

## Individuals, Subjects, Transversals and *Agencements*

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Beginning from the introduction to the *Terra Critica* reader, I would like to pick up in particular on the rhythmic echo one might find between Thatcher's 'there are only individual men and women and there are families', cited there (p.2), and Deleuze and Guattari's statement 'il n'y a que du désir et du social, et rien d'autre' ['there is only desire and the social, and nothing else'] (*Anti-Œdipe*). Thatcher denies the social and affirms the individual and the family; Deleuze and Guattari bypass the individual, critically dissolve the family, and pronounce a simple dynamic between trans- or non-individual desire and the social, or, to be precise, between *some (du)* desire and *some (du)* social, so as to avoid totalising generalisations. If, as the introduction proposes, we need new tools and vocabularies to address the complex 'new times' in which we find ourselves, perhaps one avenue through which to pursue this might focus around the status of the individual. If the concept of the social is in crisis, the introduction states, the notion of the individual, as the 'dialectical counterpart' (p.2) to society also threatened and needs rethinking. In Stuart Hall's enquiry about the meaning of the 'new times', in which I find a parallel to Michel Foucault's 'critical ontology of the present', mapped out in the late essay 'What is Enlightenment?', Hall remarks on one dimension through which the present conjuncture (in 1988) has been understood – the 'return' or 'revolution' of the subject, proposing that: 'We can no longer conceive of "the individual" in terms of a whole, centred, stable and completed Ego or autonomous, rational "self". The "self" is conceptualised as more fragmented and incomplete, composed of multiple "selves" or identities in relation to the different social worlds we inhabit, something with a history, "produced", in process. The "subject" is differently placed or *positioned* by different discourses and practices' (pp. 251-2). Hall draws out the broadly Althusserian and Foucauldian thesis that the changes, political and ideological, that characterise 'new times' are not only 'out there' but also 'in here', 'working on us' (p. 252). The 'cultural' dimension, Hall notes, has increasingly become an arena in which the logic of consumer capitalism is played out. Although later in the essay Hall points to the ways in which the everyday lives of subjects are overdetermined, to my mind he stops a little short of a more thorough-going investigation and rethinking of the notion of the individual. I was however intrigued by the implications of a rhetorical flourish in Hall's one sentence paragraph: 'However, it seems to be the case that, whichever explanation we finally settle for, the really startling fact is that *these* new times clearly belong to a time-zone marked by the march of capital simultaneously across the globe and through the Maginot Lines of our subjectivities' (254). The implication is that capital has both a global and subjective dimension, the one enmeshed with the other, and moreover that whatever defences the individual subject may construct, capital infiltrates, displaces or simply gets around them. This again has a decidedly Althusserian and Foucauldian resonance: whatever resistance the subject might express or act upon in relation to ideology, for Althusser

ideology interpellates individuals 'as subjects'; subjects are always already in some sense subjected by virtue of the fact that they are subjects. This seems to me also articulated, but with a different inflection, in Foucault's lecture in the TC reader where he says: 'We should not therefore be asking how, why and by what right subjects can agree to being subjugated but showing how actual relations of subjugation manufacture subjects.' In this light we can return to the introduction's proposition that: 'An understanding of the individual as the dialectical counterpart of society, something that has long been taken for granted by the project of critical theory in its various manifestations, is no longer sufficient when it comes to critically addressing the transversal formations of sociality in evidence today', and also to the aim to think through the possibility of collective *agencement*'. For me this presupposes a need to think of modes of subjectivity that operate 'below' the level of the individual but are not for all that equivalent to some kind of private and asocial 'interiority', 'within' the individual. The notion of the 'transversal' and of 'agencement' introduced in the TC preface seem to me to appeal to Deleuze and Guattari's approach to the question of the subject and to the different ways in which this has been taken up as a social or political theory or programme, both by Deleuze and Guattari themselves, separately and together, and by others in their wake. It is interesting that the Deleuzian/Guattarian terms and tone of the TC reader introduction do not significantly recur in the texts of the dossier, suggesting a chronological or historical difference here, between 'earlier' critical theory of the 1970s and 80s, and later work which picks up on and carries forward the post-Foucauldian/Deleuzian baton. But I don't think that as Foucault predicted in the preface to the English translation of *Anti-œdipe*, the 'next century', i.e. ours, is (yet) Deleuzian. If the 'myth' of the monadic individual and the panoply of associated ideological hooks such as identity, choice, lifestyle etc. are so many ways in which the social as such is and continues to be evaporated in favour of the 'march of capital' through the territories of our subjectivities, then it is perhaps in different forms of a-subjective individuation that the social, the potential of the collective, may be found and reformulated. These would be forms of subjectivation and individuation which operate across and between individuals but at levels 'below' that of the individual subject. For me this is the terrain on which Deleuze's later work operates. Deleuze's essay 'Postscript on Societies of Control' for me remains one of the most powerful, albeit brief, diagnoses of the post-disciplinary and perhaps even post-subjective regime. One of its key oppositions is that between the individual and the dividual, the latter being the facet or dimension of the subject which is enlisted, but may also be excluded, from a social body which is itself partitioned into multiple sections or modes, each of which has its own code. This captures for me the sense in which the individual is sectioned or traversed by a series of vectors which spatially and temporally enlist them and interpellate them in different ways. The 'transversal' operates in a quite different way, and I think one could say that it's one of the tasks of critical theory to critically separate the ideological interpellations and control mechanisms of the dividual from the potential social *agencements* opened up by transversal singularities operating 'below' the subject. Then I think 'what is to be done' separates into

two related seams – first the investigation of the lived experience of people working in or engaging with real institutional structures of the modes of their interpellation and control, and the scope for unpredictable, transient transversals through which a ‘social’ body or group-subject emerges. Second the ways in which this group subjectivity and these transversal intensities may be distinguished from fascist or despotic re-territorialisation.