

Modes of Existence, Modes of Resistance

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I

We are the Ueinzz Theatre Company, set up in São Paulo, Brazil, twenty years ago. Lunatics, therapists, performers, maids, philosophers, “normopaths” — once on stage no one can tell the difference. It's a sort of Galleon of Fools, adrift inside — and outside — the artistic circuit. We rehearse every week, we have produced four theatre pieces, we've given over 200 performances, we travel a lot throughout Brazil, and also abroad, and this is part of our magnificent curriculum. But this concreteness does not guarantee anything. Sometimes we spend months in the stagnation of insipid weekly rehearsals. Sometimes we ask ourselves if in fact one day we will ever perform again or go back to performing. Some actors disappear, sponsorships dwindle, scripts are forgotten, and the very company itself seems like some intangible virtuality. And then, all of a sudden, a date for a performance appears, some theatre becomes available, a patron or sponsor shows up, and there is just the glimpse of a season, with an invitation to perform in the Cariri or in Finland. The costume designer spruces up the dusty rags, actors who had disappeared months ago reappear, sometimes even running away from internment... But even when it all “happens,” it is on that fine limit that separates building from collapsing. I would place our performative trajectory on that moving limit, between madness and unreason, like a steep experiment over the abyss.

First example: we were going to perform *Daedalus* at a major Brazilian Theater Festival. The cast was about to go on stage. Each actor was getting prepared to utter in Greek the combative clash that begins this piece one “cannot make head nor tail of it” — according to the complimentary review of one critic from the São Paulo press. I wait, tense; I run in my head the words we are supposed to throw at each other in menacing tones and frenetic rush. I am scanning the audience when I notice that our narrator is standing a few metres away from the microphone — he appears to be disorientated.

I go up to him, and he tells me that he had lost his script. I slip my hand into his trousers' pocket, where I find the complete bundle of papers. The actor stares at the papers, which I hold up to his face. He seems not to recognise them. He puts on and takes off his glasses. And he murmurs that this time he will not take part in the play — that this was the night of his death. We exchange a few words and a few minutes later I am relieved to see him back at the microphone. But his voice, which was normally tremulous and stirring, was now slurred and washed out. In the middle of a scene in which he plays Charon, he suddenly walks right across the stage and heads for the theatre exit. I find him sitting in the street, deathly still, murmuring the demand for an ambulance — his time had come. I kneel down beside him and he tells me: "I'm going to the swamp." The situation lightened up after that and we negotiate: he would accept a cheeseburger from McDonald's instead of the ambulance. I hear the final applause coming from inside the theatre, and the public starts to exit through the small door that leads to the street, where both he and I are. What they see as they exit is Hades, king of the underworld (my character), kneeling at the feet of the living-dead Charon. And for this we receive the respect of each member of the audience who passes by us, because, for them, this intimate scene seems to be part of the performance. The whole thing by a razor's edge. It is by a razor's edge that we perform, it is by a razor's edge that we don't die. Work, unworking, absence of work.

Let's go back a few years. It is the Company's very first rehearsal, at the "A Casa" Day Clinic, where our group began. In a theatrical exercise on the different methods of communication between human beings, all the members of the group were asked in turn which other languages they spoke, apart from Portuguese. One patient, who never speaks and who only produces a sort of nasal sound, like some discordant mantra, replied immediately, with a clarity and assurance quite uncommon for him: German! Everyone is surprised, as no one knew that he spoke German. And what word do you know in German? Ueinzz. And what does Ueinzz mean in German? Ueinzz. Everyone laughed — this is the language that signifies to itself, that folds within itself, an esoteric, mysterious, glossolalic language. Inspired by material collected from the laboratories, the directors brought their proposed script: a group of nomads, lost in the desert, goes out in search of a shining tower, and on their way they come across obstacles, entities, and storms. When they come across an oracle, he must indicate to them, in his sibylline tongue, the most adequate course for the pilgrims to take. The actor is promptly chosen to play the part of the oracle: it is the one who speaks German. When asked where the tower of Babel is, he must reply: Ueinzz. The patient quickly gets into the role, and everything goes well together: the black hair and moustache, the small, solid body of a Turkish Buddha, his mannerisms, both aloof and schizoid, the look, both vague and scrutinising, of someone who is constantly in conversation with the invisible. It is true that he is capricious, for when they ask him: Oh Great Oracle of Delphi, where is the Babeline tower?, he sometimes replies with a silence, sometimes with a grunt, and at other times he says Germany or Baurú [in the state of São Paulo], until they ask him more specifically: Oh Great Oracle, what is the magic word in German, and then, without fail, comes the Ueinzz that everyone has been waiting for. The most inaudible of patients, the one who pisses in his trousers and vomits in the director's plate, is charged with the crucial responsibility of telling the nomadic people the way out of Darkness and Chaos. After being uttered, the sound of his answer must proliferate through the loud-speakers dotted about the theatre in concentric circles, amplifying in dizzying echoes Ueinzz, Ueinzz, Ueinzz. The inhuman voice we could not hear finds in the scenic and ritual space a magical and poetic effectiveness. When the piece was given that sound as its name, we had difficulty in imagining how it should be spelled. The invitation went with "weeinzz", the folder had

“ueinzz”, the poster played with transcribing the word in a wide variety of possibilities, of Babel-like proportions. Today we are the Ueinzz Theater Company. We were born out of an a-significant rupture, as Guattari would say.

Our penultimate piece was inspired by Batman and Ítalo Calvino. It was called Gotham-SP (São Paulo), an invisible or mythological city, taken from comic strips, cinema screens, and the most persistent deliriums of one of our actors. Every night in Gotham-SP, from his tower, the mayor yells indiscriminately at tycoons, prostitutes, and psychiatrists. He promises worlds and wealth, control and anarchy, bread and cloning. The emperor Kublai Khan, nearly deaf and nearly blind, is the recipient of lost voices. A single resident repeats in her cubicle: “It’s cold here.” A passenger requests the company of a taxi-driver on a rainy night and recites fragments from Nietzsche or Pessoa. The decadent diva searches for that impossible note, Ophelia comes out of a water barrel after her beloved, the angels try to understand where they have just landed, Joshua, revived, demands a new order in the world... Singular speeches that clash in inhuman polyphony, sonorous, visual, scenic, metaphysical... Dissonant voices and semiotics that no emperor or mayor manages to orchestrate, much less suppress. Each of those beings who appear on stage carry their icy or torrid world on their fragile bodies... One thing is certain: from the bottom of their pallid isolation, these beings seek or proclaim another community of bodies and souls. A community of those who have no community, as Bataille says, a community to come, as Blanchot says, an inoperative community, says Nancy, a community of celibates, Deleuze will say, the community that comes, concludes Agamben.

A strange community that share a rhizomatic time. As described by one of our first directors: “The actors of the Company have a rare ally on their side who destroys representation in its most artificial sense: time. The time of the uncommon actor is mediated by all his dialogues; it is traversed by subtexts which become the actual text itself. In dialogues, the reply does not come immediately, nor is it rational; rather it goes through other mental circuits. There is a delay, a scenic slowing down, that puts the whole audience producing. The actor, in an intuitive manner, moves between Stanislavskian identification and Brechtian distancing. And he becomes excited by the applause of the audience; he performs his dramatic “bullfight” by measuring forces with the audience and with his own inner shadows.” This is not the fictional time of representation, but the time of the actor or performer, who enters and exits his character, thus allowing other dimensions of his acting to be seen: “It is in that narrow passage from representation to a less deliberate acting, with its space for improvisation and spontaneity, that live art treads, along with the terms “happening” and “performance”. It is also that tenuous limit where life and art approach one another. As one breaks away from representation, from fiction, a space opens up for the unpredictable, and therefore for the living, since life is synonymous with the unpredictable and with risk.”¹, says Cohen.

I would now like to propose a theoretical leap, which in my opinion brings all these episodes together. What is at stake in this theatrical, paratheatrical, or performative device is the singular, unreasonable subjectivity of the actors and nothing else. That is, what is being staged or acted out is a manner of perceiving, feeling, dressing, positioning oneself,

¹ Renato Cohen, *Performance como linguagem* (Performance as Language). São Paulo: Perspectiva, 2002, p. 58. Also Ana Goldenstein, in “Performance and Madness: accompaniment to the creative process of the Ueinzz Theatre Group”.

moving, speaking, thinking, asking questions, offering or removing oneself from the gaze of the other as well as from the others' enjoyment. It is also a way of representing without representing, associating whilst disassociating, of living and dying, of being on stage and feeling at home at the same time, in that precarious presence, at the same time concrete and intangible which makes everything extremely serious, and at the same time “neither here nor there”, as defined by the composer Livio Tragtenberg — leaving in the middle of a performance, crossing the stage, bag in hand, because your part has now come to an end; one moment, letting go of everything, because your time has come and soon you are going to die, the next entering and getting involved in every scene like a sweeper in a game of football; then conversing with your line-feeder who should be hidden, and revealing his presence, then turning into a toad... Or then grunting or croaking, or like Kafka's nomads in *The Great Wall of China*, speaking like the magpies, or just saying Ueinzz...

I can't stop thinking that it is this life on stage, “life by a razor's edge”, that makes the peculiarities of this experience. Some in the audience are under the impression that they are the living-dead and that real life is on that side of the stage. In fact, in a context marked by the control of life (biopower), the methods of vital resistance proliferate in the most unusual of ways. One of them consists literally of putting *life* on stage, not bare, brutal life, which, as Agamben says, is reduced by power to the state of survival, but life in the state of variation: “minor” modes of living, which inhabit our major modes, and which, on stage or off, gain scenic or performative visibility, even when one is on the edge of death or collapse, on the edge of stuttering or grunting, of collective hallucination or limit-experiences. Within the restricted parameters which I referred to, here is a device — among others — for a hesitant and always indecisive, inconclusive and without promises, experimentation for changing *power over life* into *power for life*.

II

Permit me to put this in a broader, more contemporary, bio-political context. On the one hand, life was assaulted by power. To put it another way, power penetrated all spheres of existence, mobilised them in full, and put them to work. From genes, the body, affects, psychism, but even intelligence, imagination, creativity, all has been violated, invaded, colonised, if it was not directly expropriated by the powers. The various mechanisms through which they are exercised are anonymous, scattered, flexible, and rhizomatic. Power itself has become “post-modern”, undulating, a-centred, netlike, molecular. With that, it has a more direct effect over our ways of perceiving, feeling, loving, thinking, even of creating. If before, we still imagined that we had spaces that were protected from the direct interference of the powers (the body, the unconscious, subjectivity), and we had the illusion of preserving in these areas some independence, today our life appears entirely subsumed in those mechanisms of modulating existence. Thus even sex, language, communication, oniric life, even faith, none of these still preserve any exteriority in relation to the mechanisms of control and monitoring. To summarise it in a sentence: power is not exercised from outside, nor from above, but more as if it were from within, steering our social vitality from head to toe. We are no longer struggling with a transcendent or even repressive power; it concerns more an inherent, productive power. This bio-power does not seek to arrest life, but to take control of it, to intensify it, to make the most of it. Therein lies our extreme difficulty in resisting: we hardly even know where power is, or where we are, what power dictates to us, what we want from it; it is we ourselves who take on the task of administrating our own control. Power never got so far or so deep into

the kernel of subjectivity and of life itself as in this contemporary biopower.

But when it appears that “everything has been dominated”, as the lyrics of a Brazilian funk song say, at the end of the line there is a suggestion of a u-turn: that which appeared to be subdued, controlled and dominated, that is “life”, reveals in the process of expropriation its indomitable power, no matter how erratic that may be. Let’s just look at one example. Today capital no longer needs muscles and discipline, but inventiveness, imagination, creativity; what some theoreticians call invention-force. But that invention-force, which capitalism appropriates and which it puts to work for its own benefit, does not emanate from it and in the end it could even do without it. It is what is being noted here and there: the true source of wealth today is people’s intelligence, their creativity, their affection, and all that belongs, as is obvious, to each and everyone, not to capital, nor to the State, nor to the sciences, nor to the media, nor to institutions. That which appeared to be entirely subsumed by capital, or reduced to mere passivity — “life”, “intelligence”, “affection”, “sociability” — appears now like an inexhaustible reservoir of meaning, a source of forms of existence, an embryo of directions that extrapolate the command structures, the calculations of the established powers, formatted subjectivity.

It would be the case to tread these two major routes, bioPower and biopower, like in a Möbius strip. Thus, if today capital and the governmentality that corresponds to it enters life on a scale never seen before, and saps its creative strength, the opposite is also true: life itself hits back, revived. And if the ways of seeing, feeling, thinking, perceiving, dwelling, dressing, of situating oneself, no matter how singular these may be, become an object of interest and capital investment and molecular monitoring, they also become a source of value that can, by themselves, become a vector for valorization or self-valorization or even of deviation. For example, when a group of prisoners composes and records their own music, what they show and sell is not only their music, nor their harsh life stories, but their style, their perceptions, their disgust, their caustic sarcasm, their way of dressing, of “living” in prison, of gesticulating, of protesting — their life, in short. Their only capital being their life, in their extreme state of survival and resistance, that’s what they’ve capitalised, self-valorized and produced value. Taken from this point of view, if it is clear that capital increasingly appropriates subjectivity and forms of life, subjectivity is itself biopolitical capital, which virtually everyone increasingly has the use of, whether they are those so called marginals, so called lunatics, prisoners, or indigenous peoples, but also anyone and everyone with a singular lifestyle that belongs to them or which is given to them to invent — with the political consequences yet to be determined.

It’s clear that biopower and the new mechanisms of governmentality make individual and collective life an object of domination, of calculation, of manipulation, of intervention, if not of fetishization or aestheticization — and that there is a corresponding capitalisation in this process. Our era revolves around this pathology: market-ready modes of existence. Part of the contemporary effort is to diagnose this illness and retrace its genesis, ramifications and effects. Among them, of course, is the daily rejection of ‘minor’ modes of life, minority ways of living that are not only more fragile, precarious and vulnerable (poor, crazy, autistic), but also more hesitant, dissident, at times traditional than others (indigenous people); that are, on the contrary, still being born, tentative, even experimental (those still to come, to be discovered, to be invented). In fact, there is a war between different modes of life or forms of life today. Perhaps this is what has led some philosophers recently to dwell on such contrasting and atypical modes of existence, even if they pertain to a bygone era. The Franciscans in Agamben, the Cynics in Foucault, the Schyzos in Deleuze-Guattari, the autistic in Deligny, but also the Araweté in Viveiros de Castro or even the fireflies of Didi-Huberman, are part of a zigzag line of

inquiry that crosses the philosophical domain, as well as the anthropologic, subjective, aesthetic, in the last decades, challenging our political imagination.

Following the clues arising from these observations, the questions which should guide our research could be indicated under topics, be developed throughout the year, with some of them perhaps returning in our final conversation. The questions are the following: What is a form of life, or a mode of existence? How might the plurality of modes of existence and forms of life be made visible? Assuming that a mode of existence constitutes a “world”, with its own “duration” and singular “subjectivity”, what does it concretely mean for different “worlds”, divergent “subjectivities”, distinct “durations”, to coexist or collide? What type of pluralism and perspectivism is demanded or imposed by such a challenge? Which processes of subjectivation and desubjectivation are created through these frictions? How do such singular temporalities manifest themselves in an aesthetic apparatus such as *Ueinzz*? Which frontiers does such an apparatus shuffle, beyond the already established ones such as the ones between madness/sanity, individual/collective, subjective/scenic, art/life? Wouldn't we need to rethink the doublets construction/unfolding, force/fragility, exhaustion/creation, impossibility/invention, time/becoming? And lastly, how does this miniature experience, which is *Ueinzz*, overflow its delimited contour, entering into connection with other theoretical, aesthetic, micropolitical, macropolitical experiences, and contributing towards a cartography of contemporary sensibility and its mutations?

III

One of the most impacting descriptions of the event belongs to the Polish writer Bruno Schulz. “Ordinary facts are ordered within time, strung along as on a thread. They have their antecedents and their consequences, which crowd together and press hard upon one another without any pause. This has its importance for any narrative, of which continuity and successiveness are the soul. Yet what is to be done with events that have no place of their own in time; events that have occurred too late, after the whole of time has been distributed, divided and allotted; events that have been left in the cold, unregistered, hanging in the air, errant and homeless? [...]

Have you heard of parallel streams of time within a two-time track? Yes, there are such branch lines of time, somewhat illegal and suspect, but then, like us, one is burdened with contraband of supernumerary events that cannot be registered, one cannot be too fussy. Let us try to find at some point in history such a branch line, a blind track onto which to shunt these illegal events. There is nothing to fear. It will all happen imperceptibly...” (Schulz, *Sanatorium under the Sign of the Hourglass*, p.200)

On the one hand, the train of events in the two-time track, on the other, the supernumerary events that can't be streamed, being enmeshed in the “branch lines of time”, in the “parallel streams of time”, in the “blind track” where they “hang in the air, errant and homeless”. Bruno Schulz says it, mouth full: regular time is too narrow to lodge all events.

The Greeks already understood that alongside *Chronos* — the time of measure, which fixes things and events, which develops a form and determines a subject, constituting a ‘pulsed time’ (being this the version of time we know best, as it resembles the vulgar or historical conception we have of time), there is another time, which they called *Aion*, being this time without measure, an indefinite time, a time that does not cease to divide itself when it arrives, always already-there (immemorial) and still not-there (unprecedented), always too early and too late, the time which is simultaneously the time of the

“something which will happen” and of the “something which just happened”, the time of the gushing of time, bifurcated, non-metrical, non-pulsed time, made of pure speed, the fluctuating time we see in psychosis, in poetry, in dreams, in catastrophies, in some videoclips, in large and micro-ruptures, collective or individual; the time of becoming, we might say, if we did not know, now at this time, that becoming is not time, not irregular time nor even ephemeral time juxtaposed to eternity, nor finitude transvested as castration, but something else, something like the production of speeds and slownesses... We have here not a chronological time but a chronic one, which produces decentered movements, with anomalies, aberrations, various becomings. Contesting a homogeneous, cumulative, linear time, is not exclusive to Deleuze. In different ways, it is present in Bergson, in Heidegger, in Benjamin. Agamben, for instance, says the following:

“Every conception of history is invariably accompanied by a certain experience of time which is implicit in it, conditions it, and thereby has to be elucidated. Similarly, every culture is first and foremost a particular experience of time, and no new culture is possible without an alteration in this experience. The original task of a true revolution is never merely to ‘change the world’, but also — and first of all — to “change time”. Modern political thought has concentrated its attention on history, and has not elaborated a corresponding conception of time. Even historical materialism has until now neglected to elaborate a conception of time that compares with its conception of history. Because of this omission it has been unwittingly compelled to have recourse to a conception of time dominant in Western culture for centuries, and so to harbor, side by side, a revolutionary concept of history and a traditional experience of time. The vulgar representation of time, that of a precise and homogeneous *continuum*, has thus diluted the Marxist concept of history,” concludes Agamben. (*Infancy and History: Essays on the Destruction of Experience*, p.91)

In my view, Deleuze’s distinction between History and Becoming accomplished part of this task. History obeys chronological time and its sequential, linear, cumulative, progressive, ordered logic. But from within this time various detours take place that multiply temporalities, as pointed out by Bruno Schulz. History is merely the set of almost negative conditions allowing for the experimentation of something, which escapes History all together. Without History, experimentation would remain undetermined, unconditioned, but the whole question, Deleuze adds, is to know, to investigate, where the seeds for a new mode of existence appear, whether communal or individual, how to determine the surging of other becomings, events — an entire temporal network. What escapes History is not the eternal, but what Nietzsche called the untimely or the inactual, the actuality of Foucault, the becoming or Event of Deleuze, the duration of Bergson. Names are not what matters most, what matters is that it is at this level that the nascent is engendered. Becoming is trans-historical, sub-historical, supra-historical, spatial, geographic, intensive, it is not imprisoned by previous coordinates of a pulsed time, so much so that it creates its own coordinates (for instance, of a fluctuating time, a non-pulsed, chronic time). The event is not to be found along a sequential time-line, it fluctuates just like the smile of Alice’s Cheshire cat, it is an incorporeal always available to be revisited, like a revolution... Duration, in its turn, is of the order of a qualitative, intensive “time” — it cannot be conceived from without, represented as a line, spatialized. To apprehend duration, one needs to espouse it, set sail in it, as one plunges into the flux of the world and its qualitative multiplicity, or even into its turbulence. Duration likewise implicates another theory of memory — not a dead past moving away from us along a sequence of events ordered on a line, but as a virtuality coexistent to us, with its scintillating points (corresponding to significant events), fluctuating in us as a virtual reservoir, fitted to

actualize itself in the form of memories (*lembrança p diferenciar de memória*). And to remain here with another image we could speak of time as a sheet: every time we use a handkerchief to blow our nose, putting it in our pocket, we crease it in a distinct manner, so that the two points of the handkerchief that were distant to each other are now contiguous, perhaps even coinciding, or, on the contrary, moving now irremediably away from each having been close at the start. It is as if time were an enormous mass of clay, with every new form created rearranging the distances between marked points. A curious topology where we are witnesses to an incessant transformation, modulation, which reinvents and sets in variation the relations between the various sheets and their scintillating points, every rearrangement producing something new, a plastic memory, always redone, always to come. A mass of moldable time, or rather, modulable time. In this Bergsonian vein, memory ceases to be a faculty interior to man, being it now man who inhabits the interior of a vast Memory, World-Memory, a gigantic inverted cone, virtual multiplicity in which we are merely a certain degree of distention (relaxation) or contraction.

IV

It is always from a line of escape, which has a temporal dimension to the extent that it tears apart a temporality and makes History “escape”, that an event, a new space-time, a singular mode of existence, a line of life, begins. The creation of new space-times may happen in a parade, in a psychotherapeutic or expressive group, in a scientific lab, in the blank page faced by the insomniac poet, in the clutter of homeless street kids, in the altered perception of a druggie, in a psychotic episode, in a movie, in a battle, in a breeze, a ritual, a love-affair, an economic crisis... And even then when all of this is submitted to the most codified forms of information, to the most serialized forms of the market, to the most universalizing forms of capitalist subjectivation, we lose all of this from sight, grasp it as nothing other than that which deviates, as that which is to be reterritorialized. One of Deleuze-Guattari's central contributions was the fine art of detecting, below such generalized homogenization, distinct space-times, in order to understand them, differentiate them, foster them. And this also means producing them. Resisting, therefore, does not only mean criticizing, combating, demolishing, but, above all, creating new space-times, new events, new subjectivities.