



## Outside Politics/Continuous Experience<sup>\*</sup>

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### abstract

The political potencies of experience are alternately cherished and repudiated in cultural studies and social theory. This paper explores different possibilities for considering the role experience plays in political change. Firstly, drawing on John Cassavete's (1978) film *Opening Night* and W. G. Sebald's (1997) book *The Emigrants*, we examine how the imposition of clichéd renditions and normalising discourses of experience is refused and reworked. We introduce the concept of continuous experience to gain purchase on modes of everyday existence which are fluid, dispersed and never unified. Continuous experience interrupts and carries with time; things, people and situations are affected by continuous experience not as it is interpreted or represented but as it materialises. The concept of continuous experience allows us to consider the unrepresentable excess of everyday sociability, an excess which materialises as sociability in the making. Secondly, we investigate how these imperceptible modes of sociability operate against and beyond given modes of political representation, such as state-politics, identity politics and micropolitics. We use the term 'outside politics' to discuss strategies of political engagement after representation; that is, strategies of dis-identification and imperceptibility. Outside politics fuel the emergence of plural historical actors who circumvent the ascription of both identity and subjectivity, and who resist univocal integration into emerging hegemonic forms of political sovereignty.

Attempts to think political action in the 1990s were dominated by debates over identity politics or by melancholic discussions about the demise of the left, the seeming impossibility of resistance and hesitation over the efficacy of micropolitics which targets everyday life. Hence, for many, the 'new modes of political engagement' which emerged in the wake of Seattle appeared as a surprise – startling people out of their familiar tone of lament. There *is* a contingency and unpredictability to current modes of political engagement, and inquiring into their specificity is an important endeavour. This paper attempts to rethink this contingent articulation of new social movements from a very particular perspective: we consider how everyday experience contributes to and promotes forms of political activity, forms which question prevalent ways of

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thinking political organization today (Papadopoulos, Stephenson and Tsianos, forthcoming, 2007). We will focus on modes of engagement which harness and work with dis-identification, or what we call 'outside politics'. Our purpose is not to offer a genealogical account of outside politics, but to delineate a conceptual tool for talking about and working with something which lies at the core of outside politics, something familiar yet much overlooked: continuous experience.

## **Policing and Outside Politics**

Because the *demos* have no apparent wealth, skills, or experience, Plato saw democracy as a way of including people who otherwise have nothing to offer to the work of governance. Inclusion on the basis of an egalitarian principle acts as a paradoxical reminder that some parts of the society really have no role to play in governance. Plato's critique of democracy illuminates how opening possibilities for egalitarian principles and practices can effectively be a means of erasing those very possibilities (Rancière, 1998, 2001). This form of exclusion is not a matter of denying possibilities for political representation: it occurs prior to representation. It functions at the level of perception, rendering some people invisible. Each society is demarcated and entails different communities or groups of people. The capacities of some are simply imperceptible to others, meaning that there are always those who are accorded no proper place in the normalising organization of the social realm. Efforts to challenge this invisibility are easily captured and recouped into disputes over rights or representation, disputes which actually contribute to the exclusion of the imperceptible. Politics happen only when imperceptible actors emerge within the realm in which they already exist, but to which they are not thought to belong.

Whilst questions of representation and rights are often mistaken for politics, they in fact provide the terrain where the normalising functions of inclusion and exclusion – practices of policing – are enacted. Policing is blind to the excesses or absences of normalised existence (Rancière, 2000). Dis-identification breaks from this logic, enabling intervention in the appearance that society is made of up of identifiable, self-evident groups or people who occupy the space that has been allocated to them and no other. Now, doing politics involves refusing who one is supposed to be, refiguring the perceptible and making the incommensurability of worlds evident. Doing politics means foregrounding the incommensurability of principles of equality and rights and the inegalitarian distribution of bodies. Politics, in this strict sense, amount to the refusal of representation: politics works with imperceptible experiences and immanent transformation.

## **Imperceptible Experience**

To speak of outside politics may seem paradoxical, or it may even appear to be a glorified account of a failure to intervene in contemporary social- and geopolitics. Outside politics is easily misrecognised because, as it works on the level of everyday life, it entails processes which are imperceptible; hence it cannot be grasped by familiar

ways of conceiving of socio-political change. We suggest that in order to consider the significance of outside politics we need to explore the specific ways in which it affects everyday experience and works through continuous experience. This paper is devoted to interrogating how outside politics functions in everyday life. The concept of continuous experience is not being put forward in the attempt to designate what experience *is*, but as a tool to analyse the inner workings of modes of socio-political engagement which are being harnessed in moments of social and geopolitical exclusion. Whilst the notion of outside politics provides an observer's view of radical political action today, the concept of continuous experience explores the immanent emergence of these forms of political engagement.

In this sense, the politics of continuous experience is distinct from other prevalent forms of political engagement and the ways in which they harness experience. Firstly, political activity which takes the state as its object is underpinned by an idea of experience as universal – a notion which casts experience as the property of a given entity (i.e. a subject) and amplifies the experience of some actors, ignoring that of others (Chakrabarty, 2000; for an in depth discussion see Stephenson and Papadopoulos, 2006). Universal experience privileges political strategies which address the institution of the state as *the* way to do politics (Calhoun, 2002). Secondly, identity politics target the state with calls for recognition of multiple and different forms of experience. Experience is cast as the end product of regulation and subjectification. Identity politics attempt to insert the experiences of excluded positions into state governance and public discourse. Yet, these strategies are easily recouped when, in place of redistribution, they result in the colonising recognition of difference (Santos, 2001; Brown, 1995; de Lauretis, 1988). Importantly, there is another dimension of identity politics; to the extent that it works in social and cultural domains it can challenge the status of the state as the ultimate arbiter of socio-political transformation. This shift has given rise to a third form of intervention: micropolitics. Micropolitics takes the limits of the state as its point of departure and works with experience as the site of regulation and of transformation (Foucault, 1998, 1990; Warner, 2002). It involves putting experience to work as the substance of aesthetic cultivation (Connolly, 2002). Micropolitics fractures the ongoing processes of capture entailed in state-politics. Yet, seen historically, micropolitics have also been one of the means through which the neoliberal state (and post-Fordist regulation) has reinvented itself and continues to disseminate into social and cultural life. There is a need to respond to the ever-present risk that the aesthetics of freedom not only overlooks, but reproduces, the privileged positioning of those who cultivate it (Spivak, 1999). Because each of these three positions ends up either solidifying a subject or privileging subjectification, they cannot elucidate dimensions of experience which subvert policing. It is impossible to grasp this subversion without the tools to elucidate how people escape the seizure of immanent experience as it unfolds.

## **Dis-identification and Migration Politics**

The political possibilities of dis-identification can be illustrated if we consider theories of the autonomy of migration which attempt to intervene in public discussions of, and policies formulated in response to, migration. Much political activity around migration

seeks to control (or counter the control of) border-crossing, detention and the legislation of residency and visas. Migrants are commonly cast as either threats to a nation-state's integrity or victims of the state's punitive policies. But both of these positions approach migration from the perspective of an observer. They focus on people's points of departure and arrival. What becomes impossible to grasp is the journey itself.

When we cease taking the observer's perspective and engage with theories of the autonomy of migration, it is possible to approach migration as constitutive force in current social transformation (Bojadzijeve, Karakayali and Tsianos, 2004; Karakayali and Tsianos, 2005; Mezzadra, 2001). Theories about the autonomy of migration no longer focus on how migrants become integrated into the societies in which they reside (of course this happens), but on how people move and change these societies *de facto* – by integrating and rearranging the given restrictions and conditions into their mobility. Migration's weapon of imperceptibility is not the only tool in use. Neither is it the case that imperceptibility always succeeds, it is a route without guarantees, it involves pain, suffering, hunger, desperation, torture, even the deaths of thousands of people in the sunken ships into the oceans of earth. But neither of these details can justify ignoring the journey and forces of migration. Hence, the autonomy of migration is concerned with how migrants themselves organize their mobility, their informal social networks, their employment opportunities, and their participation in the institutional policies of a certain country.

When we turn to the inside story of migration, the dynamic and contradictory trajectories being opened, crisscrossed and closed again and again as people travel, we can see that border-crossings are effected by becoming imperceptible. Instead of being perceptible, discernible, identifiable, current migration puts on the agenda a new form of politics and a new formation of active political subjects who refuse to become a political subject at all (rather than strive to find a different way to become or to be a political subject). Sir Alfred Mehran (the man who existed as Mehran Karimi Nasseri in 1988 when he got stuck in Terminal 1 in Charles de Gaulle airport in Paris) refused to use his original name when in 1999 he was offered a UNHCR passport which rendered him identifiable by the assimilationist logic of liberal-national administration. Many of the migrants in the border camps of the EU, instead of waiting for a decision regarding their asylum status, escape the camps and dive into the informal networks of clandestine labour in the metropolises. The migrants waiting on the North shores of Africa to cross the Mediterranean in floating coffins burn their documents and enter the life of 'Herraguas,' or burners, which *de facto* puts them outside of any politics of rights (Kuster, 2006a; Kuster and Tsianos, 2005). Visibility, in the context of illegal migration, belongs to the inventory of technologies pertaining to the regimes of control which police migrational flows. Becoming imperceptible is an immanent act of resistance because it makes it impossible to identify migration as process which consists of fixed collective subjects. Becoming imperceptible is the most precise and effective tool migrants employ to oppose the individualizing, quantifying, policing, and representational pressures of contemporary regimes of migration control (Papadopoulos, Stephenson and Tsianos, forthcoming 2007). Outside politics are the means through which migrants finally engage in processes of de-representation and dis-identification in order, not simply to enter into the game of policing, but to break the

rules of representation and integration, transforming the game into a political dispute over their 'right to be' (Papadopoulos and Tsianos, 2007a).

Dis-identification is not primarily a question of shifting identitarian ascriptions; it is a material and an embodied strategy of 'de-humanisation', it breaks the relation between your name and your body. A body without a name is a non-human human being, an animal which runs. It is non-human because it deliberately abandons the humanist regime of rights. The UNHCR convention for asylum seekers protects the rights of refugees on arrival, but not when they are on the road. On the road, migrants are accompanied by traffickers; the coyote of the US-Mexico border, the British sailors who operate as sharks, the 'korakia' or ravens of the Greek-Albanian border, the Chinese 'shetou' or snakehead (cf. Papadopoulos and Tsianos, 2007b). In the sovereign public imaginary, migration is an illegally organized scandal with only two players: lawbreaking migrants and criminal smugglers. But the criminalization of border-crossing and the reduction of the complex and polymorphic networks which sustain migrational movements as a one act/two actors piece hides the common elisions made between the alleged sovereign humanitarian doctrine 'save the people' and violent fixations on the politics of 'save the borders' from unchecked intrusion. Migration is not a unilinear individual choice process; it is not an effect of the push and pull mechanics of supply and demand for human capital. Migration adapts differently to each particular context, changes its faces, links unexpected social actors together, absorbs and reshapes the sovereign dynamics targeting its control. The unruly, transformative force of migration is primarily sustained by cooperation, solidarity, the usage of broad networks and resources, shared knowledge, collective anticipation (Kuster, 2006b). But to understand the political efficacy of this kind of cooperation (which functions without reference to a *fixed* collective subject), we need to elucidate the way in which it works with everyday experience.

## **Immanent Struggles in the Terrain of Experience**

One might think that with working the immanent and contingent planes of experience would unleash all the creative and subversive potentials which are connected to a non-essentialist, anti-foundational, non-binary political way of engaging with life. And while this is certainly the case – many critical thinkers in the field of Science and Technology Studies have stressed this (Bowker and Star, 1999; Hess, 1995; Schraube, 1998; Winner, 1986) – it seems that this form of activity simultaneously fails to interrupt a mode of capturing of experience which is deeply embedded in current structures of postliberal domination.

Consider for example, the concept of hybridity which has been so central for undoing racial, cultural and nationalist essentialist practices (Ang, 2003; Anzaldúa, 1999; Bhabha, 1994; Hall, 1994; Papastergiadis, 2005; Santos, 2001; Werbner and Modood, 1997; Young, 1995). Now, notions of 'rhizomatic hybridity' (Wade, 2005: 606), are entering into discussions of hybridity. One might think that this engagement with life would intensify the subversiveness of these ideas in our current conditions. But the business of hybridity seems to have rather ambivalent effects. They range from

normalising hybrid identities by including them into shuddering multicultural societies (as discussed by Hage, 1998) to the aestheticisation and “ambivalent coupling between racism and sexualized desire for the Other” (Sharma and Sharma, 2003: 5). And Sanjay and Ashwani Sharma continue:

Contemporary Orientalism appears less troubled with the danger of going native (and even miscegenation) in its relation to otherness, which may account for the ‘frisson’ of difference being harder to sustain now. Moreover, the encounter with the Other is no longer only one of a distant place or mediated through Orientalist representations; it has become an everyday occurrence in the Western multicultural metropolis. Nevertheless, while the racism of Orientalism has shifted towards a differentialist inclusion, we find that an assiduous preservation of ‘the proper distance’ from the ‘Other’ has become portentous. (2003: 6)

The immanent and situated transformations taking place on the level of everyday practices are easily absorbed into an all encompassing system of representations, a system which then re-enters and pervades the everyday. We understand this absorption of the subversive potentials of emergent experience as a process where a transcendent, optic trajectory struggles against and finally dominates over the continuous experience of situated actions. That is, regimes of control are established by transforming one mode of everyday existence into another. The immanent unfolding of life exists in tandem with an optic order marked by its transcendent vision and representational mediation.

We could draw on Benjamin’s work on phantasmagoria (whose origins are always hidden from those who are drawn into it) to analyse the ascendancy of the optic mode of existence (Benjamin, 1999; Buse et al., 1999: 59-70). Equally, we might turn to Debord’s (1994) work on the spectacle, characterised in part as “the common ground of the deceived gaze and of false consciousness” (1994, thesis 3). Despite their importance for cultivating our imagination, there is however a problem with these concepts: they invoke the optic as something external to what people do, as something which is added to people’s actions as a means of subjugation and coercion. In these approaches, the representations and images which dominate and subjugate immediate sensual experience and material action seem to have their provenance in the notion of ideology. A top-down reality appears to dominate people’s daily actions and experiences.

But dominance does not function through the imposition of external images, ideologies and representations over people’s ordinary lives. With Foucault, we can say that people are not duped, they “know perfectly well ... and they are certainly capable of expressing themselves”; but what they are contesting is a “system of power which blocks, prohibits, and invalidates” some discourses and knowledges by “subtly penetrat[ing] an entire societal network” (1977: 207). This suggests that optic, transcendent trajectories circulate *in* emergent life, in everyday action and experience. That is, at least two very different trajectories are carved out in this immanent terrain of experience. It may seem that the terrain of experience is an ensnared space where familiar and new modes of cooption and policing proliferate. Another trajectory needs to be identified before the politics of experience breaks with policing. Daily action, transformations in life, everyday experience are immanent, non-totalisable, haptic, material and situated (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 492-500; Haraway, 1991).

## Working with Experience as a Question to be Addressed

In this paper we consider that other trajectory, continuous experience, and the political strategies of imperceptibility and dis-identification as the means through which outside politics are effective. Outside politics work with the excess and indeterminacy of continuous experience. Through readings of Cassavetes' film *Opening Night* and Sebald's book *The Emigrants*, we suggest that this excess is neither mystical nor extraordinary. This excess is carried with experience as it circulates amongst people, things and situations (Irigaray, 1985; Santos, 2001). It travels in continuous experience, materialising and moving people, allowing them to connect with, instead of repudiating disparate and unexpected trajectories. Working with continuous experience entails refusing clichéd subject positions in the absence of alternatives, anticipating and orientating towards non-existent, contingent possibilities which may or may never come about.

In working with these texts, we approach them as neither representations nor evidence of particular forms of experience but as opportunities to work with experience as a problem to be explained (Scott, 1991). We have selected these texts because they both evoke characters who exist and are sustained by realms beyond those organized and regulated by optic, transcendent trajectories of experience. In different ways the audiences of Cassavetes' film, *Opening Night*, and the readers of Sebald's fictional biography, *The Emigrants*, encounter a break with normative representations of experience. As they live out their lives, Sebald's migrants seem to bypass normative accounts of the Holocaust and of survival. Cassavetes' character Myrtle Gordon is immersed in an active struggle over others' normative understandings of the role of her own experience in her performance of a stereotypical character on stage. Hence, both Cassavetes and Sebald prompt questions about how it is possible to work with experience as anything other than an ensnared space of policing. In addressing this question we introduce the concept of continuous experience, and we develop this concept through our readings of the texts. We do not claim that continuous experience exists in these texts, but simply that the questions raised by Cassavetes and Sebald can be addressed by bringing the concept of continuous experience to a reading of them.

### Opening Night

Myrtle Gordon (played by Gena Rowlands) is a star. This is not the first time she has been cast by Manny Victor, nor is it her first encounter on stage with the lead actor Maurice Adams (John Cassavetes), a past lover. *Opening Night* (1978), observes the play in the week leading up to the Broadway premiere. They are using a short run in New Haven to fine-tune the production. But it would help if the director, playwright, cast and crew first shared a common vision of exactly what they will be producing. Myrtle seems to be disturbing the cooperation required to get there. Manny and Myrtle both know that the power of Myrtle's work stems from her capacity – not just to represent a role – but to be *in* the play, to move with the part, straining and opening new possibilities in the script, to put her vision into motion in the connections between actors, to allow it to emerge in the performances of others even in the scenes in which

she herself is absent. But now the star's capacity is being tested. The script represents a woman's experience of aging as the gradual loss of one's ability to have an effect on the world, on others. Not only does Myrtle find the character alien, but if she is convincing in the part she will always be damned to play despairing, aging women. To connect with the rest of the cast over the truth of the play as she sees it, she has to break with their misconception that the script is a vehicle for the amplification of her own personal experience of aging.

Cassavetes contests the illusion that experience can be represented in a linear cinematic narrative. Instead of telling a story of this or that experience, he explores the mechanics of experience in ordinary life (Carney, 2001). It is no coincidence that Cassavetes' films were improvised, emphasising the weight of the actors' role (Cassavetes, 1976; Charity, 2001). His films are anti-narratives which attempt to reveal how our familiar narratives of everyday life are nothing more than clichés – ready to break down any moment, to become incommensurable, to move in unexpected directions, or simply to disappear. Cassavetes moves from representation to improvisation, from narrative to experience. *Opening Night* considers the suffocating treatment of experience as something reified and readily representable. Into this, Cassavetes introduces the attempt to render experience continuous.

The playwright's clichéd representation of aging does offer something insightful about a woman's experience of being subjected to this hegemonic discourse. What is awry is that the play presents only what can be said about experience when we look from outside of the lived moment; it only examines experience which has been folded onto the subject from the perspective of a self-reflexive, over-arching 'I'. It does not offer any sense of a person being in the midst of the immanent unfolding of experience. But Myrtle tries to refuse the imperative to first interiorise the character and then to struggle with the experience of ageing in a reflexive way. Instead, she tries to perform this experience as a shared and continuous mode of relating to the others involved in the production. Myrtle does the experience of ageing as something which drifts through indivisible terrain, working at the level of deep linkages (Lovink and Rossiter, 2005) that allow for new connections with others, new forms of intimate relations, a new feeling of one's own position in the world.

## **Experience After Representation**

It might be possible to read Myrtle as engaged in a struggle over the articulation of experience as she tries to counter and resist a normative mode of subjectivation to aging. But such a reading imposes an overly-narrow understanding of socio-political change as the result of acts of resistance and articulation (Frow and Morris, 1999; Hall, 1986a). Myrtle is in the games of neither articulation nor resistance, she attempts to introduce the players to another game altogether. She does politics by introducing what is outside of politics, by bringing the fundamental indivisibility of experience into play. Nor is Myrtle seeking others' affirmation of her own unique experience. Rather, she emits signals which might fire shared experiences of the continuous and contradictory nature of aging. She tries to invoke a common space where the singular threads of



experiences of aging running between herself and the others can be activated and connected, rendering a new play.

By cultivating a space for interaction, continuous experience contests the idea that each person owns his/her experience, reflects on it and negotiates its meaning. There are only common experiences on which different actors work taking different points of entrance. And this is not individualisation, but *individuation* (Virno, 2004). Starting from fluid, fragmented, imperceptible, common experiences individuation involves tracing singular paths, paths which often collapse again into each other, sometimes diverge, develop in parallel, or connect up with other unexpected paths. The stuff of individuation is continuous experience moving through individuals rather than belonging to them.

It is only after the work of demarcation that we can speak of ‘an experience’ or ‘my experience’; that is, ad hoc impositions made from the transcendent perspective of normative discourses of social life. From this transcendent perspective experience is cut, continuous experience is rendered divisible, scattered and distributed across individuals (Barad, 2003). Each individual experience mirrors this normative and transcendent perspective of social life: universal experience. An additional step, the constitution of individuals as having reflexive interiority, sustains the picture of experience as an essentially private realisation of universal experience. The question of universal experience is a question of power. It normalises and calibrates individual action. In terms of politics it achieves the exact opposite of outside politics’ goal: it performs a colonising inclusion of individual experience. Continuous experience challenges this approach to experience by exceeding the normalising and inclusive regulation of universal experience, and it does this through materialisation and tarrying with time.

## **Materialisation of Experience**

“I don’t want to argue about this, we’ll rehearse it”, Manny says to Myrtle. It is 4.30 in the morning and she has rung him to insist that the play is not working. She cites the moment in the play where a couple realise that their relationship is over, and her character is slapped. The following day the rehearsal falls apart. Manny first tries to introduce another slap: Myrtle’s character hits back at Maurice’s character. Manny mistakenly reduces Myrtle’s aversion to the scene to her struggle with heteronormativity. But Myrtle is challenging the despair she is being asked to portray.

The others at the rehearsal intensify the imposition of normalising discourses by becoming increasingly assured that Myrtle has personal problems with aging. The situation is saturated with endless negotiations of discourses which simply have no purchase on Myrtle’s concerns, it cannot absorb new efforts to put experience to work. Myrtle has to act. She simply has to redo the situation. When Manny asks her to rehearse the slap scene she does not argue or refuse, but she simply does not go with it, she falls to the ground and starts shouting. She stays there, Maurice is forced out of his role, he cannot say his lines to a body on the ground. Without negotiation, Myrtle inserts a new fact. At this point the others can no longer close this act with a reading

that seals Myrtle into her personal dilemma. Having introduced a rupture, now the hegemonic reading figures as a *reaction* to a new fact, a new possibility. Myrtle's doing continuous experience has affected the situation. It can no longer continue as it was. Manny is forced to retreat to act 1, scene 1 – and Myrtle and Maurice leave the stage. The efficacy of action without negotiation stems from the fact that the potency of continuous experience lays its materialisation, not in its narration, in its performative power to change things, not its capacity to represent them.

Continuous experience materialises – in two ways. Firstly, although experience can be understood as constituted through interpretation (Vattimo, 1997; Taylor, 1971) or – alternatively through discourse (Scott, 1991) – this is not all there is to experience. Materialisation means to act both on the inside and outside of existing meanings and discourses: it is the objective making and remaking of the world in ways that may not be representable in given discourses. That is what Myrtle does, for example, when she stops the 'normal' flow of the rehearsal.

Secondly, continuous experience flows not only through people but also through objects. Elements of the material world become artefacts of experience. Objects and material structures are far more independent, more real, more durable than any discourses. And discourses have meaning to the extent that they interact with these material, interobjective worlds – not the other way around (Barad, 1998, 2003). In the words of Bourdieu there is a 'still pedagogy' which a social field – that is comprised of social interactions, objects, practices – exercises on people participating in it (Bourdieu, 1987: 128). Things and objects are constantly incorporating and producing other objects (and therefore the world we live in), 'objects are thirsty,' as Anders says, for more materiality and for more action (Schraube, 2005).

Continuous experience is neither the result of narrative nor of discourses, but exists in actions carried out in material worlds. Other people, things, material spaces, situations – all these actants – participate in the unfolding of experience. Experience is not primarily a matter of thought. Things and spaces are carriers of experience, which becomes ours. The common space of individuation is not just an intellectual representation, it is not merely a symbolic construction, it is matter: structured through objects, artefacts, landscapes, buildings. Individuation harnesses the experience things carry with them as it passes from things to people to things to situations and so on.

This has implications for the politics of everyday life. When experience materialises it transforms our conditions of visibility and action in a specific field, it comes out of the everyday and transforms it (Debord, 1981). And it does that by bypassing the very basic legitimising foundations of those fields' hegemonic discourses. Experience which was previously dismissed, or was simply invisible, is inserted into a new matrix of legitimacy. Myrtle already knows that her attempts to gain others' understanding will necessarily be captured, tamed and reinserted into the framework of the situation. She has to affect the situation in a different way. She cannot negotiate. She is forced to do politics from beyond, outside politics: that is, to act from outside of the normalising discourses at work both in the script and being repeatedly imposed on her by the others' misrecognition of her efforts to intervene in the play. And finally she does by appearing drastically drunk for the opening night performance. It is not simply Myrtle, but a relay

between Myrtle and a vast amount of alcohol which together trigger people's participation in a different play – the other actors and most importantly the audience. The performance moves people. Her politics are effective.

## **Tarrying with the Event**

Although continuous experience unfolds through people and things it is not only a spatial phenomenon. It also flows through time, departing from the logic that experiences are discrete points on the timeline of individual's life story (Adam, 2004). *Opening Night* has a linear time frame: the highly-pressured week leading up to the premier on Broadway. The expectation is that each day will bring the production closer to the dazzling success they all want to perform in New York. But, Myrtle retreats from this chronology. And, instead of becoming increasingly tight as the days pass, the production becomes progressively looser, open and more unpredictable. The rule-breaking, moving performance is not a result of the play's progressive refinement. It is idiosyncratic and contingent, and could have easily failed. Myrtle anticipates and invests in a shift which may or may not have occurred. She tarrys with time (Theunissen, 1991). The imposition of normative discourses over experience occurs in time, structuring time and controlling the flow and the figurations of everyday activities (Elias, 1978). Myrtle moves against this regulation of time, but without intention. Myrtle cannot articulate an intention – even to herself – because what she is trying to evoke is already outside, unrepresentable. She could never have intended the event of the opening night, but at the same time, she engages in a process of change which is orientated towards it (Badiou, 2001). Tarrying occurs before intentionality and entails the dissolution of the reflexive subject. It expands the present, creating a moment of slowness, a moment where desire unfolds. Immanent experience unfolds in space and time without constituting a coherent subject (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). Continuous experience does not produce intentionality: it produces action as part of the social field in which it unfolds. Tarrying involves a mode of being which is inextricable from others and from the situation – a move beyond the self, enabling the permeation of experience with the world. Tarrying is intentionless and targetless: it has no object.

But perhaps tarrying is passivity masquerading as activity. To claim, as we are, that an objectless mode of being can be involved in doing effective politics involves a move away from familiar ideas of active political engagement. Effective political strategies are commonly thought to be underpinned by the capacity to adopt a transcendent view of the situation, work out what is happening and, from this detached perspective, figure out the most promising means of intervention. Of course, such an approach has been criticised on the basis that it cannot take account of situatedness (Haraway, 1991). But there is an additional problem: political action involves working not with what is already present and identifiable in its existence, but what is imperceptible, unfolding, with possibilities which may or may not be realised (Patton, 2000). And, in overlooking this, transcendent accounts of politics exclude what is becoming.

Myrtle is captured in the incessant circulation of normalising discourses, any attempt to introduce an excess is recuperated into an optic, transcendent trajectory. Retreating

from this transcendent position, without guarantees Myrtle inhabits a space outside of these discourses. She works with unrealised trajectories, possibilities which do not yet exist (not even in the symbolic, nor the imagination), potentials which may never manifest. And yet, she is driven by these non-existent possibilities. Myrtle could never have intended this event, but at the same time, she engages in a process of change which is orientated towards it (Badiou, 2001). And the non-existent event of the new play could not have come into existence without this unfolding of continuous experience.

Continuous experience is necessary to outside politics in a double sense. Firstly, it reconstitutes a situation as a space which is transformable through drifting, movement and the recombination of actants. This first dimension is connected to the immanent materialisation of experience. Secondly, through tarrying, continuous experience breaks with the regulated time and order of a situation opening it to non-present possibilities. Continuous experience is both immanent and full of potentialities. It is incorrigibly present, mesmerised by suddenness (Bohrer, 1998). This is political action from within, an active mode of being which prepares and evokes a change in the unfurling present.

## **Everyday Sociability in the Making**

It might be argued that continuous experience is really something exceptional, something only a minority of privileged actors can tap into (Rich, 1980) or which only exists at special points of rupture and transgression (e.g. Bataille, 1986). Against this, we argue that continuous experience is simply there; it is particular neither to special actors nor to extraordinary moments of transgression. It is an ordinary, ongoing, largely overlooked aspect of being. Whereas already captured modes of connecting may be easily identifiable, it is harder to see sociability in the making.

Cultural and social theory has been deeply involved in both the turn towards experience as an object of research and in contesting this broad shift. On the one hand, experience is valued as a foundation for articulations which evidence subjection or resistance to hegemonic discourses (Hall, 1986b; Slack, 1996). On the other, such promises are contested when experience is recast as the end-product of discursive assemblages (Scott, 1991; Rose, 1996). At the extreme ends of these debates, experience is either irrelevant to or identical with socio-political regulation and change. Continuous experience is grasped by neither of these poles. It operates at the level of everyday sociability; it is a mode of doing everyday politics which interferes with hegemonic politics by creating connections between actants which circumvent the normative terms or relating (Hardt and Negri, 2000). Unlike current hegemonic forms of sociability which are already captured by neoliberal governmental rationalities, the potential of continuous experience lies in the fact that it is sociability in the making.

## **Dispersal in the Everyday**

Sebald's *The Emigrants* (1997) evokes figures who are being pushed out of history: people who, because of the passage of history, are limited in how they can represent

their experience in the present. Yet they can still act in accordance with their experience and work through it. They can forge a different understanding of history without representation. Hegemonic discourses – of survival or loss, for example – cannot be avoided, but *The Emigrants* circumvent such discourses' reinstallation as central principles which order the trajectories of their lives. Sebald's emigrants travel with history without ever making it their point of departure or arrival. It is dispersed, unevenly distributed in the times and spaces of people's lives.

Max Ferber's life is not given meaning by the Holocaust. He is fifteen in 1939 when his parents arrange for him to leave Munich for England. Their plan is to follow. He lives in, what he describes as, an anarchic boarding school populated by boys who wear brightly coloured school uniforms – at times Ferber feels like he has become one of a flock of parrots. He receives fortnightly letters from home. After two years the letters stop. Only later he learns the reason: his parents had been deported to Riga. One might think here that his parents' disappearance will steer Ferber's course in life, an experience which will become memory, a memory which will become the most crucial principle endowing meaning in Ferber's life. But as Ferber ashamedly says, he was relieved to stop receiving the letters. Only later did he gradually grasp the fact of what happened, but he never grasped the meaning. There is no meaning. The moments when the Holocaust enters Ferber's experience are black holes in his life. The Holocaust is unspeakable, beyond meaning, and beyond representation. It is dispersed in Ferber's ever-present: "There is neither a past nor a future" (Sebald, 1997: 181), only a present. The Holocaust is dispersed in situations, encounters, things, people, Ferber's artwork, the way he lives as a hermit artist. History disseminates in the most unexpected corners of one's existence. It is not possible to collect dispersed moments of continuous experience into the one crucial, divisible overarching experience of the Holocaust.

Sebald evokes this dispersal of experience in Ferber's life and beyond. The account we read is written by a raconteur who, after a period of close friendship, has lost touch with Ferber. Twenty-five years later, the raconteur chances upon a story in the Sunday paper about a now famous artist, Ferber. For the first time he learns about Ferber's parents' disappearance. He goes to rekindle their relation and is warmly welcomed. Ferber gives him the diaries his mother, Luisa, wrote between 1939 and 1941. Luisa writes, not about present events, but about her childhood, her early love affairs, her marriage to Ferber's father. This is how Luisa experiences the Holocaust, she knows her fate and actively moves towards it bringing the depth of her engagement in life, in the community of which she is a part. The trajectories of Luisa's life run through her son, to his friend, who is entrusted to write about Ferber's life. The friend writes what we read. But first he writes, deletes, rewrites, deletes and writes again, concerned not only about doing justice to Ferber, but about "the entire questionable business of writing" (1997: 230). When Ferber gets emphysema the friend visits him on his deathbed; he never gives Ferber what he has written. The text makes up the fictive biographical account that we read. Sebald works with dispersed experience, not by giving it a coherent return to a person to whom it might be thought to belong but, as it circulates, by tracing its course through bodies, time and place.

In *The Emigrants* experience is a unified whole, but without a centre of gravity, without a central historical reference point. Like Woolf's Mrs. Ramsey, their experience is only

held together by innumerable scattered pieces of historical events (Woolf, 1997). As Luisa writes in 1941, “when I think back to those days’ between the wars, the winter days of ice-skating, I see shades of blue everywhere – a single empty space, stretching out in the twilight of late afternoon, crisscrossed by the tracks of ice-skaters long vanished” (1997: 217-8).

When the friend returns to Kissingen to search for traces of Luisa’s family, the elderly Germans he encounters appear as George Grosz caricatures living out their lives against the stage-set of a spa town. The city officials give him instructions to take 1000 paces south from the town centre and keys to the cemetery, keys which do not fit the locks on the gate. Clambering over the high walls he finds a neglected wilderness, and finally the gravestone of Luisa’s mother. In one sense, this grave is what he has come for, but now before it he does not know what to think. He marks his presence with a stone and leaves. Although the cemetery has not been completely destroyed, the space it is allocated in the town’s life is sealed and discrete, history never moves beyond the walls of the cemetery, never flows into the everyday life of Kissingen. The friend breaks the seal by participating in the dispersal of the Holocaust, its manifestations in seeds which have fallen and grown unnoticed outside of the cemetery’s walls. But also in seeds which have never really grown, but which just appear as bearers of the passage of historical time (Améry, 1964/1980).

Sebald conveys this dispersal of continuous experience by refusing the imperative to present ‘the Holocaust experience’ in the form of a coherent and cogent story. He deals with (fictive) biographical material, but without allowing it to be captured by the logic of narrative. There is no climax, no resolution, no dawning realisations about the meaning of experience. The point when the friend stands in front of the Ferber family grave is not illuminating. He simply says he does not know what to think, and leaves.

Dispersal is more than an attribute or quality of continuous experience. It is the process through which experience escapes capture and travels, destabilising clichéd renditions of events, crisscrossing space, releasing details of existence from their neutralised designation. The dispersal of experience is the means through which continuous experience flourishes and opposes any attempt to allocate a proper place to history’s leftovers. The friend leaves Kissingen deeply disturbed by the efficiency with which a generation of Germans have cleaned-up history. It is not that they have extinguished all evidence of the past, they have just tried to control its dispersal by tidying everything up and now they no longer need to actively remember it. They have made the move against which Jean Améry (1964/1980) rails: you cannot relegate the past to memory, it is always active everyday experience, even when it is elusive (Middleton and Brown, 2005). Dispersed experience is anti-memory: “And the last remnants memory destroys” (Sebald, 1997: 1).

## **Fluidity and Imperceptibility**

*The Emigrants* is populated by neither heroes nor anti-heroes, but by imperceptible characters. Although their everyday existence has been touched by the Holocaust, the

migrants' lives are not dominated by the trauma of survival. Their exclusion in the cleaned-up version of history does mark their lives, but they are not driven by the felt necessity to live as a response to it. They live arbitrary lives, which are no more and no less exceptional than most. But in doing this, they let history emerge and flow through many different unconnected, small incidents of life.

Sebald evokes this proximity to life through a series of unrelated figures who, as they age, forsake exceptionality, enter into ordinary life and embrace a mode of being unmediated by the clean-up of history. Their intimate relation to the Holocaust is not placed outside of their lived everyday existences; nor is it super-imposed on them, condemning them to permanent states of loss and anxiety. *The Emigrants* is not a book about loss, or about potentials unrealised. It deals with the individuation of the experience of the Holocaust.

Continuous experience is fluid (Irigaray, 1985). It is most closely connected to the surroundings, the vicinities, to the habitats of everyday life. After assimilating into his new country, Dr Henry Selwyn pursues a career as a doctor in England and in his later years devotes himself to his garden. In the last decade of his life, Paul Bereyter lives with a French woman and still retains a connection to his home town in Germany, where he had worked as a primary school teacher. Ambros Adelwarth leaves Austria and becomes an exclusive butler; he travels throughout the world accompanying the extravagant American, Cosmo Solomon. Max Ferber pursues his art in a corner of Manchester's abandoned docks, completely retreating from the normal business of the art world. In the crisscrossing paths of their migrations, Sebald's figures encounter death by making life. The Holocaust is carried with them, in them, in their lives. They dive into the realm of imperceptibility (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987).

The migrants retreat from the world without spurning it; they slip into the fissures between clichéd modes of everyday exchange, opening new ways of connecting. They are not hostile to others, they forge singular connections with those crossing their paths. The relations Sebald evokes are striking for their warmth, the openness of the curiosity which flows between people, the quality of the affections which emerge, the care taken – not out of a sense of obligation, but because people appreciate, are implicated and curious about the possibilities being cultivated in each others' trajectories of individuation.

Doing imperceptibility means retreating from the invitation to connect to others along terms dictated by the need for recognition of an individualised, divisible experience. For example, it involves refusing the interpellation of oneself as a 'survivor', an identity which always risks constraining experience. Imperceptible experience can act as a force which interrupts the representation of selves and the affirmation of identity. Instead of relating to others on the basis of a common interest, connections emerge from a shared search for a viable way to change the very conditions of existence. Such connections can contest the constraints of hegemonic identities, expanding the terrain on which the experience of the Holocaust can be lived out in radically different ways.

But here, possibilities for relating are not structured by the imperative to bring difference into play, nor does doing imperceptibility necessitate denying difference.

Imperceptibility starts from difference but involves a continuous drift away from the identities which are related to different subject positions. Hence, imperceptibility is a process of dis-identification; it works with singular, continuous experience. In this sense, outside politics do not aim to amplify either pole of the identity-difference axis (Butler, 1997): the migrants are liberated from the terms of this axis. This allows for new forms of inclusiveness in political disputes. By becoming imperceptible, actants without legitimacy can insert themselves into the political field, changing the architecture of the discourses in play.

## **Continuous Experience and Political Change**

Although the mode of engagement we are describing here does not involve a final, unified agenda, it would be a mistake to conclude that continuous experience and imperceptible politics are purposeless. By contesting exclusion through inclusion they generate alternative means for doing politics. In our current socio-political conditions state-politics, identity politics and micropolitics provide the necessary terrain for the proliferation and functioning of new hegemonic forms of transnational, postliberal sovereignty (Papadopoulos and Tsianos, 2007a; Balibar, 2004). What we are witnessing is not so much the demise of the state, the rise of transnational powers, or cultural political struggles, not even a new alliance between these actors. In postliberal sovereignty the state ceases to represent itself in its actions; it splits itself, and certain parts of it participate in broader social aggregates articulating interests, wills and political views from many different bits of social classes, social groups, associations of civil society (such as trade unions, customers organizations, pressure groups), local businesses, TNCs, NGOs, international governing bodies, transnational organizations (Sassen, 1999). What are emerging are vertical aggregates of power which use cultural politics to help maintain the coherence of postliberal power formations.

In this field, state-politics, identity politics and micropolitics all fail to establish a break with these emerging aggregates of sovereignty. For example, micropolitics were introduced as an answer to the limitations of state-politics. The intention was to counter everyday normalisation, to counter the effacement of subjectivities, the codification of otherness and Fordist immobility (Massumi, 1993; Connolly, 2002; Moulier Boutang, 1998). But as the state splits itself and disseminates into the finest fissures of society micropolitics (or the aesthetic cultivation of experience) have become necessary elements for its functioning and for its effective transformation into a postliberal mode of governance. Postliberal conditions require more than self-regulating individuals to proliferate. Networked subjects are needed, subjects who, by assuming responsibility for creating connections between disparate actants, actively forge new vertical aggregates of power (Sassen, 2004).

However, in situations where postliberal sovereignty recuperates the production of experience into a crucial moment of its own reproduction, there is still an excess of experience which infringes on and ruptures the new logic of control. The political relevance of this excess, of continuous experience, is that it creates new forms of sociability which operate in the everyday and outside of the inclusive strategies of



postliberal aggregates. Continuous experience fuels the engagement of those who are excluded from the logics of representation in current forms of sovereignty. We are not proposing that continuous experience is inherently subversive of hegemonic political rationalities (Bove and Empson, 2002). Rather, we are suggesting that if there is one form of politics which *can* be subversive in the current configuration of the everyday it is this. Through the creation of sociabilities, outside politics make apparent in everyday activity a world which is neglected or silenced by the dominant discourses of contemporary power.

*Opening Night* depicts the struggle over a move from identity politics and micropolitics to the politics of imperceptibility in the everyday. Continuous experience materialises – not through the resolution of tensions between all those involved in staging the play – but as a fact with which all have to contend. A new play is there. Unburdened by others expectations of their success, or even failure, Sebald’s characters simply move imperceptibly. The migrants take up the dispersal of continuous experience and in so doing they reveal the social relations which are being forged in the neglected spaces between hegemonic discourses of tragedy and loss – modes of sociability which rework our sense of the everyday lived experience of the Holocaust and the futures such experience makes possible. Their everyday experience is the place where history unfolds. Rather than moving towards futures which are determined by their pasts, the migrants navigate without ever puncturing the “mist that no eye can dispel” (Sebald, 1997: 25). Moving deeper into the immanence of the present entails a refusal of clichéd subject positions, a retreat from the self. This is the subjectless condition of outside politics. Policing proliferates through the capacity state-politics, identity politics and micropolitics have to evoke subjects through processes of representation. In contrast, outside politics refuse representation, harnessing everyday sociabilities which exceed the constitution of today’s subjectivities. In this paper we argued that it is through continuous experience that these sociabilities operate and *de facto* change the world we live in. They create an imperceptible world, World 2 (Papadopoulos, 2006), which has the power to challenge the political constitution of post-liberal societies. Outside politics insist that another world is here.

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