



From...To...

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The Multiplication Effect

If today one asks the question ‘what will the future look like?’, politicians on the ‘left’ and the ‘right’ seem to come up with pretty much the same answer. If there is a future, which is to say, assuming that this question makes any sense, the answer tends to be something to the effect that tomorrow will look like today, but will be different only by a matter of degree. Tomorrow will be like today but will be multiplied by something. A number usually.

According to the World Bank, the figure that defines progress, that is to say, whether or not one has achieved the future, is two percent. One must operationalise, surely. If national product is growing at a rate of two percent each year, then an economy is obviously growing. But if national product is *growing* at a rate of less than two percent, then the economy is ‘in recession’. In this case, the criterion for the multiplication effect is 1.02.

It would be infantile to dismiss calculation purely on the basis of their mathematisation or rationalisation of life. Most important are the consequences of this logic of multiplication, of which the World Bank is just an example. We might take this as a way of pointing to a logic of calculation, a way of defining the meaning of the future. Because in many walks of life, in the contemporary organized world this multiplication effect is used as a surrogate for the calculation of the ‘good’ and the ‘good future’. According to such a calculus, tomorrow is ‘good’ if it is the same as today but two percent (or any other figure) faster, bigger, grander, more efficient.

Differences

Critical theorists will be pretty quick to observe that the multiplication brings with it an insidious denial of alternative futures. Defining the future as today multiplied by X is one of the most effective ways that one could deny the possibility of a complete, or even a significant, modification of the basic ground rules on which ‘today’ is defined. The

multiplication effect reduces the Other to the Same. It gives the appearance of change while cleverly maintaining a relatively constant state. Against this, critical theory asserts at least the possibility of a radical difference.

But we should not forget that assertion of radical newness is also one of the ways that the status quo can be maintained. This is, in part, the point of Adorno's much maligned, and often misunderstood, criticism of jazz music. Adorno's point is that, despite the appearance of innovativeness and ever new styles and themes, behind the distribution of jazz music a commodity relation remains. Despite the fact that "for almost fifty years the productions of jazz have remained as ephemeral as seasonal styles"¹, this ephemerality is the ephemerality of commodity relations. Adorno argues that jazz sells this appearance of newness, and hence the jazz commodity market rests, as perhaps all markets do, on always the same, forever repeated 'newness'.

While it is fashionable to chastise Adorno for the subjective and elitist prejudices of his dismissal of jazz, and while such admonishments surely hit their target, we should not let this stop us from taking what remains crucially insightful in it. Why? Because today in academic circles the pretence of newness has become a form of radical chic. Ever new, ever different, but then, on another level, always the same. Organizational kitsch, or perhaps better, organized kitsch. Movement without movement.

Movements

The motto of real estate is 'location, location, location'. A high price for a property can be achieved only if the location is right. However beautiful a house might be, if it is located next to a working class housing estate, no (middle class, deep pocketed) customer can probably be persuaded to make the deal. Who wants to see the poor when waking up in the morning? Capital, then, seems to concentrate in certain locations. If one has a million in the bank, one buys a country estate or a townhouse in Mayfair. Equally, multinational banks and companies have their headquarters in The City of London, Manhattan or Frankfurt. Managers and consultants need to sit in shiny new glass palaces (because 'we want to be transparent to the public'). A multinational corporation needs to represent something: wealth, success, ambition, growth – its capacity for multiplication.

Is this the whole story? Marx reminds us not only of the ossification of capital but equally of its flows and movements. The monuments to capital in the big cities are ephemeral – yet still colossal – representations of something that is always on the move. Capital is not something solid, but gaseous, viral – it spreads into all holes, bodies and territories. Of course, today capital is global. Every day billions are shifted through the multiple networks of global capital markets – across boundaries and traditional locations of representation, such as national borders. But further: capital also enters our bodies. What combines the body of the management consultant sitting in a shiny

1 Theodor W. Adorno (1967) 'Perennial fashion – Jazz', in *Prisms*, trans. S. and S. Weber. Cambridge, MA: MIT, p. 122.

London office with the Chinese sweatshop worker producing plastic toys for the children of the West is that both of their bodies have been turned into commodities.

But capital is, of course, not the only thing that is moving. In fact, it seems to have become somewhat fashionable to talk of movement today. An entire industry of academics seems to be keeping busy by turning solids into air, fluidising structures, displacing, dislocating and deterritorialising things, in short, showing the ephemerality of life. It is said that modern bodies are always ‘in between’; that they are always becoming – coming *from* and leaving *to* somewhere, perhaps nowhere. This journal has been, perhaps, contributing to such movement. But then, we have always been keen to show that movement is a multiplicity, which is to say that there are different (kinds of) movements.

We could therefore identify two broad conceptions of movement. On one hand, there is movement as transport. One goes from A to B, knowing pretty much what A and B are and where they are located. One goes onto this journey because one has a clear purpose: shopping perhaps. Today it is most likely that one takes a car to make this journey (the supermarket might be located at a motorway junction for the ‘convenience’ of shoppers). The funny thing about cars is that one does not really leave home; one does not really leave all the comforts of the house behind. In fact, the car might have the more comfortable chair and the better CD sound system. So, in a way, car travel is about taking one’s home on the move. Nothing really unexpected will happen on this journey.

The other, perhaps more interesting, conception of movement is pretty much the flipside of the idea of movement as (car) transport. Here movement is seen as an endless becoming that is not predictable, nameable or measurable. This movement is not one from A to B but movement as such. Pure process. No locations. This movement is a ‘non-place’. Calling for such ‘pure’ movement, it seems to us, is, perhaps, a basic starting point to think of a different type of movement – beyond the restricted notion of car travel, for example. But considering that the machinery of capital is always moving at high speed, the question is whether it is enough to think of movement as ‘pure movement’. Pure movement “itself is an empty gesture, and the mere refusal of order simply leaves us on the edge of nothingness – or worse, these gestures risk reinforcing imperial power rather than challenging it”.² In other words, a movement that does not move us somewhere is a movement that runs the danger of being swallowed up by those who play speedy games of self-multiplication: capital, for example.

Locating Politics

A movement of ‘pure becoming’, then, might be as tedious as a movement where nothing really happens. Considering that the modern world is already moving at high speed, perhaps we are asking the wrong question. Perhaps what is needed is not more

2 Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2000) *Empire*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, p. 216-217.

movement, more speed, more becoming, that is, more of the same. Perhaps, we, rather, need to slow down and arrest. Perhaps we don't lack movement and creation today, but "resistance to the present."³ But where should we locate this resistance, this politics?

For us, politics is not a place. Politics is not only done in one building – such as the house of parliament – or a set of governmental buildings in the capital cities of this world. Also, politics is not only done by politicians who talk about their political affairs on radio or TV. Politics is not that which is reported in the news. In fact, this restriction of the political to today's established places of politics is dangerous precisely because it implies the possibility of an absolute place where the social can be (re)presented.

Does this mean that politics cannot be located, that it is always on the move? In a way, yes, because politics responds to a multiplicity of power/knowledge relations that do not have a clear centre. This is Foucault's suggestion about the capillary and decentred nature of power. This, however, has often been translated into the infantile notion that power and resistance are everywhere. While politics might always be on the move it also has to respond to the specificity of power/knowledge relations; it has to organise specific resistances. Sure, politics is about displacing, taking out of place – disjuncting time and place. But, in order to be effective, it also has to put into place, we might want to say organise, specific movements of resistance. The multiplicity of what is politics does not imply that anything goes anywhere; instead, it points to possibilities of different political movements some of which are more effective than others.

Perhaps, then, the political is about organising effective movements of resistance. Such movement cannot simply be about a 'pure becoming' that goes anywhere and nowhere. Instead, it is a movement that differentiates between different speeds and different kinds of slowness.⁴ This is to say that reality is not simply a never ending movement but something that is characterised by different types of speed and slowness that need to be analysed, critiqued and resisted. Speeding up and slowing down is an art, a political art. Perhaps, we can say that politics is about seizing the right moments for slowing things down and speeding them up. Seizing the right moment is not a movement for movement's sake but one that results in an event that responds to specific constellations of power and knowledge.

It has become clear that many of the traditional places of politics have become ineffective and sometimes simply corrupt. Today the political is on the move again: from Seattle to Prague, from Genoa to Evian, from Porto Allegre to Florence, as well as from and to many other places. We live in potentially exciting times. In many places difference seems to be possible again. But this movement does not simply move, because everything is moving and becoming. There are questions of organisation and strategy that need to be asked. Not all movements go into the 'right' direction; not all movements are effective in their resistance against domination. So, there is a question of 'from...to...' precisely because not all movements are the same. Where do we come

3 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1994) *What is Philosophy?*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and G. Burchill. London: Verso, p. 108.

4 Nick Lee (1998) 'Two Speeds: How are real stabilities possible?', in R.C.H. Chia (ed.) *Organised Worlds: Explorations in Technology with Robert Cooper*. London: Routledge, p. 39-66.

from and where are we heading to? Why are we moving at all? How can we conceptualise spaces of resistance? How can something move from margin to centre? What are movements of speed and slowness? What is a postmodern movement? How can movements be organised? These, then, are some of the themes, the moves, in this issue of *ephemera*.