

On 'Three Dots' of Critique: Indirection, Indifference, Transversality

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With this intervention I want to continue my engagement with critique in the Foucaultian manner, as being concerned with an 'art of not being governed like that' (Foucault 2007). As I have argued in my last year's contribution to the *Terra Critica* workshop, continuing critical thinking and critical engagements in this sense *today* does for me not mean to reclaim a realm 'outside of power' or an end of 'critical conditions'. It means instead to affirm a fully immanent approach and engagement with the matters at stake – in a com-passionate manner (Ettinger 2009, Haraway 2008) – acknowledging constitutive implication in the critical endeavors we're negotiating.¹ 'On 'three dots' of critique' follows both Félix Guattari's *The Three Ecologies* and Virginia Woolf's *Three Guineas* as critical engagements concerned with precisely such art and concern of 'not to be governed like that', and what I want to bring to the table of our discussion are three to me significant aspects of their *e/affective* criticality: indirection, indifference, transversality. In the short intervention style of this paper I won't be able to elaborate in any sufficient detail the significant theoretico-methodological dimensions all three terms suggest to me. What I want to achieve is merely pointing them out with the help of the texts, from which I hope then that further discussion can emerge.

Indirection

How to produce an *e/affective* critique? How to be *e/affectively* critical?² It is to this question that I continually came back in my reading of especially Woolf's *Three Guineas*, following her through her three fact-fictional letters. What to do when addressed (and immediately touched) by an urgent call that needs to be responded to? How to respond in a fashion that does not merely choose sides and/or lay the issue aside, but expresses adequately the complexity of matters at stake? I see this as Woolf's *critical* situation when being confronted with this letter that, as she says, has been now lying around unanswered for "three years" already, and that has this immense question in it: "How in your opinion are we to prevent war?" (Woolf, 3)

I need to leave aside here the quite suggestive question how precisely the three letters with three guineas to distribute in the three years that this one letter lay before her might matter to the whole discussion of critique.³ But Woolf's (literary and political) strategy to continually *defer a direct answer* is of great significance to me here, and I want to suggest her indirection as useful if we are after specifying *e/affective* modi of critique.

¹ Cf. http://terracritica.net/wp-content/uploads/Thiele_positionpaper.pdf.

² The superposition of effect and affect into *e/affective* will be addressed more extensively below with the help of François Jullien. However, for me it is certainly most of all linked to a Deleuzian/Spinozian heritage of affectivity as the body's capacity to affect and be affected whereby both a too hastily humanist understanding of what a body is and also the too simple (post-)modern oppositional setting of affect and ratio is to be avoided. The most *e/affective* dimension of the Spinozian tradition to me is that Spinoza's *Affektenlehre* speaks from within rationalism and the tradition of 'radical enlightenment'.

³ That she even ends her final letter by stating "[n]ow, since you are pressed for time, let me make an end; apologizing *three times over to the three of you*" (Woolf, 144, my emphasis), makes this question even richer in suggestion.

That indirection is Woolf's strategy in her response(s), we can trace right from the very beginning. She starts her first approach to answer by stating that it "takes time" to find good explanations for the many answers that "have suggested themselves" (3). Slowness is, thus, the rhythm she suggests – "[t]hree years is a long time" (3). We can also detect the significance of indirection in Woolf by simply counting (especially in this first part of *Three Guineas*) how frequently it is said that "the daughters of educated men have no direct influence" (13), that it is "the indirect nature" (15) of influence on these matters – war, culture, and freedom – that also marks Woolf's writing. And, of course, we can follow it by simply listening to her argumentation in each of the three parts in which she defers the question respectively the prevention of war to always another question: women's education (the "imperfect" women's college), women's professions (the ambivalence of "earning her own living"), and women's difference (the provocative suggestion of the "Outsiders' Society").

If it is with these powers of indirection that Woolf's literary critical engagement with both the addressee of her letter and the issues at stake becomes so *e/affective*, then as the critical strategy chosen by Woolf, indirection becomes significant on (again) three levels: used as a *politics of location*, indirection does not hide but instead highlights the historically specific distribution of speaking positions and silences within the terrain of the discussion at stake; as a *diffractive manoeuvre*, Woolf by indirect-ing the discussion 'gains space' for the matters at stake. In her answers we see new interference patterns emerge and, thereby, the terrain of discussion itself is reopened; and as an *earthly practice*, Woolf is fully aware of the necessary entanglements with-in the matters at stake – however indirect it may be. Indirection, thus, is also of a different 'logic' than any either/or criticism.⁴

Indifference

If we at this moment compare notes with the French philosopher François Jullien who writes in *A Treatise on Efficacy: Between Western and Chinese Thinking* (2004) that reaching effectivity might not imply "a psychology of will" but "[a]ll that is needed is a phenomenology of effectivity – as in affectivity – that is to say, effectiveness", we can further specify what is theoretically so significant here.⁵ Reading Woolf and Guattari with Jullien's argumentative move from effectiveness as efficacy (a purely willed effect) to efficiency (emergent – indirect – effectiveness), it might be possible to argue that criticality's effectiveness "is not something that one 'seeks', steering towards it directly and deliberately". Rather, critical "strategy is always a matter of how to impinge upon the process upstream (*en amont*), in such a way that an effect will then tend to 'come' of its own accord" (Jullien, 121). Such emergent, processual effectiveness does not confront head on, but shows – on first sight at least – even indifference in respect to the wished for result. Jullien here speaks of a thinking of efficiency "unconnected to the notion of a cause" which, when it does not get re-connected to a theological/transcendental absolute principle, "becomes *efficiency*, the processivity of which stems from the fund of immanence" (Jullien, 133).

⁴ With more time and space available here, I would also argue that Guattari's multiplication of ecology (as one) into *The Three Ecologies* is to be read as indirect-ing the discussion at stake. He defers the oppositional militancy against "Integrated World Capitalism" via a systemic disturbance of the established micro-/macro- or individual/collective/environmental-differentiations.

⁵ Referring to this specific text by Jullien, I have to also state the ambivalence that I feel respectively his 'comparative' style "between Western and Chinese Thinking" that cannot avoid re-classification and thus renewed cultural fixations. Also, his philosophizing of efficacy/effectiveness from approaches in warfare, politics and diplomacy is ultimately not insignificant for this paper (but cannot be explored further here).

Is it possible to read Woolf's provocative quest for indifference in respect to the question how to prevent war in the third part of her *Three Guineas* in such immanent manners? There she argues:

It is briefly, not to incite their brothers to fight, or to dissuade them, but to maintain an attitude of complete indifference. But the attitude expressed by the word 'indifference' is so complex and of such importance that it needs even here further definition. Indifference in the first place must be given a firm footing upon fact. (Woolf, 107)

And the fact she is bringing to the fore at this moment is the statement that "in fact, as a woman, I have no country...my country is the whole world" (109); wherefrom she then summarizes the "nature of her 'indifference'" by stating a concrete list of (in-)actions that significantly ends with the following conclusion:

That the daughters of educated men then should give their brothers neither the white feather of cowardice nor the red feather of courage, but no feather at all; that they should shut the bright eyes that rain influence, or let those eyes *look elsewhere* when war is discussed. (109, my emphasis)

This indifference of daring to 'look elsewhere' (which is not the same as 'looking away') in such pressing situation seems to be Woolf's most consequential expression of the fact that 'my country is the whole world'. If we follow the text further, she develops this line of indifference, which here might already be better spelled out as *in-difference* because, of course, it cannot be a simple negligence that she is after, into the "*anonymous and secret Society of the Outsiders*" (109, my emphasis). While, for sure, the distancing/ironic ambivalence in this strategic move cannot go unnoticed, I see here significant resonances with the Deleuze-Guattarian 'becoming-imperceptible' (Deleuze/Guattari 2000). And especially so, because it can also be argued that the becoming-series in *A Thousand Plateaus* has been developed with at least some attention to Woolf by Deleuze and Guattari. In the same manner – and similarly easy to misunderstand – in which Woolf's indifference is in no way mere passivity or effectlessness, so does becoming-imperceptible in no way suggest final disappearance. To the very contrary, Deleuze and Guattari define it as "the immanent end of becoming, its cosmic formula" (279). Becoming-imperceptible – the most 'advanced' movement *in-difference* in the becoming-series – is a becoming (like) everybody/everything (*tout le monde*) that also "is the world (*faire monde*), to make a world (*faire un monde*)" (280).

To me it is such fully immanent criticality with this difficult but consequential in-difference that both Woolf and Guattari insist on or at least hope to make *e/affective* with respect to the immense calls that lie before them – war (1938) and integrated global capitalism (1989). To again only hint here at Guattari's *The Three Ecologies*, his strategy to molecularize the molar blocks of subjectivity, capitalism, and ecology, is one of both indirection and indifference. With this he (and we) can gain space in the face of an always further integrated World Capitalism, whose *e/affect* it can be to make the (economical) capitalist system 'stutter'.

Transversality

This leads me to my concluding paragraph and a third – rather all-traversing – dimension of *e/affective* critique: transversality. This (maybe most famous) Guattarian concept for me binds together immanent critique as indirect-ing in-difference in that it sets the general tone

in which critique and criticality is (to be) practiced when looked at from the view point of *e/affectivity*. To just for a moment look at the history of its 'invention' (understood in the Deleuze/Guattarian sense in which 'creation of concepts' is a (philosophical) task (1994)): as Gary Genesko in his essay on "The Life and Work of Félix Guattari" (2008) describes, transversality explicates Guattari's affirmative critical engagement with the psychoanalytical method of transference. Instead of merely rejecting/overcoming psychoanalysis for this "mischievous and seductive" method (Genesko, 48) that fixes everything between two (analyst/analysand), "Guattari developed the concept of transversality through his interest in finding a kind of therapy adequate to an institutional context" (48). He therefore translates (multiplies) 'transference' so that the (therapeutic) transformative situation (in all its openness and ambivalence) is transversalized as a process in which more agential connections are allowed into the arena and in which a de-personalization sets in that makes pre-set boundaries between categories – individuals, societies, collectivities, environments – become porous and possibly transformed into always already interrelated 'entities' (Guattari's (machinic) animism is of significance here).⁶ Describing a process, "[it] remain[s] a line rather than a point" (Genesko, 74), transversality is to be seen as a concept 'practiced' more so than a concept 'philosophized'. And this cutting through every pure fantasy of theoretical solutions makes it for me another central dimension for *e/affective* criticality, whose interesting question is precisely not 'what it is', but rather 'how it is done'; or even better 'how it is *to be done*' if here at the end of this intervention paper I come back to the Foucaultian concern of critique as 'the art not to be governed like that'.

This paper must fail the test of being *e/affectively critical* in the sense of such a transversal praxis. Rather than 'doing', i.e. indirect-ing in-difference critical matters, it has merely reported on some points of critique. The texts of Woolf and Guattari are however exemplary practices of critique in this transversal sense. Whatever has changed since both historical moments – 1938 and 1989 – I want to end on two passages that to me exemplify the transversality from which I would hope to see new critical engagements (indirect-ing and in-difference) to emerge, and they also bring again the two authors in close conversation with each other. Let me first cite again Woolf from the final pages of her third part in *Three Guineas*, when she phrases the outsiders' critical 'how to do' as "to cease all competition and to practise their profession experimentally, in the interest of research and for love of the work itself" (Woolf, 112, my emphasis). To which a little later she adds: "Elasticity is essential; and some degree of secrecy...we, remaining outside, will experiment not with public means in public but with private means in private. Those experiments will not be merely critical but creative" (113). And Guattari in his very different way emphasizes in as much the experimental and creative practice, when he sees his "new ecosophy" which is "at once applied and theoretical, ethicopolitical and aesthetical" not as "a discipline of refolding on interiority, or a simply renewal of earlier forms of 'militancy'", but as the think-practicing of subjectivity that "is able to install itself simultaneously in the realm of the environment, in the major social and institutional assemblages, and symmetrically in the landscapes and fantasies of the most intimate spheres of the individual" (Guattari, 44-45).

⁶ The terminology of 'entities' is (in)directly referring to Whiteheadian process-philosophy whose 'actual entities' might feel comfortable in this proximity.

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