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Transversal Fields of Experience

Introduction to *Inflexions* Issue 4

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Transversality is a dimension that strives to overcome two impasses... [and] tends to be realized when maximum communication is brought about between different levels and above all in terms of different directions (Guattari, 1972/2003, 80).

Right now zigzags are activating. They may not be at the forefront of the actions and events taking place at this moment but they are occurring. Zigzags, a transversality of sound and colour in Sher Doruff's "ZeNeZ and the RE[a]DShift BOOM!", open this fourth issue of *Inflexions* by activating several movements that emerge from the middle, the space of the in-between. As an expression of the zigzags found in her graphical essay, Doruff's title derives from a comment that Gilles Deleuze made in the final interview with Claire Parnet for the program *L'Abécédaire de Gilles Deleuze* (1994), where upon reaching the letter Z he muses that "he sees Zen as the reverse of Nez (nose), which is also a zigzag" (Stivale 2008: 20). We can see both the words "Zen" and "Nez" in Doruff's title but she changes Deleuze's palindrome by altering the simple zigzag reading of the word. By situating the letter "N" so that it overlaps in both words, Doruff's new compound word produces a zigzag, or transversal, movement that emerges in its reading. The "N" shifts from one word to the other as it is read overcoming the need to read the word both forwards and backwards but still leaving the potential for a palindromic reading.

Like Doruff's compound word, the title of this issue, "Transversal Fields of Experience," activates its own transversal movement that emerges in its reading. Upon first reading the title, it may be understood to say "Transversal *Fields of Experience*." But a second reading of the title is possible and offers a different proposition. By placing the emphasis in the first part of the title, it can be read as "*Transversal Fields* of Experience." Because the word "Fields", functioning similarly to Doruff's "N", overlaps between the two different readings of the title, a zigzag movement occurs. This zigzag emerges through the repeated reading of the title. This is to say a transversal shift arises in the title that enables the potential for different readings to emerge and takes these readings in a number of different directions.

The transversal shifts found in Doruff's word and throughout her graphical essay, both visually and conceptually, as well as those that appear in the title of this issue of *Inflexions*, are just brief examples of the shifting experiences that are proposed throughout this issue. Like the zigzag, the works in this issue never follow one particular direction and never remain at one particular point for very long. But at the same time, when there are points that connect between the various disciplines, concepts and fields of practice, new directions take off that open up a field of potential for different experiences to emerge.

Similar to a map that refuses to trace a firm boundary but becomes populated by the traces of experience that occur through each encounter with it, the transversality that emerges in this issue raises many questions that may not have answers, creating a sensation of stimulating perplexity. In that sense, Guattari's opening description of transversality can be misleading when we come across the word "communication." Transversality has nothing to do with a communicational model but rather addresses different existential territories and universes of value through the register of resonance. "Transversal Fields of Experience" brings different points of entry into resonance that all revolve around the question of how we open up new registers that incite a creative

moving-with the forces we encounter in contemporary transversal fields that shape our everyday experiences. The fields that open up in this issue resonate with different encounters between the human and the “more-than-human” through registers of cinema (Bordeleau and Thain), dance (Dolphijn and Kurikka/Sihvonen), sound and colour (Doruff), computer icons (Evans), synaesthetic experiences (Munster), digital video (Payne), and jazz (Rosenberg). We regard these contributions as remarkable points in a complex and open field of aesthetic experiences in resonance with Guattari’s ecosophic critique of non-transversal modes of production as opposed to *different* productions of subjectivity.

One cannot address Guattari’s concept of transversality without considering the notion of subjectivity in his work. Subjectivity is different from the notion of the subject. Subjectivity for Guattari always denotes a process, something that shifts and oscillates between entanglements of existential territories and universes of value. On the one hand, existential territories are hooks onto actual experiences, they stand out in their singularity. They are remarkable points. On the other hand, universes of value are “non-dimensioned, non-coordinate, trans-sensible and infinite” (Guattari 2008: 85 n.15). For Guattari the production of subjectivity is based on transversal practices that allow the collective emergence and entanglement of existential territories and universes of value. Transversality as a field of expression provides the *milieu* for a creative emergence from disparate forces. As a “dimension to overcome two impasses,” it is not a mere connecting device but a practice for novelty to emerge. The novelty that transversal practices yield always feed from existential territories and universes of value. We have to stress this transversal mode of productivity to avoid any alignment with mere connectivist or communicational models of different terms that are merely linked. Transversality never links. It crafts, shifts and relates. *Inflexions*, as a platform, does not just connect or gather, which would denote a non-transversal mode of production, but it becomes a field for transversal expression.

As part of *Inflexions* such a field cannot appear other than through transversal modes of expression. *Inflexions* is not a mere medium in the form of an online journal. On the contrary, it seeks to foreground expression transversally and in a machinic fashion. It does not communicate content but inflects content and expression in continuous movement by injecting potential for new entanglements with each new engagement. We stress the importance of expression and the problems raised by communicational models to underline the different registers under which *Inflexions* operates. *Inflexions'* modes of expression always attempt to venture beyond the simple accumulation of texts by proposing over-arching themes that incite others to generate innovative web-based material. It does not communicate but it expresses and provides potential for experience to emerge transversally. We propose a shift in terminology to clarify the importance of a non-communicational, yet transversal, proposition at stake in this issue. It is Guattari himself who provides this insight by suggesting that transversal processes are not just communicational. Instead of a logic of communication, he foregrounds a logic of intensities: a logic of "auto-referential existential assemblages engaging in irreversible durations" (Guattari 1995: 30). Here we see a shift from the communicational binary of signal/noise, sender/receiver or message/content towards a more existential assemblage, that of expression. Expression activates content in a field of transversal potential. It allows content to emerge through a transversal milieu. As Brian Massumi writes, "the force of expression strikes the body first, directly and unmediatedly" (2002: xvii). In other words, the experiential engagement with *Inflexions*, through bodily modalities of perception, is affected first by expression. Only through such an expressive and perceptual shock content can emerge, always anew and transversally. Content and expression are as consubstantial as signal and noise. When an expression contracts into potential content, such content functions as shadow-images for the field through which a new experience emerges by dint of another expression. What happens in these content-expression-contractions is the emergence of the transversal forces of a field of experience that become malleable. "Where expression stretches, potential determinately emerges into

something new. Expression's tensing is by nature creative. It is ontogenetic" (Massumi 2002: xxii).

The contributions to this issue address these emerging zigzags between expression and content, as well as the ethico-political engagement that arises through the relations between the human and more-than human in such fields. But rather than providing entries and exits into different transversal fields of experience, the issue itself and its potential as an online journal becomes a transversal field of experience. What is at stake is the actual expressiveness of the journal's format in its multifaceted variations and modulations, which contribute actively to the extension of expression into the world of experience. We see this occurring through an interfacing of experience, which creates new ways of accessing the work. This in turn produces new modalities of reading that are introduced through the very technicities of presentation, thus producing a doubling of complex layers of experience, multiplied by the interface's potential for expression. This issue deals with different media formats as experiences for a transversality of reading/listening/viewing that is meant to generate fields of relational experience through the modes of expression of the interface itself.

Even if Guattari appears only marginally in the actual works, he is a key-figure feeding from the former issue on micropolitics and leading into the future issue on Gilbert Simondon. The fields of experience proposed make use of "transversality [as being] explicitly a creature of the middle," (Gary Genosko 2008: 52). Transversal fields are activated here as a "space in which becomings are truly creative, radically open and simply not what is now actual" (2008: 52). If we refrain from allying ourselves to "communicational thought", which suggests a clear pathway from content to receiver, it is because the assemblages treated in the issue mostly deal with what public discourse often regards as new media and communication systems. They conjunctively propose a different concept for communication that is inherently transversal. They emphasize transversality as a creature of the middle that builds relations across its field in

order to generate experience. The proposition of transversality as that which is not yet actual enables us to draw a potential futurity into the actual experience of a transversal field in the moment of its expression. Such a potential as renewed expression happens through any encounter with enunciative instances such as texts, images, sounds and sensations but gains a particular quality once we aesthetically support such events in their transversalizing movement.

Inflexions as an online journal emerges as a transversalizing field interweaving content and expression to arrive at an aesthetics that allows no straightforward order and categorical closure. In that sense the issue's interface itself has to be regarded as a transversal field of experience that includes the potential for excess. In this regard, the issue is attuned to William James' concept of the "moreness" of an experience, a moreness that we tried to make palpable through the digital potential for simultaneous modulations of intensive and expressive flows activated through a continual doubling between interfacing and reading, listening and viewing. "Our fields of experience...are fringed forever by a *more* that continuously develops, and that continuously supersedes them as life proceeds" (James 2003: 37; original emphasis). This moreness of experience in the mode of transversality pulls us into divergent experiences even while it leaves traces behind that virtualize into a collective field of potentiality.

The media assemblages discussed here can be understood as "lures for feelings" that might become part of a transversal experience.¹ With this in mind we would like to foreground a suggestion recently made by Alanna Thain in a conversation: to re-approach media systems not as different types of medium, which would suggest a certain containment, but rather through the notion of platforms. Through such a shift in conception of how a medium might be conceived we immediately touch the ethico-political and aesthetic layers in Guattari's work. *Inflexions* as a transversal platform requires a different ethics that is "at the same time pragmatic and speculative" (Guattari 1989: 70). Thus the Nodes, in relation to the Tangents, are treated differently as expressive platforms rather than just media., For Guattari: "Transversality [is] never given

as ‘already there,’ but always to be conquered through a pragmatics of existence” (1995: 125).

Transversal fields of experience provide a way for different pragmatic and speculative encounters through the exploration of, and the play with, platforms. The “N” of Doruff’s palindrome generates a zigzag that becomes expressive in the form of a creature of the middle. Platforms such as *Inflexions* engage us in “effective practices of experimentation” on all transversal levels across social, mental and subjective ecologies (Guattari 2008: 24). Experience always moves from the middle and expands in a continuous flux between expression and content. In this flux, the relations between ecological registers in all of their actual and virtual singularities are key. This, in turn, creates a speculative pragmatism; a speculativeness that underlines the radical openness for experimentation that cannot but be felt in its different expressions through the reading/viewing/listening. Convergence and divergence across transversal fields and creative platforms is sensed more than it is known as such.

Notes

¹ The notion of “lures for feeling” comes from Alfred North Whitehead. See (Whitehead 1978: 184).

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