

Roaming Producers

Sebastian Luetgert

ebastian@rolux.org

Like many other panelists before, I have to start with the statement that all I knew until today was the title of the conference and the title of the panel: "Roaming Producers". But then it turned out that even the title was a misunderstanding, a bad translation.

It is derived from a book titled *Umherschweifende Produzenten* (that I will not be referring to). But the guy who did the book was complaining the other day that "roaming" would not fit "umherschweifen", since "umherschweifen" was referring to the Situationist concept of the "dérive", whereas "roaming" was something quite different. I don't know, I guess anyone who has a mobile phone might have an idea what "roaming" is.

So the title is the first part of the mess. But now, things will get even messier. Because then, I was imagining "Roaming Producers", trying to figure out what this could mean: people who move while producing and produce while moving. And then, I noticed that, actually, I don't like these people. Or rather, I'm even afraid of "Roaming Producers". Some of them really scare me.

And that is because I was not so much thinking of Roaming Situationists, but rather of Roaming Deleuzians. These are people who see themselves as nomadically roaming the rhizomes of Capitalism. People who have a fan relation to some of these Deleuzo-Guattarian concepts. There were a lot of them around during the Nineties, and probably still today.

So I started a typology of some of these Roaming Producers, which, until now, is titled "Some Roaming Producers I Do Not Like". I have found five or six distinct types, but I'm going to stick to three of them now. One is the Ecstatic Entrepreneur, one is the Networking Nomad, and one is the Traveling Theorist. (The Schizophrenic Student will have to be addressed separately, at another occasion.)

There is still one thing I should point out before I begin, since I will not be referring to that later: These Roaming Producers are of course all White European or American Males, so my analysis is limited to these.

1. The Ecstatic Entrepreneur

The mindset of the Ecstatic Entrepreneur has been quite nicely analyzed by Richard Barbrook in his text *The Californian Ideology*. The Ecstatic Entrepreneur is basically a libertarian who has his roots in the Sixties, specifically in the west coast Hippie movement, and who was, during the Nineties, applying that libertarianism to the digital economy. So, to give you an idea: *Wired* was definitely the *Pravda* of this ideology, promoting the infinite joys of the free market.

What the Ecstatic Entrepreneur loves in Deleuze is of course the vitalism, plus the idea that Capital is such a magnificent force when it comes to eradicating borders of all sorts. The Ecstatic Entrepreneur is enthusiastically embracing biological metaphors. A very good example is Kevin Kelly, former editor of *Wired*, and his book *Out Of Control*.

Not only there you will see that the Ecstatic Entrepreneur, and that is his main point, sees Capital as nature. He sees Capitalism as a biosphere in which both money and people behave like swarms, flocks, waves etc. He truly believes that the global economy is the Body Without Organs, and he is a fan of this obscene misunderstanding.

But that's his conception of roaming and producing: the permanent floating of money around the globe, the floating of people, the floating of ideas, and so on. But then, since he loves the market, he is of course a Darwinist, so only the good ideas are going to make it, and only the people who have the good ideas are going to catch some of the money.

But for the Ecstatic Entrepreneur, the great thing is that Capital takes care of all that. ("Change is good", *Wired* once announced, and that's because no one has to discuss, to question or to justify this kind of change anymore. Things are no longer changed by people, they change by themselves, automatically. And the ultimate killer application, the robot that is able to repair itself, is of course the global market.) So all he has to do is sit back, float and enjoy the ecological economy of the planetary market machine.

There are of course other sub-categories of the Ecstatic Entrepreneur, like the Flexible Freelancer, who has been comprehensively analyzed by a Chicago magazine titled *The Baffler*. The Flexible Freelancer believes in the freedom of freelancing. He is switching from internship to internship, he is an artist today and a programmer tomorrow, and then he is a tourist, and then he is starting a business. The Flexible Freelancer is the guy who assumes all this is happening because of his own non-conformism and creativity, and who can't think of any exterior reason for this. He has never imagined that the new economy might just be forcing him to be that flexible and that his subjectivity might be structured by the very same forces that structure the world outside him.

Finally, I even think that the concept of Communication Guerrilla is part of the Ecstatic Entrepreneur phenomenon, since the Communication Guerilla is working in the same field of marketing and public relations and sharing all its blindnesses. What the Communication Guerilla will borrow from Deleuze is of course rather a vague idea of Capitalism as a semiotic system. So at the very core of their strategies lies hardly more than the conviction that if the signifier starts roaming, everything will be fine. But of course, anti-marketing is marketing as well. It may just be an internship. First you do Toywar, and then you'll work with IBM.

Needless to say that the term Communication Guerrilla is an insult to all the real Guerrillas of the world. (Today, we even have Guerrilla Marketing, and if I'm not completely wrong, there is even a Webby Award for that category.) What we are witnessing here is a complete misconception of what Guerrillas have been, in what kind of wars they have been involved, what was at stake at these wars and

who their adversaries were. If the actual Guerrillas have a counterpart in the "virtual" domain, then for sure it's not someone who is globally communicating and counter-communicating all day long. If there is such a thing as an info war, then it's the war against information. This war has hardly even begun, and there is no genealogy of its great leaders yet (and once there will be one, it will not be published as an art catalogue).

2. The Networking Nomad

With the Networking Nomad, I have two fundamental problems. One is the Networking, one is the Nomad.

The Networking Nomad is the figure that believes to aimlessly wander through the electronic networks, to connect and disconnect at his own will, to drift from continent to continent via phone lines, cables and satellites, freed from any restriction of physical territoriality.

The Networking Nomad may be a character initially derived from the famous figure of the Data Dandy, but while the Data Dandy was clearly a Punk, that is, a materialist, the Networking Nomad is a Hippie, driven by some esoteric idealism.

He doesn't collect objects, he just lets them go. He doesn't build systems, he just tears them down. And he is not, as the Data Dandy, a narcissist. There are no mirrors in his world, all he knows are surfaces to surf, surfaces without any reflection.

The Networking Nomads favorite network is, of course, the Internet. But digital Deleuzianism, I'm sad to announce, is just another misunderstanding. Even if the whole century may have been Deleuzian, as Foucault said, the Internet will never ever have been Deleuzian.

In the Short Summer of the Internet, back in 1995, there was a lot of electronic enthusiasm, some sort of crazy theoretical over-production along (and over-affirmation of) Deleuzian concepts that, at its time, was probably fully legitimized.

But years later, you have to acknowledge that most of these things do not work. These guys were not becoming women in chatrooms. They have not lost their genders or gotten rid of their bodies. They have not changed the way they think though hypertext (whatever that was). And noone of us has deterritorialized from anywhere through the Internet. We are all still here.

So, please, let's admit: The Network is not the Rhizome. Much more, the Network is the new mode of work in the Societies of Control, the new mode of production in the Global New Economy. Like Johan Sjerpstra said: "When I hear the term 'network', I grab my gun and shoot."

This term is not so much a noun, but rather a verb. Networking is a way of interconnecting all the new forms of digital labor and digital leisure, of amalgamating computerized pleasure, excess, scarcity and slavery into the new world-wide 24-hour working day. Networking constitutes a digital continuum that

most of us are more or less familiar with, a mode of production which, at the same time, is such fun and such terror. To quote Netscape Messenger: "You have 247 new mails." This kind of networking doesn't look like a concept to enthusiastically affirm, but rather to study, and then to resist.

The second problem, as I said, is the Nomad, as a romantic concept for movement without aim, without border, without direction and without restriction.

Very contrary to popular belief, Nomads are people who are desperately trying to stay where they are. If you don't believe me, please re-read Deleuze. Nomads will always avoid to move, and they will only move if they are ultimately forced to. For the Nomad, there is no global surface to slide up or down, but only a local territory with all its looming segmentations. The nomadic concept of space is the very opposite of "mobility", and it's really hard to see how people can constantly mix up the two.

But in the case of our Networking Nomad, things are even worse. He will even assume that his Nomadic existence is based on the fact that he is a surfer: a surfer of the networks, a surfer of the digital waves.

But being a surfer is of course the ultimate disqualification. The territories of the Nomad, as most of us might vaguely remember, are the deserts, since these are the most suitable zones for minimized movement.

The idea of surfing in the desert is absolutely absurd. There is no such thing as sports in the desert. So you may push or attack the Nomad: then he will move. You may even put him on some airplane, using physical force: then he will travel. But even then, the Nomad will resist to surf. You may drop him over the ocean: all he will do, of course, is simply drown.

So all in all (and even if you don't follow my drastic illustrations), there is quite an urgent need to save the Nomad from his fans. Historically, the Nomad has always had enemies to flee, but rarely has he be dragged around as shamelessly as in the Deleuzian Nineties.

3. The Traveling Theorist

The Traveling Theorist is probably the saddest of these Roaming Producers. (So here comes all the bad news for all of us.) The Traveling Theorist is the frequent-flyer academic, the critical avantgarde that populates the business lounges all across the planet.

Obviously, the Traveling Theorist is traveling from conference to conference. You will find him standing on a rooftop overlooking Istanbul, then, the next day, browsing through American journals in a small Venice bookstore, and a week later enjoying the exotic ambience of dinner party in the hills of Rio de Janeiro.

The Traveling Theorist is a harsh critic of what he calls globalization. But at the same time, he is one of its most prominent promoters. His view on the global cities is the aerial view of the landing passenger, and once he has safely reached the

ground, he becomes part of the very class that he believes he is opposed to: a class that, over the past twenty years, has turned numerous cities from places to live into mere interfaces for a frequently flying global elite of transcontinental commuters.

The aerial view of the landing passenger, his view from above on the suburban grid, is already a troubled one. Obviously, no one really likes to fly, or, even if, to start or to land. But then, another aspect of his eerie feeling is of course the anticipation of what is awaiting him on the ground.

It is widely believed that international conferences were places of vivid theoretical debate. But of course they have never been such places. Theorists from all over the world are carried all across the globe to present ideas they have developed way before at home. Then they have to listen to other theorists' ideas, and these are ideas that they are not only extremely familiar, but bluntly bored with. They have been to other conferences, they have listened to all this over and over again. Then, instead of a debate, everyone has to catch their planes. "It was good to see you!" - "Yeah. Didn't we meet in Helsinki last year?" - "No. I was invited, but I could come."

But even given all this, it is still widely believed that international conferences were at least occasions for fruitful discussion among the local public. But again, there is hardly ever a local public, apart from the obvious journalists. It takes only one or two of them to turn a public congress into a press conference, and these are not that much fun either.

International conferences are theory fairs, and the general lack of theoretical interest tells a tale about the state of the theory business. Today, these conferences function as simple events, that is: culmination points of city marketing. Take this one here, which is of course one of the rare and wonderful exceptions. The city of Munich is so desperately needing an international internet congress that they are now even willing to do one on open borders. But from the city marketing perspective, that still makes sense. Hundreds of people in airplanes are tourism. It doesn't matter if they are carrying critical ideas or not.

In the end, the Traveling Theorist becomes the Academic Tourist, caught in a permanent state of consumption, in a time-space continuum called restaurant-taxi-hotel. (Earlier, when preparing this paper in the café, not only was I asked to order: I was asked to order twice.)

Of course, the Traveling Theorist doesn't enjoy all this. When he arrives on stage, he is stressed, jet-lagged, unconcentrated, and often he may even have caught a strange disease on his way, or at least a common disorder. One of the most insightful late statements of Gilles Deleuze is that traveling for hours in modern trains and airplanes is an almost unbearable experience. And if you don't believe the late Deleuze, then go and ask a rock band about touring. Traveling is really not a solution.

The Traveling Theorist is aware of all this, but he can't get out of it. He is already booked for Sao Paulo next week, then directly to an anti-globalization

meeting in Bruxelles, and then he will have to present his critique of simulated urbanism at a conference in Kuala Lumpur.

The Traveling Theorist may be the end of all these roaming producers, since he is self-reflective, but lost in closed circuits. It is hard to theorize space if you're lost in space to such an extent, and it is hard to theorize time if you are constantly running out of it. After all, Traveling Theorism tends towards a state that can't even be justified with Deleuze anymore.

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So what is my intention here? My intention is not to establish any kind of theory police. You are of course allowed to do all this, to follow all these "Roaming Producers".

My intention is neither to discredit Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the book as a toolbox. Ideas are tools. There are brilliant ideas in Deleuze and Guattari. Please, pick them, use them as tools, that's just wonderful. But do not overestimate them. Under certain conditions they may be useless, and under certain conditions they may be counter-productive or even dangerous. To avoid this, please consider reading the rest of the book as well. It might be the manual.

(Someone I discussed with while writing this paper asked me if not even Hardt and Negri had stated in *Empire* that every tool was a weapon. Unfortunately, that is only half true, and only half of the story. In fact, this phrase is by Ani DiFranco, and it is the very beginning quote of *Empire*, so most readers may have read it. But it's not the full quote. The full quote is: "Every tool is a weapon if you hold it right.")

But my actual complaint about "Roaming Producers" lies somewhere else. While most of us are familiar with analyzing the terror of producing, we still have to fully trace and track the terror of roaming, which reaches from forced freelancerism to forced migration. If we refrain from romanticizing about the freedom of flexibility, then we should neither have any nostalgia for Rhizomatic Refugees.

I guess that we have to rethink our conception of the struggle for freedom of movement. There is no such thing as freedom of movement if it does not include the freedom not to move, the right to stay where you are. And we are not engaged in a struggle for migrants and migration if that is only a struggle for the abolition of any barrier that is still keeping people from moving around the globe in perfect congruence with Capital's lines of flight. Even if Capital's borders equal zero, there is still a desire for other modes of movement, and one of them is no movement at all.