Deleuze and Parnet 102) The connection between flight and weapon undermines the dichotomy of active fight and cowardly flight. Flight here means neither defence nor individualism but an inventive form of offence.

Lines of flight, for their part, never consist in running away from the world but rather in causing runoffs, as when you drill a hole in a pipe; there is no social system that does not leak from

all directions, even if it makes its segments increasingly rigid in order to seal the lines of flight. (Deleuze and Guattari 1988: 225)

2) Lines of flight are not phantasms, nor chimeras. 'The great and only error lies in thinking that a line of flight consists in fleeing from life; the flight into the imaginary, or into art. On the contrary, to flee is to produce the real, to create life, to find a weapon.' (Deleuze and Parnet 36) *To produce the real,* this sounds like an anticipatory answer to the criticism Deleuze and Guattari received in the decades after *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* when they were brushed off as stoned hippie poets and kings of metaphor. Contrary to these denunciations and allegations a militant, sometimes revolutionary tone blows through Deleuze and Guattari's writings in the 1970s, but by excerpting quotes out of context this aspect often gets intentionally lost both in academic and art writing. But the metaphoric is truly the very last thing Deleuze and Guattari would tie up with the business of creating and inventing: 'it is always on a line of flight that we create, not, indeed because we imagine that we are dreaming but, on the contrary, because we trace out the real on it, we compose there a plane of consistence.' (Deleuze and Parnet: 102)

3) As if fleeing alone isn't suspicious enough, it is regularly accompanied with further vocabulary from the arsenal of denunciation found in military language: Flight means desertion, fleeing means betraying. But in appropriating the concept of betrayal a radical reassessment takes place, a radical shift first of all concerning the object of betrayal: 'We betray the fixed powers that try to hold us back, the established powers of the earth.' (Deleuze and Parnet 30) Fixed and established powers do not form an outside; they traverse our bodies, our relations, our worlds. The traitor therefore betrays her own realm, her own gender, her class, and her majority. To betray one's own majority means to drop out of one's own dominant normality. 'For it is difficult to be a traitor; it is to create. One has to lose one's identity, one's face, in it. One has to disappear, to become unknown.' (Deleuze and Parnet 33) At the beginning of betrayal is the movement of disappearance, of becoming-nobody as a break of loyalty to the logic and to the terror of identity, representation and visibility. Yet, as an absolute act that would result in *being*-nobody, to loose the face, to abandon identity, to disappear is perhaps not only difficult but not even imaginable, least of all in the business of art and writing with their manifold modes of accumulating symbolic capital. Rather, betrayal as a creative act has to be imagined and actualised as a tendency of disappearance, as a movement that constantly has to be instituted, which again and again starts anew and thwarts the institutions, the structures, and the state apparatuses of representation.

4) The concept of the line is also removed from its everyday meaning within the conceptual assemblage of the flight-line. According to Deleuze and Guattari lines of flight are not continuous

lines, unbroken and straight, but combinations of flows and incisions, a continuous stuttering, a stumbling, often beside the usual tracks. There is nothing regular in the lines of flight, nothing divine, nothing that commands over territories, over possessions, over striated spaces dominated by straight-ahead movement. Instead a line of flight implies a demonic multitude, hopping from one interval to the next, jumping over intervals. (Deleuze and Parnet 30 ff.) [4]

Even though the concept of flight seems to assume a movement from one place to another, which is also suggested by the mathematical definition of the line, this is in fact not the case with the line of flight. 'The line is between points, in their midst, and no longer goes from one point to another.' (Deleuze and Guattari 1988: 298) The line runs through points, between points, as a flow through the middle, a rampant middle without beginning or end. As a result, lines of flight can have a specific movement (although not from one point to another), but they can also take place on the spot as a motionless journey, a flight without changing place. Deleuze (and on this point he is not entirely in personal accordance with Guattari) repeatedly quotes in this context (where he also says that becoming shouldn't be frightened off) the philosopher of history and universal historian Arnold Toynbee on the surprising quality of the nomadic:

> Toynbee shows that nomads in the strict, geographical sense are neither migrants nor travellers, but, on the contrary, those who do not move, those who cling onto the steppe, who are immobile with big strides, following a line of flight on the spot, the greatest inventors of new weapons. (Deleuze and Parnet 28)[5]

Such paradoxes of nomads not moving from their spot, or fleeing as marking time seem to me especially helpful in dealing with the all too flowery traditions of interpreting Deleuze and Guattari: from the nomadological pathos of the cosmopolitan intellectual to the figure of migration as a new revolutionary subject.

5) In contrast to traditional left, particularly Marxist political theory, there are no concepts of the individual and of society in Deleuze and Guattari. Not so much in their place, but rather undermining this specific axis of striating thought, both authors use notions like singularity and event. Like these, lines of flight are not only non-escapist and non-individual, they cross the binary logic of collective and individual. For Deleuze and Guattari such oppositions don't describe a relevant reality:

> It is possible for a single group, or a single individual even, to exhibit all the lines we have been discussing simultaneously. But it is most frequently the case that a single group or individual functions as a line of flight; that group or individual creates the line

rather than following it, is itself the living weapon it forges rather than stealing one.

(Deleuze and Guattari 1988: 226)

6) Fleeing is not simply an empty movement of one or more people escaping. In place of a subject-object relation between the one who draws a line of flight and the line of flight as such, between the one forging a weapon or appropriating it and the weapon as such, fleeing *becomes* at the same time an invention, and therefore a productive, creative, inventive weapon. Instead of understanding fleeing and taking up a weapon as contrasting poles and referring to them as neatly separated modes of subjectivation, for example the (effeminate) coward and the (manly) hero, we must understand flight and weapon as being interlinked. Creation takes place precisely in this concatenation of fleeing and inventing. Different possible worlds are created precisely on the lines of flight. Creating worlds also means fleeing the idea of only one possible world, and at the same time it means creating ever-new ones. Flight as *de*stitution overlaps with a *con*stitution of new social concatenations, with a constituent power, with an *in*stituent practice.

7) Finally the line of flight is *primary.* Not in the sense of a chronology or an eternal universality but rather as constitutive for the social plane of immanence. Here it is necessary to once again read the notion of flight against its everyday use, against the idea of flight being a reaction to an antecedent situation, an antecedent attack.

One might say in a certain sense that what is primary in a society are the lines, the movements of flight. For, far from being a flight from the social, far from being utopian or even ideological, these constitute the social field, trace out its gradation and its boundaries, the whole of its becomings. (Deleuze and Parnet 101)[6]

If we consider this primacy of lines of flight as a mode of subjectivation that does not just simply react to something, then the final semantic consequence is a necessary shift from a 'flight from ...' to fleeing as an absolute concept.

'The Year in Which the Future Ended (Began)'
In his video *The Year in Which the Future Ended (Began)* (12 min., 2007) Marcelo Expósito draws two lines of flight that thwart the dichotomies of a politics of remembrance. Here fleeing carries us beyond conventional forms of documentary practice in order to actualise the remains of a traumatic

history in a very different way.[7] Instead of burying the future by burying the past under the cover of pseudo-objective representations, Expósito introduces memory work as a *twofold* archaeological practice. Whilst the past often becomes petrified in the procedures of writing history and in the classical forms of documentary, here a present-becoming is to be worked out that emerges *in-between* the images, and at the same time *in-between* the archaeological findings. *Worked* out, yes, because memory does not just come about simply through contemplation: 'memory is work, not something you can just contemplate.'[8]

The point of flight for Marcelo Expósito's video is the year 1977, the year when the first democratic elections took place in Spain, and according to the official history the high point of the democratic process in Spain. For Expósito, however, speaking 30 years later, it was 'the year in which the future ended (began).' Much could be said about the emptiness of this sanctioned date, much also about the continuities of the Franco regime beyond this threshold and up to today. Similar to the way the notion of 'transition' is used for the neoliberal transformation process taking place in the ex-communist countries of Europe, the phrase 'transition towards democracy' is also of the great significance in Spain. And as this notion serves to test new forms of neoliberal exploitation under the cover of democratic promises in the post-communist countries, there are also indications that the late introduction of democracy in Spain is not only an adjustment to Western European normality. Yet, Expósito's interest is initially less about the thirty years that have since passed and about the accumulated layers of repression that have congealed in this time. In fact, he draws his line of flight back to 40 years before 1977. In a dreamlike and accelerated rewind he accumulates representative images of the Franco period's clerical fascism, but also the resistance against it, from the attacks of ETA in the early 1970s via the various insurgencies of the 1960s and 1950s. The frenzied rush into the past then encounters the years of purging and isolation after the war, and finally the civil war and revolution. The assumption of the video is that the

> official accounts of the transition to democracy are largely naturalised through a form of visual representation based on over-codified images that, paradoxically, increasingly show less and at the same time increasingly hinder the possibility of understanding the historical events that they supposedly represent.[9]

The canonical repetition of the images, especially in the case of jubilee events, halts the past and rudely decontextualises it. This is why Expósito invents his first line of flight trying to betray the dominant representation, to revive the images of the past. On this first line Expósito over-affirms the rude form of official documentation by accelerating the sequences of the canonized images in a rampant rewind, so that they completely lose their representational connotations. The memory and dream work of the images serve here to connect past and future, which lose their linear alignment

and melt into a flow, a line of flight, which cleaves a new way between the points of dominant history.

In the video's final passages however a robust archaeological practice is added to this first line of flight, which is an archaeology of images. The motto of the video, 'to stir up the underworld', not only refers to an archaeology of *visual* representation, but also to a concrete undertaking, to the small but effective social movements of those who dig up the bones of hundreds of civil war fighters and anonymous victims of the Franco regime in the here and now. In the meticulous work of excavation, sorting, labelling and documentation, 439 bodies of Republican soldiers of the civil war, as well as victims of Franco's reprisals in the early years after the war were exhumed in the central Spanish commune Uclés between 2005 and 2007.[10]

This specific form of memory work finds itself embedded in a social movement working underground like a mole, which stirs-up the official politics of the Spanish state, or, as Marcelo Expósito puts it, creates 'a truly micropolitical earthquake':

> Since the end of the 90s some people decided: if the law and the state does not take any decision in terms of what to do with our relatives buried like animals everywhere around the country, we are just gonna go and take them out - that means that an impressive social process has taken place: dozens of what are officially called *asociaciones por la recuperación de la memoria histórica* (associations for the recovery of historical memory) have been created, with the main aim to locate where corpses are buried, and start the process of exhuming the corpses (individually or collectively), trying to identify the relatives, and burying them again with honours and with a proper name, when possible.
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> Some of these associations are linked to the communist party, others are close to the CGT (the anarcho-syndicalist union), others are independent; some are connected in networks, others not so much, but the interesting question is how they operate: They profit from the fact that they move in "a-legality" - normally they are started by people who are relatives (often the grandchildren of those who were repressed and assassinated) - and they are joined by more and more people: those who give testimonies of the shootings or the burials, local historians, lawyers, archaeologists, politicians sometimes who can give "unofficial" shelter to some of the activities, forensic scientists, volunteers who give a hand in several kinds of activities: excavations, driving cars [...].
>
> Hundreds of people joining their very different knowledge and competencies in order to construct a network of practical activities in order to ... - what to say? just exhuming corpses? - not only that - it's a kind of taking the phantom out - like a real return of the

repressed, which totally puts in question, on nearly a preconscious level, in my opinion, the psycho-social basis of the democratic transition and our present political order.[11]

Here the concrete archaeological movement complements the other line of flight, the one of visual representation, with a material memory work that subverts the underground connections between fascist history and today's governmentality. Material and immaterial memory work overlap, developing complementary strategies of commemoration in becoming and so refute collaboration with oblivion. Whereas the official account of the democratisation process disconnects the future from any relation to the past, in Expósito's work the relation between past and future is actualised in both lines of flight, it is put into a disquieting tension within the present becoming. To not let the past rest, but rather to speed it up, to put it into a state of unrest, this is what lines of flight mean here.

The Deleuzianism of Antonio Negri

Whereas 1977 marks a dubious turning point or 'transition' in Spain, the same year in Italy was one of both revolt and the beginning of the *anni di piombo,* the leaden years. The genealogy of (post) operaist thought was an important strand of the struggles developing in Italy during the 60s and 70s; from the labour struggle taking place in the big factories to the non-institutional strategies of the *autonomia operaia,* and to the early theoretical and practical ways of contesting the transformations of the capitalist mode of production that continue today. In these experiences of the *autonomia* flight was already a familiar idea, mainly in terms of a flight from the factories. Antonio Negri, who significantly contributed to the formation of the operaist movement from the beginning of the 60s, founded the group *autonomia operaia* in 1969. This group developed notions like *operaio sociale,* social worker and *fabbrica diffusa*, all of which no longer understood the factory as the centre of production and conflict, but more diffuse spaces and intersections, potentially the society as a whole.

After his arrest on the charge of terrorism, and following his denunciation as *cattivo maestro*, Negri fled to Paris and linked the (post-) Marxist operaist theory more strongly with those of the post-structuralist colleagues in his French exile. Negri and Guattari wrote a book together (*Nouvelles espaces de liberté*, 1985),[12] while his relationship to Deleuze could be inferred from an interview Negri conducted with Deleuze called 'Control and Becoming'. There Deleuze repeats his dissociation from the traditional Marxist concern with contradictions, and returns to the notion of the line of flight:

> First, we think any society is defined not so much by its contradictions as by its lines of flight, it flees all over the place, and it's very interesting to try and follow the lines of flight taking shape at some particular moment or another. (Deleuze 1995: 171)

Negri seems not to have forgotten the stimulation of the time in Paris, a few years later he even describes his choice of returning to Italian prison from Paris exile in 1997 as a 'line of flight'. (Negri 1998: 17)

That's how the figure of fleeing as a specific form of 'being-against' was finally and prominently taken on in the political manifesto of *Empire* Negri co-authored with Michael Hardt around the turn of the millennium. With the concepts 'nomadism', 'desertion', and 'exodus' Hardt and Negri continued conceptualizing the non-dialectical form of resistance by flight begun by Deleuze and Guattari.

> Whereas being-against in modernity often meant a direct and/or dialectical opposition of forces, in postmodernity being-against might well be most effective in an oblique or diagonal stance. Battles against the Empire might be won through subtraction and defection. This desertion does not have a place; it is the evacuation of the places of power. (Hardt and Negri 212)

Migrant exodus appears in *Empire* as a dismissal of the national state logic of borders and as an expression of the right to freedom of movement. Besides this exodus from peripheries suffering from new forms of exploitation in the global post-Fordist regime, three further categories of exodus appear in the books of Hardt and Negri: The old figure, developed in the *autonomia*, of the exodus of workers from the factories, and therefore also from the patriarchal and heteronormative conditions of labour; the decline of the state and representative democracy as exodus from an obsolete form of government and being governed; and finally an exodus from the narrow boundaries of the anthropological scheme that wants to determine humans as the centre and confine them within the boundaries of their gendered bodies.

Whereas the all too sympathetic propagation of migration as a revolutionary subject poses a problem in the writings of Hardt and Negri,[13] the punch line of Negri's concept of exodus lies in an activist turn of the figure of flight towards the militant. This connotation is also inherent in Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the line of flight, but in Negri both the analysis of the revolutionary past and the promise of a new communism get a tactical touch of a wild flight that

provokes the accumulation of desire rather than its loss: 'For me, exodus sometimes requires force.'[14]

'Radical Imagination'

Such a culmination, such an activist twist can be traced in another video by Marcelo Expósito. *Radical Imagination (Carnivals of Resistance)* (61 min., 2004)[15] presents the experiences of Reclaim the Streets, one of the most important groups from the 1990s that worked with new, partly artistic forms of political activism.[16] Reclaim the Streets found their highly diverse origins in the ecological and rave movements of the early 1990s, and organised numerous radical occupations of public spaces in London and other British cities. Expósito's video focuses mainly on the occupation of the financial centre in London, one of the main actions that took place on the 'Global Action Day Against Capital', 18th June, 1999, which became known as 'J-18' and 'Carnival against Capital'.

One component of the becoming-aesthetic of the new political practices is their emphasis on questions of form: forms of organisation, forms of action, non-representational forms of representation. In this context carnival functions less as a simple antagonism - '*against* capital' - and more as a figure fleeing such dichotomies and overcoming classical forms of protest. Radical carnival does not enact a Dionysian freak-out that would enable us to work more efficiently afterwards. Here being *against* is not a transgressive gesture trying to run against a border or overcome it. Rather, in this carnivalesque flight the inventive power of new forms of political organisation and action become important which do not separate politics and aesthetics, but develop a new political aesthetics.

Marcelo Expósito not only shows that 'Carnival against Capital' anticipated or developed the most important forms of action for the anti-globalisation movement, his video also refers to the historical forerunners of the carnival as insurgence. These forerunners had one thing in common: contrary to orderly strikes and demonstrations where protest masses tend to be homogenised into a structure from the beginning, in this carnival a formation emerges that I call a *non-conforming* mass. Against the denunciation of the mass as grey, indifferent, and homogenous, against the negative connotations of the mass that can also be found in leftist discourses, the concept of a *non-conforming* mass suggests that it cannot be understood as *uni-form.* Such a non-conforming formation organises itself in heterogeneity and difference, as a permeable, fluctuating, diffused mass. Its non-conformity is double: The mass signals its non-conformity by not agreeing with the form of how it is governed, and its unity remains exclusively negative, based on the rejection of the specific forms of being governed. On the other hand, non-conformity is the negation of every

positive description of community and means the permanent differentiation of the singular. The non-conforming mass is not locked into *one* form, but moves itself, space and sociality.

In the non-conforming form of the radical carnival the most problematic separation in aesthetic as well as political representation, the separation between active and passive components, is dissolved. This is shown in a statement of Mikhail Bakhtin, quoted in the video: 'Carnival ignores any distinction between actor and spectator, it does away with the stage, the spectators don't go to a carnival, they are the carnival.'[17] If crisis and insurgence, confusion and protest emerge in the un-formed, formless, non-conforming flows of radical carnival, then this is not about the effect of an inside on an outside, an 'outside effect', achieving the education or involvement of those positioned outside - the anonymous art audience or the revolutionary subject - persons aesthetically and politically yet to be enlightened. What is important is a new mixture of bodies and signs that does not want to present itself to an outside, that wants to be different and excessive, as excessive and different *as possible* - even if only for the short time of the event, the rupture, inventing ever new tricks to not being counted, striated and divided by a state apparatus. But the 'Carnival against Capital' not only enables the event, the rupture, the flight, but also social recompositions, the emergence of desiring machines by which the striation of space is disrupted. This double movement, these parallel lines of flight and weapon, of suspending rupture and social recomposition, inform the quality of transgression on the plane of immanence as it shapes the radical carnival. This form of *immanent transgression* means that there is no spatial beyond of transgression, but also no temporal beyond, no succession of flight and invention, of fleeing and constituent power. The space where immanent transgression takes place is the only possible space of transgression. The time of immanent transgression is the actualisation of two temporalities of the line of flight, the event of protest in fleeing and the duration of the inventive constituent power. With the words of the Reclaim the Streets activist John Jordan: 'We want to get away from a traditional confrontational protest situation and prefigure our imagined world in the moment of protest itself.'[18]

Paul Virno and the Grammar of Exodus

Paolo Virno is a philosopher who mainly works on the philosophy of language. This philosophy, like that of Antonio Negri – although less obviously – also emerges from the Marxist background of Italian operaist and post-operaist theory. As a young man in the 1970s Virno was active in the group *Potere Operaio,* and spent three years, up to his acquittal, in prison because of it. Unlike Negri, Virno has no personal relations or theoretical filiations to Deleuze and Guattari, and his work shows no explicit references to the French line. Yet the resonances between the different

European flows of political philosophy, as they shaped the late 20th century, also appear in Virno's central concepts.

Virno develops his own concept of flight and exodus very early, and as a direct result of his experiences of the *autonomia* in the 1970s. In September 1981 he published the short essay 'Il gusto dell'abbondanza' ('The Taste of Abundance'), where he clearly outlines his concept of exodus.[19] Beginning from an image already described by Marx as the crisis of the capitalist accumulation process, the desertion of workers from the factory, Virno offers an interpretation of the difficulties of implementing capitalism in the USA. Low property prices, an almost inexhaustible reservoir of land, and a situation of overabundance enabled a mass flight from work under the wage lords. According to Virno, the cult of mobility emerging in the 1970s, the desire to escape unambiguousness, and the desertion from the factories were repetitions of this early American crisis of capitalism: 'Nomadism, individual freedom, desertion, and the feeling of abundance nourish the contemporary social conflict.' (Virno 2002: 181) Already in 1981 Virno concludes his essay about exodus with the following sentences, which have remained his 'program' until today:

> Disobedience and flight are not in any case a negative gesture that exempts one from action and responsibility. To the contrary, to desert means to modify the conditions within which the conflict is played instead of submitting to them. And the positive construction of a favorable scenario demands more initiative than the clash with pre-fixed conditions. An affirmative "doing" qualifies defection, impressing a sensual and operative taste on the present. The conflict is engaged starting from what we have constituted through fleeing in order to defend social relations and new forms of life out of which we are already making experience. To the ancient idea of fleeing in order to better attack is added the certainty that the fight will be all the more effective if one has something else to lose besides one's own chains. (Virno 2002: 181)

In his most well known book, *A Grammar of the Multitude,* Virno returns after almost twenty years to the figure of (radical) disobedience and flight. (2004: 69-71) There he describes, amongst other things, the migration of the political from the "public sphere" into the realm of production. He explains the subsumption of political acts by the work process, and particularly by virtuosity. In it Virno sees the essential premise of contemporary production connected with the emergence of a new historical-political "subject": the post-Fordist multitude. Certainly, upon reading *A Grammar of the Multitude* the impression might arise that Virno, in contrast to the older Negri, is more interested in the grammar than in the multitude. His interest in questions from the philosophy of language, and his emphasis on language as an undefined score common to all humans confirms

this interpretation. But it is the continuous quality of Virno's writing to connect by surprising breaks and bridges these questions of language and intellect as a trans-individual basis of co-operation and as 'general intellect' to components of political philosophy.

In Virno's latest book *Motto di spirito e azione innovativa* (*Wit and Innovative Action*) this theoretical strategy of politicizing linguistic grammar is repeated once again. Initially the book offers a basic discussion of the 'essence', 'structure' and 'logic' of the joke in relation to the emergence of creativity and innovative action. The book's starting point is Freud's study of the joke, published in 1905. Virno sees this book as a significant attempt to interpret the various kinds of joke in a quasi-*botanical* way, and he proceeds in a similar, although - like Deleuze and Guattari - strictly anti-Freudian manner.

But Virno is not interested in the joke *per se*. According to him the joke is a diagram of innovative action. In its grammar macrocosmic changes of life forms are mirrored in miniature. In extensive philosophical elaborations, mainly about Aristotle, Wittgenstein and Carl Schmitt, Virno tries to show that it is the joke that demonstrates that the world could be changed and how the world could be changed. And after these elaborations about, amongst other things, the difficulty in applying a rule and its relation to the exception and the state of exception, he finally and quite surprisingly returns to two of his most well-known figures from *A Grammar of the Multitude.* In *Motto di spirito e azione innovativa* these figures appear first of all as two basic types of joke. For Virno these are the multiple, ambivalent use of concepts and sayings, and the dislocation of meaning. All jokes as well as all human undertakings to change their form of life nourish themselves, according to Virno, *either* from the unusual combination of existing elements *or* from an abrupt deviation. In this context jokes become the microcosm where we experience the unexpected combination and shift of meaning as the basis of a change in forms of life. These are exactly the two modes of *creatio continua* of concepts that I referred to at the beginning of this text: the new combination, the recomposition that consciously creates misunderstanding and irritation and the radical dislocation of concepts from their familiar contexts. But we find this basic typology on the macroscopic level as well, as innovation and exodus – or, to return to the key concepts of this text, as inventing and fleeing, weapon and flight, rupture and recomposition, destitution and instituent practice.

Virno writes about the link between jokes as dislocations and the oldest stories of exodus: The logical-linguistic resources needed for finding a way out of Egypt are exactly those that jokes feed upon. These are characterised by deferral and dislocation, that is, by an abrupt deviation from the axis of the discourse. On a linguistic level this deviation means instantly changing the subject if a conversation proceeds as if on train tracks. In the political field it is actualised as a collective defection, as exodus. Confronted with the question of whether they should be subordinate or openly rebel against the pharaoh's domination, the Israelites invent a possibility no one previously

reckoned with: they flee. Instead of treating the problem as a decision between given alternatives, exodus changes the context this problem appeared in. This opens, Virno argues in *Motto di spirito e azione innovativa,* a side road not yet inscribed into existing political maps, and so changes the very grammar determining the options of thinkable choices:

> Exodus is the transmission of the heuristic procedure the mathematicians call data variations, onto political practice. By preferring secondary or heterogeneous factors we gradually move away from a specific problem, namely the question submission or insurrection, to a completely different problem: How can we actualize a movement of desertion and simultaneously test forms of self-administration which previously were unthinkable? (2005 79)[20]

From Virno's first political writings on exodus to the language philosophy of the recent books this Deleuzo-Guattarian figure re-appears: there is a concatenation between flight and weapon, between the movement of fleeing, of deserting, of suspending and the virtuosic, inventive, constituent power of social recomposition that emerges anew in the setting of post-Fordist capitalism.

'The City Factory'. To escape the city as factory

> So what score are present-day virtuosos playing from? I suggest the following answer: every day, contemporary virtuosos (taking virtuosity as an activity without a finished work, in need of a public space), [...] are following that specific and peculiar score which is the 'general intellect', the whole ensemble of human intellectual abilities.[20]

With a lot of political and aesthetic intuition Marcelo Expósito approaches the actualisation of Virno's conceptual assemblage in his video *First of May (the City-Factory)* (62 min., 2004).[21] The video makes a complex introduction to the transformation from the Fordist paradigm of the factory to the post-Fordist paradigm of virtuoso cognitive and affective work. With the example of the Fiat factory at Lingotto, once a proud centre of automobile production and now a hotel and conference centre and example of the *fabbrica diffusa,* Expósito shows in meaningful and detailed images those transformations of the political and of the means of production described by Virno. Parallel to this a discussion of forms of resistance runs through the video, from strikes to interventions into the

city as the space of the post-Fordist factory, from clogs thrown into the machinery to the figure of the hacker disrupting the machinery of communication, from the striking workers of the Fordist factory to the contemporary practice of the ChainWorkers and the Euromayday movement as a transnational renewal of the political practice of the 1st of May.[22]

In post-Fordist capitalism labour increasingly develops towards a virtuoso performance without product. It demands a space that is structured like the public. It demands the presence of others, which Hannah Arendt recognised as the basic category of the political. It demands that one exposes oneself to the gaze of others, and as a result co-operation and communication become basic qualities of labour, and virtuosity and performativity become necessary inter-subjective competences.[23] Virno's example comes from the field of virtuosity in the narrow everyday-sense: Glenn Gould hated to perform in front of the public and therefore retreated to the recording studio. Of course, this retreat is by no means a simple withdrawal to the artist's ivory tower. In his video Marcelo Expósito shows Glenn Gould's practice in an astonishing way: Virtuosity takes place here as a suspension of his appearance as 'performing artist' and at the same time within the meticulous work of a new arrangement of the material in post-production – suspension and recomposition as the two sides of a line of flight. Whereas Gould rejected reproducing scores within the concert business, he attended all the more intensively to a potential new arrangement of the given material in an undefined score.

But this line of flight is no longer the exclusive competence of the virtuosic artist, today it also belongs to the contemporary every-day virtuosos Virno speaks of. The every-day flight from performativity as representation and the weapons of the new (social) arrangements are also implicit components of Expósito's description of Euromayday. If the factory spreads into the whole city, then 'the city is the new space of labour, the territory to be subverted and reorganized by the new antagonist forces.'[24] And this de- and reterritorialization has also happened in many cities from the middle of this decade: Since 2004, like an accelerated variation of the practice of Reclaim the Streets a stream of dancing, chanting, painting people rolls through many European city centres on the 1st of May. Reclaiming the city streets, the city walls and the social spaces occurs as a suspension of traditional protest forms and as a recomposition of bodies and signs in a territory where action and representation blur. In this way the diffusion of the virtuosic/artistic into the city of cognitive capitalism fights back: As the logos and displays of corporate capitalism, which differentially unify city centres, exist due to the creativity of a multiplicity of cognitive workers as virtuosos, the score of creativity - exercised within precarious jobs - now spreads as an opponent over the logos and displays of the urban zone of consumption:

on the walls, the advertisements, the representations of the state, the banks or the big brands, appear the new signs that give visibility to the 'precariato sociale' of the city as an emergent social subject.[25]

Marcelo Expósito's video works actualise this twofold fleeing and invention (of searching/finding the weapon) movement to be found in different variations in Deleuze/Guattari, Negri and Virno, as well as in the artistic-political practices of the last ten years. The videos however, cannot simply be understood as representation, but rather empathically depict the interwoven currents of theory and practice. They draw a line of flight from conventional documentary practices (historiographic, artistic and activist), and at the same time they are interventions into those political practices that have abandoned the old figure of the opposition and separation of politics and aesthetics.

Translated from German by Anita Fricek and Stephen Zepke.

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1. I develop some of these figures in 'Fluchtlinie und Exodus. Zu einigen offensiven Figuren des Fliehens', in S. Nowotny and G. Raunig (eds), *Instituierende Praxen. Bruchlinien der Institutionskritik*, Vienna: Turia + Kant, 2008, pp. 209-218.

2. I problematised this specific misunderstanding, mainly in terms of the art world in 'Instituent Practices, Fleeing, Instituting, Transforming', in Raunig and Ray (eds) 2009: 3-11. Also available at: http://eipcp.net/transversal/0106/raunig/en.

3. 'I may be running, but I'm looking for a gun as I go.' (Deleuze and Guattari 1988: 226)

4. See also Deleuze 1994: 37

5. See also Deleuze 1995: 77

6. The notion of the 'primacy of lines of flight' is explicitly developed on p. 102. On the primacy of resistance see Raunig 2007: 44-54.

7. Marcelo Expósito has also expanded the notion of flight in a self-reflective text where he describes his double movement of entering into (art) institutions and escaping from them: 'Inside and Outside the Art Institution: Self-Valorisation and Montage in Contemporary Art', in Raunig and Ray 2009: 141-153. Also available at: http://eipcp.net/transversal/0407/exposito/en.

8 . Quotation from the video.

9. Marcelo Expósito, *The Year in which the Future Ended (Began)* can be seen at: http://www.hamacaonline.net/obra.php?id=592

10. See http://www.armhcuenca.org

11. Marcelo Expósito, in email exchange with the author, 15.12.2008.

12. Translated as *Communists Like Us*, translated by M. Ryan, New York: Semiotext(e), 1990.

13. For a critique of Negri/Hardt's exodus notion, see Katja Diefenbach, 'New Angels. On the Happiness of Being Communist: Multitude in Empire', available at: http://eipcp.net/transversal/0303/diefenbach/en.

14. 'What makes a biopolitical space? *A discussion with Toni Negri*'. Available at: http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2008-01-21-negri-en.html

15 . Marcelo Expósito, *Radical Imagination (Carnivals of Resistance)* can be seen at http://www.hamacaonline.net/obra.php?id=244. See also: http://marceloexpositonet

16 . See Marion Hamm 'Reclaim the Streets! Global Protests and Local Space', http://eipcp.net/transversal/0902/hamm/en and John Jordan, 'Notes Whilst Walking on "How to Break the Heart of Empire"', http://eipcp.net/transversal/1007/jordan/en.

17 . Mikhail Bakhtin, quoted in Marcelo Expósito, *Radical Imagination (Carnivals of Resistance)*.

18 . John Jordan in Marcelo Expósito, *Radical Imagination (Carnivals of Resistance)*.

19 . Republished as 'Dell'Esodo', in Virno 2002: 179-184.

20 . On critique as suspension and recomposition, see Gerald Raunig, 'What is Critique? Suspension and Recomposition in Textual and Social Machines', in Raunig and Ray (eds) 2009: 113-130. Also available at http://eipcp.net/transversal/0808/raunig/en.

20. Paolo Virno in Marcelo Expósito, *First of May (the City-Factory)*.

21. Marcelo Expósito, *First of May (the City-Factory)* can be seen at http://www.hamacaonline.net/obra.php?id=240

22. See http://euromayday.org as well as Gerald Raunig, *A Thousand Machines. A Concise Philosophy of the Machine as Social Movement*, translated by A. Derieg. New York: Semiotext(e), 2009.

23. Virno specifies the notion of performativity himself, mainly in relation to the contemporary social movement he therefore also calls 'performative'. See 'Un movimento performativo', http://eipcp.net/transversal/0704/virno/it. In this 2005 text Virno analyses the question of why the anti-globalisation movement 'did not sufficiently bundle those forms of struggle which are able to change the state of the precarious, temporary and a-typical labour into subversive political potency.' For more on virtuosity, see Isabell Lorey, 'Virtuosos of Freedom', available at: http://eipcp.net/transversal/0207/lorey/en.

24. Quote from Marcelo Expósito, *First of May (the City-Factory)*.

25. Quote from Marcelo Expósito, *First of May (the City-Factory)*.