

## **Molecular Collaboration**

Standard discussions of collaboration tend to be built upon a series of identities: individuals, groups, projects and the world, which are all dealt with as discrete unities. What I want to propose is a type of collaboration that recognises people's 'molecular' nature and molecularises groups, projects, and even the world. Throughout their writing, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari draw a distinction between molar and molecular formations. They are generally considered as two ways of considering the same phenomenon or situation with the molar being a 'macro' way of considering wholes, structures, and systems of organisation, while the molecular is a 'micro' way of considering changes, particle flows, and the way that elements and forces interact to produce effects (Deleuze and Guattari 1984, p. 279-281).

According to Deleuze and Claire Parnet, individuals and groups are made up of 'lines': molar lines of rigid segmentarity, supple lines of segmentarity made from molecular fluxes, and lines of flight that cut right across things and launch us into the unknown (Deleuze and Parnet 1987, pp. 124-5). There is an oscillation between stability and ruptures where neither condition is privileged (Deleuze and Guattari 1988, p. 9).

### **Molarity**

There are three movements associated with molar forms. The first is construction of the territory of the group: a territorialising movement. This tends to define the molar formation in terms of a theme, a style, an identity or a 'program' that categorises, defines and delimits a group, so it can be grasped in its entirety. The second is when individuals move from one 'segment' or 'space of enclosure' to the next, where each stage in the series has its own 'laws' (Deleuze 1992, p 3) such as the movement from student to graduate, or accused to prisoner: a movement from one molar state to another. An example of this second type of movement is the tabard transition in Reactor's Geodecity project, where one makes a transition from being outside of the project to being a co-participant within it. The final movement could be described as a 'nomadic' movement of whole bodies through space, an example of which is an artists' residency programme: the identities of the institution and artist remain unaffected.

### **Molecularity**

Rather than the structure and form of molarity, molecularity is primarily concerned with deterritorialising flows and movements that cross thresholds other than the edges traced by the molar segments. The molecular fluxes slip between the more rigid structures of our lives. Deleuze and Parnet describe them as the attractions, repulsions, and 'forms of madness that are secret' (Deleuze and Parnet 1987, p 125). Examples of molecular practices that destabilise structure and problematise molar forms are the paranoid-critical method used by London group The Bughouse and 'fabulation' that constantly throws the idea of truth into doubt, destabilising dominant significations and opening up potential (Deleuze and Parnet 1987, p. 41).

### **Line of Flight**

A line of flight is a deterritorialisation that causes an assemblage to open up towards an unknown future, or to mutate into a new form. These lines are often completely unexpected, but can also be provoked or sought out. Lines of flight tend to result from molecularisation but the form and structure of molar formations are not invulnerable to glitches or ruptures. One form of glitch that relates to molar forms is the 'deliberate' glitch, which is inserted into or allowed by a system or project in the knowledge that it will provoke unexpected changes. A third party is often responsible for introducing this kind of rupturing of the molar on purpose. For instance the fool, whose purpose is to glitch the authority of the King. However, molecular flows are more likely to create the circumstances for glitches and other ruptures to occur because confluences can have unexpected outcomes.

### **Molecular 'dividual' and molecular group**

The function of each artist, or co-participant, within a molecular collaboration is not fixed in the same way as it might be considered within more molar conceptions of collaboration, but is in a state of flux and enters into temporary alliance with other parts of the group, and other collaborative groups. Each artist, or co-participant, has different capacities actualised in each different group and so are thought

of as what Deleuze refers to as *dividuals* rather than individuals. (Deleuze 1992) The subjectivities of participants and collaborators are not fixed. Group names are no longer proper names, but as in the case of *The Bughouse*, are adjectives that connote shifting regions whose territories overlap with other regions. What I am proposing with the notion of molecular collaboration is that the 'region' of each group's practice can overlap or connect with other regions and thereby form new configurations, which have the potential to produce new relations and new worlds. In the same way that a piece in the game of Go plays a particular role, has particular capacities, depending on its position within the assemblage of the whole game, at a given point in time, artists and groups have different capacities activated in different assemblages. These capacities and assemblages condition each other and are imminent to each other.

In a 1938 presentation to members of the College of Sociology<sup>1</sup> Georges Bataille delivered a presentation on behalf of Roger Caillois from a set of notes on the subject of secret societies in which he describes a dichotomy in society between cohesion and ferment (Caillois 1988, p. 152). In his pre-*amble* to the presentation, Bataille described how 'the "elective community" or "secret society" is a form of secondary organization that possesses constant characteristics and to which recourse is always possible when the primary organization of society can no longer satisfy all the desires that arise' (Caillois 1988, p. 149). The secret society introduces a glitch into the functions of society. It exists for its own sake and as such stands as a negation of political structures that would make necessity the founding rule of all human activity (Caillois 1988, p. 155) and should therefore also be distinguished from 'conspiratorial societies' which are 'formed expressly with an action in mind distinct from their own existence: in other words, societies formed to act and not to exist' (Caillois 1988, p. 154). The secret society stands as an autonomous, molecular, association, whereas the conspiratorial society is a heteronomous, molar, organisation.

For Caillois, secret societies introduce turbulence (molecular fluxes) into 'encrusted' (molar) society, and this is one argument for molecularising our collaborative practice. The molecular flows between group regions can lead to unpredictable encounters between practices or people that can send the project off on a line of flight towards an unknowable future. The molecular sets up the conditions for the novel line of flight. We do not need a blueprint, we do not need a structure, what we need is potentialities.

What Stewart Home calls the 'heroic' phase (Home 1991, pp. 31 & 50) of groups, when they are at their most developmental and active, is their process of 'becoming'. Once they have a fixed identity or ideology (being), their capacity to be productive and creative is constrained. If they then cannot adapt to changing conditions, they end. If a collaboration is to be sustainable, it needs a process by which it can remain 'heroic', or maintain a processual 'becoming'.

Although a group might become fixed under certain conditions of habit or ideology, and therefore too rigid to adjust to new conditions around it, adopting the mind set of molecular collaboration means that groups frequently 'scramble' or molecularise each other, provoking new spirals of change. This can be the case where groups intersect each other, or when a group is composed of artists who have multiple practices. There are spirals of change happening at all levels from the individual, to the group, to the overall molecular collaboration with each affecting the conditions of the scales of magnitude above and below it simultaneously, producing new becomings, new relations, and new practices. Focusing on states of 'being' instead of processes of 'becoming' would severely limit this revolutionary process, but it is dangerous to give up 'states' altogether since, as Deleuze and Parnet warn, the danger of the line of flight is that it can run away with itself and become a line of abolition or destruction (Deleuze and Parnet 1987, p. 142).

The processes in molecular collaboration whereby subjects enter into practices composed of molecular becomings where they and the situation develop together is analogous to Todd May's notion of poststructuralist anarchism, which is based upon experimentation in contact with local

---

<sup>1</sup> The College of Sociology was a group of French intellectuals who came together out of dissatisfaction with surrealism, which they believed privileged the individual at the expense of society. They sought to understand humanity through moments of intense communal experience. It is worth noting that the College of Sociology itself takes the form of a secret society.

conditions, and which affirms liberty from dominant systems (May 1994). Collectivity should not be a static entrenchment of 'a' collective, but molecular and plural, and as Mark Seem writes in his introduction to Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus*, 'Once we forget about our egos a non-neurotic form of politics becomes possible, where singularity and collectivity are no longer at odds with each other, and where collective expressions of desire are possible' (Seem 1984, pxxi).

Caillois, Roger (1988) *Brotherhoods, Orders, Secret Societies, Churches* in Denis Hollier (Ed.) *The College of Sociology (1937-39)*. Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press.

Deleuze, Gilles (1992) *Postscript on the Societies of Control*. *October*, 59, 3-7.

Deleuze, Gilles & Guattari, Félix (1984) *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, London, Athlone.

Deleuze, Gilles & Guattari, Félix (1988) *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, London, Athlone.

Deleuze, Gilles & Parnet, Claire (1987) *Dialogues*, New York, Columbia university Press.

Home, Stewart (1991) *The Assault on Culture: Utopian Currents from Lettrisme to Class War*, Oakland, AK Press.

May, Todd (1994) *The Political Philosophy of Poststructuralist Anarchism*, University Park, Pennsylvania State University.

Seem, Mark (1984) Introduction, in Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari (Eds.) *Anti-Oedipus*. London, Athlone.