

3Cs counter-cartographies collective // disOrientation<sup>2</sup>

## **a cartographic micropolitics?**

### **// disOrientation**

I am in an unfamiliar place... momentarily what the map tells me bears little sense of where I think I am<sup>i</sup>

### **// openings**

The publication of disOrientation<sup>2</sup> marks another cartographic salvo fired by the 3Cs Counter-Cartographies Collective against the growing precarity of university labour and the infiltration of market-economy logic into higher education discourse, policy and practice. At the same time, disOrientation<sup>2</sup> maps the emerging spaces of resistance across the globe; struggles and performances underscored by the question, *is this the university we want?* disOrientation<sup>2</sup> then, is political. All maps are political<sup>ii</sup>; there is nothing new in that, but political on what register? Evidently there is a macro-politics at work, and this is readily perceptible through the text of the guide; an attack on the insidiousness of neo-liberal policies within and beyond the university. What though, of the imperceptible work done by disOrientation<sup>2</sup>? What of its affective and virtual characteristics and *unfoldings*? These questions are necessarily micropolitical. The following paragraphs attempt to conjure a micropolitics which does not detract from the ambitions of disOrientation<sup>2</sup>, but which animates the potential work done by the guide not in representational terms, but in terms of the imperceptible – a politics of affect.

### **// micropolitics**

What then, is/are micropolitics? Unsurprisingly, there are numerous definitions and divergent trajectories the term can take, but in relation to mapping, Felix Guattari's contentions as to what micropolitics could resemble are instructive. In addition to his well known collaborations with Gilles Deleuze, Guattari's solo work took cartographic devices further in narrating and analysing the emergence of political assemblages, particularly in Brazil where he spent a significant amount of his life elucidating a qualitatively different politics, following what he considered the failure of the tumultuous events of 1968.

The prefix *micro* does not denote scale. Micropolitics is not by necessity equitable with the small, parochial or local – neither in its ambition(s) nor practice(s). Instead, micropolitics deal with *affect*, *perception* and *desire*. It is this politics of affect which Guattari suggests is one which assemblages and struggles should take seriously; thereby rendering a politics which attempts to add to the strategies of mobilising around 'traditional' lines of affinity, namely class and race.

One more definition; what is affect?

### **// affect**

Affect is bodily intensity. Affect, as a notion, can be traced back to Spinoza and his contention of *affectus*<sup>iii</sup> – the ability of bodies to affect, and be affected. Contrary to the Cartesian settlement of the mind/body binary, Deleuze, Guattari and Brian Massumi have used affect to relocate the points of cognition and knowledge production. Rather than conceive of merely mental cognition, an

attendance to affect looks at how bodily movement and sensations (pre-cognitive) are implicated in the formation of thought, spaces and further affects.

Affect then, is a pre-personal intensity, in so far as affect *is not* emotion. Emotion is the cultural, linguistic fixing of intensity and feeling, though this is not to say that affect is not mediated through and by social assemblages (in the same way affect does work on these very assemblages). Most importantly, affect offers a way of going beyond the realm of the human; it offers a way of *being-in-the-world* with other types of agency and 'things'. Affect does not lend itself to empirical capture, but it unfolds and is generated everywhere. As a result, research into affect does not look to grasp affect, but instead it attempts to *animate* affect through various performances – these might include anything from mapping to dancing to writing. Affect is non-interpretative and unlike semiotics which performs a reading on behalf of others, it does not structure in a deterministic way the link between, for example, physical images and emotional reactions. Instead affect ruptures this oscillation between signifier and reaction, and instead is generative of different movements, subjectivities and actions.

### **// autonomy and affect**

How does affect play out in micropolitics? Affect, as intensity goes, is intensely political, sometimes in a subversive way. For Deleuze and Guattari, affect operates as a dynamic of desire within assemblages to manipulate meaning and relations. Affect is subversive because it can be detached from geographical and temporal origins and become independent; affect is autonomous<sup>iv</sup>. "What makes affect autonomous is that it escapes confinement (by a particular body) and limitation by what actualises it (emotions)"<sup>v</sup>. Indeed it has been argued that the autonomy of affect can be freighted to the particular conception of Italian *autonomia* and its allied struggles<sup>vi</sup>. In the same way that *autonomia* is not about "marshalling state or administrative power"<sup>vii</sup>, affect, likewise, is not about, or found in, the fixation of identity or meaning, but instead is concerned with the production of different forms of socialised, immaterial and affective works. Put another way, *autonomia* and affect have no pre-figured political or policy end-game, but instead deploy a range of creative and unsettling tactics which seek to produce alternative (or multiple) practices, articulations and even different worlds. One such tactic which deploys affect, deliberately or otherwise, is mapping.

### **// cartographic micropolitics**

"The primary purpose of...cartography is thus not to signify and communicate, but to produce assemblages of enunciation"<sup>viii</sup>

Cartography and mapping are devices which suffuse Deleuze and Guattari's works – not as metaphors, but as ways of working through the rhythms of capitalism and everyday life which do not conform to the classical dualistic or dialectic readings of power and struggle. Moreover, whilst Deleuze and Guattari label cartography a 'royal science'<sup>ix</sup>, they both saw in mapping the wider possibilities for the creation of different articulations of spaces and politics. disOrientation<sup>2</sup> arguably is not simply a case of resistance versus a nebulous hegemony, a regurgitation of the David and Goliath fable, but instead it seems to offer tactics, or *lines of flight* for others to generate their own articulations of the university and beyond.

What work does disOrientation<sup>2</sup> do and what constitutes a cartographic micropolitics?

For Guattari, a cartographic micropolitics is constituted by what follows:

“strategies for the constitution of new territories, other spaces of life and affect, a search for ways outside of territories seemingly without exits”<sup>x</sup>

disOrientation<sup>2</sup>, without being prescriptive, offers a range of potential strategies in the section *New Waves of Autonomy* – a cartography not yet completed, still unfolding; mapping emergent struggles across the globe, but recognising the partiality of the story, asking others to contribute virtually and online. To borrow from Brian Holmes, disOrientation<sup>2</sup> offers, “a cartography of escape routes leading beyond the black holes of neo-liberal control”<sup>xi</sup>.

Let’s take it further. disOrientation<sup>2</sup> is a *de-territorialisation*; a coming undone of structures and codes. The guide picks apart visas, global migrant streams, ranking logics and competition; it is the unsettling of the university and the world. As with every de-territorialisation however, there is a concomitant re-territorialisation; the coming together, the re-articulation, perhaps even a space for optimism; again *New Waves of Autonomy* offers hope, as do the calls to organise, but without determining what form or body this organisation must take.

disOrientation<sup>2</sup> *disorients*. It does work on the body. For students who have been recently oriented officially by the university, disOrientation<sup>2</sup> unsettles the official accord between body and campus. Reactions will be (maybe) visceral first, from the gut; *layoffs, precarity* (what is this?!?!), *crisis...* It’s difficult to be more than tentative here, because affect is not about determining what people feel, but it’s interesting to think what *lines of flight* disOrientation<sup>2</sup> might induce or provoke – a line of flight being a path of mutation, pathway connections between bodies which release new capacities to act and respond; lines of flight can take forms not obviously recognisable but as they are realities, they are, as Deleuze and Guattari contend, *very dangerous* for societies. How these affects and lines of flight are measured is not easily resolvable, but perhaps can be detected by the conversations, movements and new maps which are generated elsewhere in the university and the world in response to, or encouraged by 3Cs cartographic provocations.

### // ethico-aesthetic project

disOrientation<sup>2</sup>, as a cartographic artefact, could be situated in what Guattari calls the ‘ethico-aesthetic’ paradigm. In trying to move beyond a technocratic politics, Guattari valorises creative processes in generating different subjectivities and spaces. The ethico-aesthetic project involves a distancing from structure and instead looks to creative freedom to deal with problems which emerge in the world. As documented widely, through positivist and rationalist thinking, the abstract came to be seen as the polar opposite of the intensely experienced. Of course, abstractions of things/phenomena can only come about once those things have been experienced in some way. disOrientation<sup>2</sup> then, whilst an abstraction, has also been/is experienced and lived, from its origins in coffee-shops, people’s living rooms, discussions/arguments in university campuses, through to its material publication and its journeys, effects and affects in the world. For Guattari, cartography itself is an ethico-aesthetic act that provokes an event of existence<sup>xii</sup>.

disOrientation<sup>2</sup> is something of an aesthetic machine, or to borrow (once again) from Senselab<sup>xiii</sup>, a **technology of lived abstraction**, a technology of “diagrammatic thinking [which] creates a visual notation for...a space of possibilities, something yet to come”<sup>xiv</sup>. disOrientation<sup>2</sup> as a technology of

lived abstraction is not an object for simple consumption, but instead is an active platform for creative productivity and political movement. In terms of the ethical, Guattari states that the aesthetic project has ethico-political implications because, “to speak of creation is to speak of the responsibility of the creative instance with regard to the thing created”<sup>xv</sup>. To this end, 3Cs has a responsibility to the affects which emerge from disOrientation<sup>2</sup>; this responsibility is realised through 3Cs acknowledgement of *partiality* in their accounts, *collaboration* in their remit and *affinity* in their practices.

### **// to conclude, for now**

disOrientation<sup>2</sup> is a lived abstraction of the schizophrenic processes of migration, precarity, competition and of *being-in-the-university-and-the-world*. It is also an articulation of struggles and spaces yet to come.

As disOrientation<sup>2</sup>'s concerns are multi-scalar, from the campus to the world (and back again), the politics it articulates do not necessarily conform to the axioms of class and identity. This is not to say that class and identity are not always in the background of these concerns, but to valorise these traditional lines of affinity would be to reduce and essentialise a myriad of struggles and interests. These paragraphs have been an attempt to animate disOrientation<sup>2</sup>'s micropolitical articulations; affective articulations which don't conform to a cartographic propositional logic of 'this is there'<sup>xvi</sup>, but which continually ask the question 'what could be here, or there?' In doing so, there seems to be an implicit appeal to the affective in disOrientation<sup>2</sup>, a dis-articulation of what the university wants you and us to be about; a deliberate disorientation of how we should navigate campus and the globe. To be sure, the case for affect in geography and cartography is still one to be argued over, but for now it could be suggested that disOrientation<sup>2</sup> is not a representation of the university and the world (whereby all surprises have been pre-figured), but a processual unfolding of things/struggles happening and emerging in the university and the world – struggles which need to be had, and which might use cartography as a way of unsettling assumed arrangements between bodies and universities.

Whilst the following lines<sup>xvii</sup> from Deleuze and Guattari are subject to over-citation, they seem nonetheless a useful point at which to leave these contentions open-ended for now:

“...the map **[[disOrientation<sup>2</sup>]]** is open and connectable in all of its dimensions; it is detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modification. It can be torn, reversed, adapted to any kind of mounting, reworked by an individual, group or social formation. It can be drawn on a wall, conceived of as a work of art, constructed as a political action or as a mediation...”

## References

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- <sup>i</sup> John Newling (2005) *Essays: 93, Writings by John Newling 1995-2005*. SWPA.
- <sup>ii</sup> Denis Wood (1992) *The Power of Maps*. Guilford Press.
- <sup>iii</sup> Benedict de Spinoza (1677 & 2004) *The Ethics*. Kessinger Press.
- <sup>iv</sup> Brian Massumi (2002) *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*. Duke University Press.
- <sup>v</sup> Felix Guattari (1992) *Chaosmosis: an ethico-aesthetic paradigm*. Power Publications.
- <sup>vi</sup> Nick Thoburn (2003) *Deleuze, Marx and Politics*. Routledge.
- <sup>vii</sup> Craig Dalton and Liz Mason-Deese (forthcoming) 'Counter (Mapping) Actions: Mapping as Militant Research, Counter-Cartographies Collective'. *ACME* submission.
- <sup>viii</sup> Felix Guattari, with Suely Rolnik (2008) *Molecular Revolution in Brazil*. Semiotext(e).
- <sup>ix</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1994) *What is Philosophy?* Verso.
- <sup>x</sup> Felix Guattari (2008) *Molecular Revolution in Brazil*. Semiotext(e).
- <sup>xi</sup> Brian Holmes (2009) Blog entry: *Guattari's Schizoanalytic Cartographies, or, the pathic core at the heart of cybernetics*. <http://brianholmes.wordpress.com/2009/02/27/guattaris-schizoanalytic-cartographies/>.
- <sup>xii</sup> *ibid*.
- <sup>xiii</sup> Check out Senselab, founded by Brian Massumi and Erin Manning at <http://www.senselab.ca/>.
- <sup>xiv</sup> Inna Semetsky (forthcoming) 'The complexity of individuation'. *Journal of Applied Psychoanalytic Studies*.
- <sup>xv</sup> Felix Guattari (1992) *Chaosmosis: an ethico-aesthetic paradigm*. Power Publications.
- <sup>xvi</sup> Denis Wood and John Fels (2009) *The Natures of Maps: Cartographic Constructions of the Natural World*. University of Chicago Press.
- <sup>xvii</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1989) *A Thousand Plateaus*. Continuum.