Cycling Diaries
- Moving Towards an Anarchist Field Trip Pedagogy

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“Anarchy can't be taught!”
De Acosta (2009, 27)

“Pedagogy teaches but does not know how it teaches.”
Ellsworth (2005, 167)

“Mounted cyclists are different persons.”
freely adapted from Fournel (2003, 132)

In late 2012 a group started a pedagogical experiment by initiating a self-educational experience called Cycling Alternatives. We, the authors, are part of this group and cycled with people from different backgrounds through Central Europe in two to four week long tours in 2013 and 2014. As indicated by its title – Cycling Diaries – in this chapter we will primarily explore the pedagogical effects of collective movement on bicycles grounded in our direct experiences, personal reflections, group discussions and the notes we took during these trips. We thereby engage with non-representational and post-foundational anarchist thinking and geography field trip didactics while arguing that we were practicing machinic field trips which operated as collective unlearning experiences. Thus we were gauging dominant scripts in-between us and encouraging each other to embrace the potentials of collective action. We thereby quasi-naturally experimented with anarchist principles, like consensus decision-making, and were moving towards emerging socialities. In short our cycling machine
“taught” us anarchy without teaching it, a pedagogy that did not know how to teach. Not least, we hope our experiences inspire others to embrace radical pedagogies within the disciplining matrix of Geography and beyond.

The contribution is basically structured in line with the genealogy of our tours. Firstly we delineate our starting points, then briefly explore the pedagogical motives for our trip – that is following everyday lines of contention; thirdly we turn to the disruptive nature of collective movement as a cycling machine, and finally consider the role of affects for unlearning and transgressing the self. The flow of these parts will be accompanied by storytelling _interludes_. The sum of these parts, we hope, will guide readers in considering how potentials for unlearning and moving towards freedom are called into being through the practice of anarchist pedagogies.

_Interlude: A Clockwork Machine_

_While some people prepare breakfast for the whole group, others are doing yoga in the grass, some are already packing their stuff or just waiting bleary-eyed for the coffee to be ready. After breakfast the small crowd of cyclists bursts into life. Be it washing dishes for all, loading the kitchen and common stuff trailers, collecting trash and lost stuff, repairing brakes and saddles, pumping tires, reading maps and planning the daily route and stops, checking food stocks and developing a strategy for filling them again. After everything is set and the place cleaned, if the last person has her water bottle filled and sun cream applied, if the last tire is pumped, we start._

_The cycling collective goes like clockwork, a little oiled and geared microcosm of the perfect society. Everybody has her place, is doing her part to keep things running smoothly and to the greatest outcome for all. Joy and happiness, we are moving together, forwards, progressing..._

_- Our naïve Imaginations_

_Starting Points: A Brief Genealogy of Cycling Alternatives_

These were the glossy brochure projections we had when we as a group of three to seven people started to plan Cycling Alternatives in December 2012. The trans-European project
Cycling Alternatives (2015) originated out of an informal network of European trainers in the field of global education – a non-formal educational practice based on anti-hierarchy and peer-to-peer approaches reflecting on (white) privileges and global power structures and interdependencies. This educational practice is used predominantly in classroom-style fixed places with fixed schedules and is organized by semi-professional trainers. However, the group of trainers felt that reflecting on power relations and analyzing how they are biographically and socially inscribed, reproduced and materialized in institutions has after all its deconstructive limits. These reflective classroom operations of unlearning privilege often do not lead to consequences in peoples’ actions. In contrast, they make it easy for people to consider reflection as enough of an attempt for changing themselves and the world into a more just and less violent one, and thus can contribute to the perpetuation of hierarchies (Georg, Mettmann, and Stenglein 2014). This is in a way similar to what Kropotkin (2008, 15) claimed more than 100 years ago about educating young persons: “[H]umanitarian feelings cannot be developed from books, if all the life outside school acts in an opposite direction. To be real and to become active qualities, the humanitarian feelings must arise from the daily practice of the child”.

A group formed out of our unease towards the limits of classroom-based anti-oppression pedagogy and decided to shift the learning process out of closed and remote seminar houses onto the streets and into an exposure to the public. We wanted to visit places where alternatives were collectively lived and follow the autonomous geographies of people, who, however contested, are changing their practices towards more egalitarian ones. We wanted to learn from and exchange with them. We thus set off on journeys asking about the spaces of possibility for a non-hierarchical, non-capitalist practice in the “here and now” (Springer 2012, 1616).

So in 2013 a group of 30 people cycled from Berlin to Warsaw dealing with the topic of the Commons. This experience was so intense that around half of the group decided to continue the experiment. During several meetings and endless online-discussions around 15 people organized three tours in 2014. The tours happened simultaneously, two starting from Germany and one from Poland. The tours had different overall topics, namely Self-Organization, Permaculture and the Solidarity Economy. After three weeks, the three tours of around 30 people each met all together in a tiny village near Karlovy Vary in Czech Republic.
for a five day exchange about the different experiences.

That we chose the *bicycle* as our means of moving was the obvious thing to do. On the one hand it allows for traveling considerable distances (up to 80km a day in group) and for carrying everything we need. On the other hand it is a widely used and cheap means of transport, utilized by people from totally different backgrounds and with different capabilities. Considering these aspects, it is no surprise that we were by far not the first ones who had gone for educational and political long distance tours by bicycle. Since the 1970s such tours had already become very popular. Today there are several other groups that use bicycles and cycling together as a method or aim of either political activism or political education in Europe. With its 25 years of experience, the “Ecotopia Biketour” (2015) is probably the most established and well known. For example last year’s tour involved cycling under the topic “Bottom up! Sovereignty against Exploitation” from Sofia to Athens over a period of more than ten weeks! The Ecotopia cycling tour is in contrast to Cycling Alternatives not based on people joining for the whole trip, but instead allows participants to hop on and off. Another tour, the three week long “Reclaim Power Tour” in 2013 was particularly directed towards a brown coal mining area for a big protest event, followed by an extensive media strategy and an explicitly activist approach (EKiB 2013). Similarly, the “Velokarawane Leipzig” (2014) cycled to the Degrowth conference in Leipzig in 2014 and another “Velokarawane” (2014) from Zurich to Barcelona. Beyond these examples that we personally know, there are to be sure many others.

These tours all share an ethos of “Do It With Others” (DIWO) culture, non-hierarchical organizing and anti-consumption approaches, and are part of anti-capitalist activist networks, demonstrating a particular example of bicycle activism in Europe. In the shadows of the most visible form of bicycle activism, the frequent Critical Mass rides in cities in Europe and beyond (see Carlsson 2002), there are not only these long distance tours, but also self-repair workshops and DIWO bicycle scenes blossoming in many towns. This does not come as a surprise, for next to walking, the *ordinary materiality*, the bicycle (Horton 2006) poses one of the most autonomous and least cost-intensive ways to move around in cities and between cities in Europe and elsewhere. It is on this backdrop that McCarthy (2009, 180) rhetorically asks: “Is any machine more philosophically suited to anarchism than a bicycle?” And it is also on this backdrop that we inquired about alternatives while mounting our bikes.
Interlude: At an Initiative

Our task today is quite simple. We have to clear the stonewalled barn, where years of inactiveness have made the roof collapse and has covered the ground beneath with plants, bricks and mud. Wheelbarrows, spades, shovels, gloves are handed out and our work mob works for hours. Next to us an old timber-framed farmer’s house is heavily under construction, but still you can hear the small stream behind the house, where we will wash our dirty bodies when finished. We stay nearby, on the grounds of another commune. Yesterday, when we prepared a trans-commune dinner together it was arranged that we help today. More or less exhausted, we meet in an outdoor kitchen to get water and fruit. Our host, Tim, tell us about the commune, the political network in the area and the latest arguments on how to move on. From time to time hands are raised and Tim answers patiently.

- CA SelfO-Tour 2014, on a visit near Kassel

De/Centering through Contentions: Ethnography, The Everyday and Alterity

The short story of our visit at a commune stands as example, but is by no means representative of all the people and places we visited. Apart from intentional communities we exchanged with a multiplicity of different self-organized collectives, including free radio stations, workers’ and housing syndicates, cooperatives, community supported agriculture projects, squatted houses and caravan sites, “without-money-shops” and exchange networks, community gardens, permaculture communities, spiritual communities, self-organized festivals and self-organized political seminars, DIWO house-building workshops, finance collectives, and also joined Critical Mass Rides. With respect to approaches, scope and focus, the initiatives were all pretty different, as were their ways of organizing internally and of encountering and struggling with the dominant structures of the state, capitalism and other repressive interlocking structures and hierarchies. Our trip can thus be conceived of as a search for the multiple attempts of political spatilization, no matter how contradictory (Chatterton and Pickerill 2010, 476), that is of everyday, vital practices in contention. We were mapping what some called autonomous geographies (Springer 2012; Chatterton 2008) or autonomous zones (Newman 2011), utopian spaces (Firth 2014), vital alternatives (Heckert, Shannon, and Willis 2012), oppositional places (Bisignani 2014), places in contention (Nicholls, Miller, and Beaumont 2013) or social movement space (Nicholls 2009).
At the basis of this approach lies our curiosity. But it also follows the idea that there is no outside place to capitalist relations and that accordingly “new places have to be created from within, through an attempt – however complicated, contested and fractured – to alter and challenge everyday places” (Pickerill and Chatterton 2006, 742). In particular, these everyday contentious practices of spatialization that work against the consensus of the state and beyond (Critchley 2007, 130) can contribute to our unlearning by questioning the limits to the contemporary orders by means of practicing attempts of alterity (Newman 2010, 7).

In its focus on contentious spatializations, this is similar to geographical field trips with an explicit political aim. We engaged with alternative situated practices and read hegemonic and contentious articulations of place (compare Dickel and Glasze 2009; Scharvogel and Gerhardt 2009; Horvath in this book). However our approach extended and intensified such political field trip approaches in two ways. Firstly, we extended this by mapping a multiplicity of those practices, which resulted in a diverse kaleidoscope of potentials for contention. Secondly, we intensified reading or communicating contention engaging with peoples’ practices akin to an ethnographical approach (Routledge 2013), that is whenever possible attempted to bodily involve with these practices to a high degree. So for example, at the commune described above, we were actively supportive doing a daylong work mob, which was organized by another commune where we stayed for several days. We thus got deeply involved in the local communes’ network and its environment. This did not just further our connection to the people at the communes, but it also facilitated intense, sometimes very emotional discussions. On this particular occasion, we were told afterwards that by doing the work mob, we became part of a working hour exchange system between the two communes. We were puzzled and irritated as we did not know this before and felt instrumentalized, and some within our group became quite angry. As a consequence comprehensive discussions were made within our group whether it makes a difference if work-time is given a monetary value or not in order to exchange it with others. What consequences does it have to give work a value for an idea of solidarity and co-living? In each place we stayed, we shed light on different dominant structures of society and ways of contesting them. In the communes mentioned above, we predominantly explored, experienced and became part of long-term anti-capitalist attempts of organization, its potentials and constraints. At an urban caravan squat we stayed at, we sat at the campfire with one of the caravan dwellers living without official documents of residency for several years in Germany. Creatively bypassing and
avoiding federal registration, he was a thoughtful “expert” in state affairs and made tangible how the state, often unrecognized by citizens, infringes on our personal lives. Listening to his stories, the state apparatuses became visible as a repressive and exclusive form of material violence. The squat was accordingly framed as a retreat and challenge to these violent structures.

Visiting about five to eight of such places, each located along lines of contention, during each of our trips, unfurled diverse perspectives that had two major effects. Firstly they centered our perspectives on relations of power and repression. In moving on from place to place, we were able to intersect different repressive relations, discuss their blind spots and discuss their interlocking connections. Secondly, the tours decentered our views on possibilities of contentions. Experiencing the various different attempts of building places in contention and carving out freer, less hierarchical and repressive spaces, showed us firsthand the myriad possible pathways and scales of resistance. This in principle embraces the idea of letting people choose their own way of contracting other relationships, and acknowledges the plurality of possibilities of resistance in situated local and everyday practices.

Especially by engaging ethnographically, different facets of the limits of the dominant orders operated pedagogically. These points of alterity were not only recognized, analytically identified or rationally understood by us, but also experienced. The limits of the order were thus shown to us within ourselves. Frequently discussions arose where people personally evaluated the respective practices. At certain points, each of us found ourselves hesitating, not being able to imagine this life for herself, posing interesting questions and opening up personal mappings of the borders to be found in ourselves: Why can't you imagine it? What limits your imagination? Where do these limits come from? Did you know before that these limits existed at all? In this way societal discourses and practices that are normalized in our own everyday practices, were put to the fore.

This supports the idea that such contesting practices can be of great pedagogical value and can function as pedagogical others. They did however not work as pedagogical others to pedagogy (Burdick and Sandlin 2010), nor only constituted a pedagogical value in themselves and for peoples’ knowledge productions at these places (Firth 2014), but through a direct practical relation of difference they opened up in each one of us while we were engaging with them ethnographically. By actually working, taking part and being affectively
involved in the everyday performances of the people, their practices were vitally and most
directly mirroring the habits, preconceptions and everyday practices of each of us – and were
thus relating to the very basic level of our lives. This is where resistance begins, “by
occupying and controlling the terrain upon which one stands, where one lives, works, acts
and thinks” (Critchley 2007, 114).

In short, our visits were based on de-distancing ourselves from these alternative practices
and joining them in affinity. This radicalizes classic field trip practices where it is “only”
tried to “read” or “communicate” contention or hegemonic practices (Dickel and Glasze
2009; Scharvogel and Gerhardt 2009). This showed us our internalized senses of limit and
thus pointed to our potentials beyond these limits – it pointed to the potential of an other way
of our selves. This is basic for unlearning oppression and bears the seed of collective action
(Chokr 2009).

Interlude: On the Road

Imagine it is raining heavily: starting the day with wet clothes and shoes, damp sleeping
bags and tents – seeking cover to eat and then sweating under rainwear for hours. Or
imagine we planned to have a day of 60-80 km of non-stop cycling without any other activity
or encounter planned, and the trailer breaks down – where to get a damn spare part in the
middle of nowhere? Now add a minor or major bike breakdown, a wrenched muscle or a
hurting knee, a cold or a fever for some or even an accident. We might end up in a shitty
unexpected road taking much more time than wanted to, or maybe worse, end up at a busy
interstate because we missed a crossing. Imagine some people want to go fast, others go
slow, some want to enjoy scenic spots, others want to reach the next initiative, some really
want to eat animals while others totally reject this idea, some consider themselves as
activists, others as holiday cyclists, just now somebody has discovered mushrooms in the
forest and wants to extend the lunch break and somebody else still has a hangover from the
night before. Imagine this combination of biographies, needs and desires, weather, technical
failure, physical and mental exhaustion...and then having the outlook of planning the next
day together before going to sleep in a damp sleeping bag. What can be done, how and
when?

- Moments, the usual unusual of moving together
Visiting these places and experiencing everyday contentious practices was not the ultimate goal for our departures. Instead the means by which we actually moved along these lines of contention were as much a goal as the visits themselves. In this sense and again in contrast to hegemonic and classic geographical field trip practices rushing from place to place by capitalist means of transportation (compare Heywood (2012) for the hegemony of place in geographical field trips), we did not reduce our trips to learning with pedagogical others at places and with situated practices only. Instead, how we could reach these places as autonomously as possible was as important as arriving there. Making our movement, and thereby the full space of learning in a field trip itself part of the learning agenda, moves toward the idea of a prefigurative field trip practice and constitutes a confluence of means and ends (Springer 2013, 10 passim). It puts the focus on the evolvement of the learning space itself as is so characteristic in anarchist practices (Shukaitis 2009, 169; Dyke and Meyerhoff 2013, 278). In this sense it is akin to the Situationists’ dérive, as currently practiced for example by the Critical Geography Group Berlin (2015). Different to the dérive, our collective movement operated as a social experiment focusing the relations in-between us (see below). This differentiates our and other long-distance cycling tours also to the temporary autonomous zones of Critical Mass Rides (Holtzman, Hughes, and Van Meter 2007, 51), where people more spontaneously and short-livedly assemble, swarm and dissolve and preponderantly intend to interrupt the hegemonic flows to the “outside”. Notwithstanding that we also moved as an interrupting Cyclists’ Mass, and thus also engaged in direct action beyond our internal relations (Graeber 2009; Springer 2013, 11), we will focus now on the practical and pedagogical effects of the machinic character of our movement, its longitude of differential rates of flow – so to say – and in the next chapter explore its latitudes, its intensities of affect (Guattari and Deleuze 2005, 262; Bonta and Protevi 2004, 107). Thereby we follow Armaline’s (2009, 145) proposal to explore the physicality of movement for anarchist modes of learning and experimentation.

We jumped in at the deep end with regards to moving and living with 30 people on bikes. Of course, the organization team had thought of how to cycle best before the first tour from Berlin to Warsaw in 2013. The organizers carefully thought about the fastest and safest way
to cycle and sorted out what roles and responsibilities would be needed to make the tour work smoothly. A timetable was set, workshops were prepared and initiatives located: we had thoroughly conceptualized a mobile seminar. However, almost everything happened different than we had planned. Yes, we arrived in Warsaw but only because we took the train. We did not cycle the route we thought out, we had tried several different ways of how to cycle together, we had developed institutions, like a trailer buddy system, and abandoned them just to reactivate them again. We had a central organization team in the beginning. In the end of the tour it didn't feel like there still was one: we were all organizing. Compared to the original aims (based on our clockwork imaginations, see above), the tour was completely unsuccessful.

Resulting from this experience half of the group of the 30 cyclists of 2013 continued to plan another tour in 2014 (see above). We thought, now that we had gathered so many experiences cycling as a group, we could better plan and structure a collective cycling trip. Learning from our experiences of the preceding year, the three tours were given more time and less distance to cycle, including buffer and resting days. We organized better equipment, e.g. walkie-talkies to communicate between front and rear while on the road and tarps to have common rain cover, we extended the trips with starting and ending days for getting to know each other beforehand, and planned the cycling together with the other people involved. We also planned time to reflect on our experiences at the end together. However, similar to the 2013 tour, in all the three tours we repeatedly fell short of our intentions, changed routes and plans and at some point decided to take the train to be able to arrive within the extended but still constricted time frame of the project. Once more, in each tour very different modes of organizing were put into action, and abandoned again.

What becomes clear after all of these tours was that you don't want to plan such a cycling tour, you just want to make it happen. Particularly central to this is the nature of collective bodily movement on bicycles itself. Firstly, moving in this way comprises the different and changing bodily needs and capabilities, the desires, emotional moods and conscious intentions of every singular person in the group. These become part of the social relationships of the group. Each person is necessarily part of the moving process as a full person, that is, as body-mind (Freiler 2008, 40; Heckert, Shannon, and Willis 2012, 18). Secondly, artifacts and non-human objects and conditions are mingled into the collective moving body. The
collective moving-body can only be moving-body by extending beyond the human. Most obvious, this can be seen from people extending to their bicycles (Colebrook 2001, 56). Accordingly, if a bicycle has a flat tire, the person’s capability to move with the group vanishes and poses a potential threat to collective movement. Similarly, bad weather conditions, changing topography or mushrooms waiting to be collected in the forest immediately and most directly change the potentials of moving. These non-human conditions extend into the persons, have influence on moods, desires and bodily needs and similarly become part of the social relationships (compare Drew 2014). Following Freiler (2008, 41) this can be described as body-minds in collective body placed relations, or fully embedded persons. Being in such an embodied, embedded relationality is not only said to increase sensitivity to the otherness of our fellow companions (ibid.), but according to Drew (2014, 95 passim), basic in understanding how we are in the world. In criticizing the classic learning schema of analyze-think-change, she (ibid.) promotes embodied learning as see-feel-learn processes. Similarly Kincheloe (2008, 9) claims that critical learning processes connect the fully embedded person at multiple levels. In contrast to a non-moving, less dynamic environment of body-placed-relations (e.g. in a classroom), the fully embedded person becomes activated when in action and encouraged to reflect on its relatedness towards others: “While the body is immersed in action it evokes a range of emotions, from the experience of a high or laughter (a sense of relief/catharsis), to other feelings such as anger, frustration, disgust, and guilt. While immersed in action these feelings and bodily responses are constantly shifting and influencing learning” (Drew 2014, 95). This experiential bodily knowledge is, in Drew’s view (2014, 91), “learned on the go”.

Pushing forward this non-representational interpretation of the longitudinal dynamics of our movement, our moving body-placed-relations could be read in Woodward's and Lea's (2010, 160) terms as a trans-bodied collective, or after Deleuze and Guattari (Colebrook 2001, 55 passim; Guattari and Deleuze 2005) best be described as machine, that is the concatenation and composition of technical artifacts and persons and non-human objects in processes of exchange (Raunig 2010, 19). Notwithstanding the many different conceptualizations of machines (Colebrook 2001, 55 passim), the machinic concept was developed to gauge the horizons for ever lasting revolutionary, in this sense insurrectionist organization (Springer 2014b, 259); that is a form of self-rule that would not close itself off into rigid social structures and in particular not state structures (Raunig 2010, 34). Therefore
such a machine is directed against the closing effects of identity and institutions, conceptions of community and the collective and thus essentially an anti-essential – or in anarchist terms, an “infinitely demanding” – concept (Critchley 2007). According to this, the collective as a revolutionary project has to be practiced in a process of endless becoming, of endless meta-reflexivity, openness and inventiveness towards itself: it is nomadic (Raunig 2010, 34; Raunig 2007). However, this is not necessarily tied to embodied, physical movement. As Raunig (2002) shows for the precarious nomadism of the PublixTheatreCaravan, an art-activist caravan traveling through Europe for various actions in the 2000s, physical movement can infuse such a terrain of becoming.

This was similar for us. While moving collectively, unforeseeable dynamics of being in relation to each other and our non-human environment evolved that posed a threat to the current conditions of the movement itself. For a group that came together for moving between places this also threatened the collective itself. We were again and again confronted with changing situations, disrupting our flow of collective movement, pushing us into making decisions, changing and reconsidering our plans, experimenting with different forms and procedures of organization. There was little time for people to rest or take a time-out, because such decisions would also affect all directly and address the fully embedded person. People were thereby pushed forward to take part in decision making processes, raise their concerns, discuss thoughts and most of all to share to the whole group their ‘person’, that is their momentary bodily needs, desires, feelings, opinions, wishes or ideas, but also their histories and plans. Each person was thus recurrently addressed to inquire about herself in a concrete, embodied situation in relation to the others and beyond. Hence, we found ourselves in a precarious non-state of movement and non-state of our collective, challenged from day to day, from situation to situation.

Our precarious cycling machine basically operated an-archic, recurrently questioning the ways in which we tried to organize us, denying not only sovereignty (an-archon: the denial of rulers; archon = Ancient Greek for ruler), but more fundamentally denying to set up fixed foundations, create reliable structures, institutions and procedures for our collective movement (arché = Ancient Greek for beginning, principle, origin) (Springer 2014a, 92). Similarly this constituted the re-current embracing of beginning anew and operated as “infinitely demanding” toward ourselves. Read from a post-foundational, Rancièrian
perspective, this amounts to a re-current articulation of the Political, rupturing the logics of arché (ibid.) and was a condensed experience of what anarchy can be about: “Anarchy should not seek to mirror the archic sovereignty that it undermines. That is, it should not seek to set itself up as the new hegemonic principle of political organization, but remain the negation of totality and not the affirmation of a new totality” (Critchley 2007, 122). We had to react to our shared “here and now” together to slowly move forward (Springer 2012, 1616). Consequently we were embracing constant experimentation. You could thereby say that the “oxygen” of our learning processes as educational space was in the first instance not experimentation (Ward 1995, 19), but the attempt to move autonomously, stressing the how of our trips. We learned towards anarchy on the go.

In working counter-intuitively to the logics of structuration and fixation (Raunig 2007), (for instance state organization, bureaucracy, nuclear families, money...and the sedimenting effects of any discursive formation as identity), and thus the archès that most people are used to and that keep them grounded in their lives, our cycling machine disrupting our collective similarly and disrupted what formed the collective, that is our selves.

Following the short interlude A Plenary, in the next section, we will focus on the latitude (Guattari and Deleuze 2005, 262; Bonta and Protevi 2004, 104) of our cycling machine, and explore in more detail the disruptive dynamics of our trans-embodied co-sharing cycling space for our selves as fully embedded persons. What characterizes the machine is constant communication and exchange, a “tendentially permanent praxis of connection” (Raunig 2010, 33). This can operate destructively (see Bonta and Protevi 2004, 50), but also bears the potentials for emergent fields of collective action – a practice of collective unlearning.

**Interlude: A Plenary**

*Sharing is caring.*

*(Mantra which evolved during our first tour)*

_Slowly everyone gathers in the attic of a farmer’s house. Heavy rain falls on the tiles, like it did all day on our heads. Some people chat, everywhere wet clothes hang from the roof beams. The empty gazes in most of the peoples faces show that today was not the best cycling day. Even though we just wanted to cycle twenty kilometers, we were pretty unlucky. Constant heavy and cold rain and seven flat tires on different bikes at different times! The voluntary,*
but hesitant moderator opens an emotional round of sharing. Quite soon after this opening a person breaks the dampened atmosphere. She feels left alone. She doesn't feel she belongs to the group anymore and is seriously thinking about dropping out. She explains that nobody listened to her or paid attention to her when we stopped at a slope, when she felt sick and couldn't go anymore. There, still half way to go, a quick and freezing stop in the wet happened, and thereafter the group was split. Just two persons realized her need for support and stayed with her on their own initiative, the rest of us were out of sight quite soon. Everybody went according to her own speed; fast cyclists far ahead, all of us far-flung somewhere on the road, bothered by the cold rain, the slopes, the day and the caprices of cycling with others. She would not cycle on like this anymore, she said. She still feels sick. She cries. Others cry. Some faces turn into stone, some blush, some stare into space.

I cannot think anything at first, then: Why am I here? Why do I do this to me? Why is this so difficult? I can't stand it. I don't want this! I have to do something. I have to leave! Out!

I stay. Everybody stays. For now.

We did not drink, but the day after everybody feels hungover.

- CA SelfO-Tour 2014, near Erfurt

Organizing by Discomfort: Affect, Ethics and Becoming

Similarly to the organizing group, the cycling groups were quite homogeneous, mainly comprising white middle class students and wage labouring people aged between 20 and 35. However, peoples' motives for joining the tours were pretty different. Some explicitly understood the tours as political activism, some were just looking for doing an outdoor group holiday, some just liked cycling, some considered it as a pedagogical experiment, some as trip toward sustainability, some as a European networking project, some thought to have time with people they knew already before and some even thought it would be kind of a city-based tourist sightseeing tour. These diverse motives were accompanied by the partly very different previous experiences with horizontal group organization and issues of power and privilege and were coupled by quite diverse understandings of society, global social relations and notions of being political in general. Our group could thus not be characterized as an activist group, which is different to some radical accounts to anarchist pedagogy (Motta and Esteves...
2014). We were rather coming together on uncommon grounds: we literally “gave up activism” (Chatterton 2006). To our understanding this is not just exceptionally important to disseminate activist knowledges beyond activist and resistant circles, but the promising potential of anarchism, as a diverse and fluid set of practices, concepts, theories and philosophies (De Acosta 2009, 27), lies in its embrace of uncommon grounds, uncommon people, uncommon beings. Anarchism stands in contrast to any other radical critique and practice where, in short, its embrace of the dissenting and diverse fundamental equality of life sets it apart (Springer 2014a; Heckert, Shannon, and Willis 2012; May 2012). However this ethos is transversal to how social life is predominantly organized and lived by many people today. It can accordingly be very uncomfortable for some.

In each tour there were several people involved in the work that goes into preparation beforehand. They had considerably more knowledge on the tours themselves, for example they applied for financial support and had previous contacts to initiatives that we wanted to visit (which did not always work out, see above). Consequently at the beginning of each tour, these organizers were considered lead facilitators and had very strong positions within the group. However, in the course of all the tours these strong roles were broken up to a high degree. So for example during the first tour, after two days of cycling two lead persons took a quick decision, to take a sandy, but shorter route, without telling the rest of the group that there also would be the option of an asphalted road. Cycling this sandy section resulted in a disaster. The group was torn apart, some drowning in the sand, others cycling ahead at full speed to not drown themselves. As a consequence in the evening people left behind were revolting and a process was initiated to slowly dissolve these leading roles.

The Plenary interlude can further shed light on these dissolution processes. It is a very intense scene, but in all of the tours similar events happened. Just one day before the Plenary, we had a lengthy plenary session discussing how we could move on together in a better way. We talked about roles, responsibilities and concrete procedures of how to handle specific eventualities while cycling, like for example a bike breakdown. Yet on the day of this scene, when our cycling machine was ferociously torpedoed, a quick decision in the rain was taken with neither clearly defined moderation nor clear procedures on how such a decision should be taken. Nobody took the responsibility to fill this void. As a result the collective was breaking apart. The cycling machine thus had torpedoed our good intentions to stick to
procedures and responsibilities we had agreed on. Simultaneously, and maybe also fostered by our visits, which centred us on the powerful aspects of relations, the cycling machine had already put into question powerful positionalities, like the lead facilitator role. Habitual roles were also called into question, for example those tied to gender, like a dominant masculine patronizing and 'mansplaining' attitude. Thus a certain caution, insecurity and disorientation towards our own behaviours prevailed in the group. In consequence we could not stand the situation together, we could not find a way to act together, but were fleeing into solitude. During the following evening’s plenary all of us were confronted with the anger, disappointment and fear of the person whose voice was not heard on the road. Her feelings directly affected us all, because the void of having no clarity on moderation and general procedures for moving on in the respective situation could have been filled by every one of us. There was no comforting structure left to lean back on and to excuse us. We were all responsible for what had happened.

Sharing her feelings made the collective nature of our trip explicit again, recreated its precarity and showed that it had not gone away while cycling individually, but that we had not given it enough attention. By disregarding this, we induced her suffering on the road and her distrust towards the others. What became clear in the plenary, when all of us were directly and most intensely affected by her feelings, is that ultimately we were also evoking our suffering and mutual distrust towards ourselves. Through this intense and crushing emotional situation our way of being with one another was put into focus, gravitating towards a pure sensation of being in a situation together, making space and time wither away for some moments. In the first seconds this was only intense, full, empty and overwhelming, evoking reflexes of wanting to escape. In the second moments questions arose: What shall we do? How can we prevent such discomforting situations and how can we prevent letting people suffer, letting ourselves suffer? It was a cry for mutual acknowledgement and awareness towards the relatedness of our togetherness, the interconnection of our fully embedded selves. It made explicit our shared co-presence, where the practice of freedom necessarily is relational. We depended on each other, there was no way around this.

However, this felt like a heavy burden. We changed plans and decided not to cycle the next day. Everybody needed some time for herself and we needed time to talk about how we could prevent such situations. In this way basic anarchist principles gained meaning and
found their way to us. We started to experiment more with consensus decision making (Firth 2014, 177); plenaries and emotional sharing rounds gained importance; attempts to organize horizontally while cycling became meaningful in themselves and for ourselves; awareness, acceptance, collective responsibility and mutual help (see for instance Kropotkin 1902; AG (post)autonome Handlungsweisen 2014) towards each other were encouraged, and each person's importance as being part of the collective was stressed. As a consequence of potentially discomforting moments, like in the Plenary, in each trip a few people also left the tours. They did not have the energy to move on with the processes our cycling machine exposed us to. However, the pedagogical implications of these collective moments of discomfort cannot be overestimated. They reach out beyond experimenting with basic anarchist practices.

Gauging the possibilities for an ethical account of education, Boler (1999) showed the importance of feelings and emotions in the processes of learning and unlearning. However instead of focusing on positive sensations, she – similarly to Critchley (2007, 11) – argues for discomforting feelings as pedagogical catalysts for encouraging ethical action and particularly for examining “constructed self-images in relation to how one has learned to perceive others.” (Boler 1999, 175 passim). Basic to this approach is an understanding that the self is created in-relation-to others in changing situations of our lives and that thereby dominant (repressive, unethical, hierarchical,...) matrices are habitually embodied in the self. Conversely, opening pathways for changing these scripts is supposed to operate through the self being-in-relation to others in a situation. Thus in challenging individualized self-reflection and self-contained spectating (as common to critical rationalism), Boler (1999, 176) develops a pedagogical approach of collective witnessing. This approach embraces discomforting feelings evolving when we encounter others in a shared collective situation. Discomfort as abstracted expression of discomforting feelings, like anger or fear, thereby disrupts and puts into question the relations we take towards each other, which makes it essential for furthering a critical inquiry of how we become and became a self, of how we understand ourselves in-relation-to-others. The self understood as evolving in a particular experience-based history of relationalities is potentially disrupted in all the relational scripts which are constituting it, be they identitary (self-)conceptions or habitual behaviours, needs and desires. This methodology of discomfort on the one hand aims at furthering an understanding of how “we have “chosen” to be and how we act in our lives” (ibid., 196). On
the other hand it points to potentials of changing and departing from these relations. Collective witnessing in discomfort makes the history of our mutual relatedness visible in the present situation of our relatedness and opens potentials for departing from the inscribed self towards mutual responsibility, in short towards an ethical account of relatedness (Boler 1999, 178).

Massumi calls this an ethical relationship of caring (Massumi 2015, 43). In conceiving of learning, that is unlearning in this embodied way (“discomfort is about bodies” (Boler 1999, 196)), Boler (1999, 8 passim) draws on feminist performativity theory to anticipate what Massumi called from a perspective of non-representational affect theory three years later the “felt reality of relation” (Massumi 2002, 16 emphasis original). Similarly for Massumi (2015, 9), affective expressions (that is partial expressions of affect, for “affect as a whole […] is the virtual co-presence of potentials” (Massumi 2015, 5) including the non-human) can operate as irruptions in a given situation and thus potentially break open social relations (see also Woodward and Lea 2010, 160). Thereby this cracking open of social relations throws them back on themselves, makes them visible as interaction in-the-making and opens the social as a relational field of emergence (Massumi 2002, 9). Emergence however is recurrent immanence of relation. It simultaneously points back to the history of the present moment and points ahead to all potential fields of reconfiguring these relations (Massumi 2015, 9). Within the gap between breaking and reconfiguring is the ethical dimension, resembling the momentous event where the relation of sociality itself is put the fore – an event of explicit shared co-presence simultaneously full and empty. For Critchley a discomforting situation like this poses an unfullfillable ethical demand of the other towards the me (Critchley and James 2009, 15). For Massumi however, the ethical is the question of how we embrace this uncertainty towards our relatedness together, thus immediately invoking the social and the ethical (Massumi 2015, 11). Hence Massumi’s account of a disrupting affective expression, like in the Plenary interlude, transcends the logics of individuation and self. Instead the self is conceived of being in a process of withdrawing from itself towards a becoming as connectivity, becoming the in-between, a place not self nor the other (Ellsworth 2005, 31). The self “is in a dissolve out of what she or he is just ceasing to be and into what she or he will already have become by the time she or he registers something has happened.” (ibid., 34). Accordingly, people opening up to such a shared co-presence are moving away from what is constituting them as selves, including repressive inscriptions and impotencies,
towards understanding that they are being related, becoming selves – not rigid identities and anchored patterns. Thus the ethical dimension consists in a demand to form that connectivity in-between selves – not a connectivity between buoys of the self. The self is not understood as a separate entity, but a “differential emergence” from a “shared realm of relationality” (Massumi 2002, 71; see also Ellsworth 2005, 34), shared co-presence.

A similar process was initiated within us when pushed into discomforting situations. Not only did the lead facilitators roles slowly assuage, but also in other respects people started to disembark from dominant scripts, from what they were used to do and be, be it gender scripts, activist scripts, an upstanding wage labouring attitude or the active support of national football teams. Instead, encountering each other and her needs, desires and emotions became important and thus simultaneously operated an affirmative and deconstructive of the self, putting our shared relations into focus.

We experienced, we felt this shared co-presence, and now writing we approach an understanding of these moments, continuing our unlearning – and try to harness its potentials for a radical, anarchist pedagogy.

Massumi (2015, 50) writes: “What you can do, your potential, is ultimately defined by your connectedness, the way you're connected and how intensely, not your ability to separate off and decide by yourself. Autonomy is always connective, it's not being apart, it's being in, being in a situation of belonging that gives you certain degrees of freedom, or powers of becoming, powers of emergence.”

Such an approach puts our potentials for connectivity to the center of Anarchism and thus transcends dichotomies of structure and agency. De Acosta (2009, 28 passim) points to this in discussing the importance of affect and desire, which basically operate as connectivity. It cries out against individual Anarchism à la Stirner (Newman 2009) and anchors freedom as degrees of relational constraint. It is a call for critical inquiry towards our potentials to connect, to simultaneously work against the repressive forms that infuse our connectivity and embrace the potentials of becoming connected. Notwithstanding the prevailing massive inequality in how domination is concretely materialized in different positions in the relations we-take-to-each-other, from such a perspective of connectivity the suffering of individual bodies due to basic antagonisms (Anderson 2015) and the repressive, hierarchical, dominant,
exploitive, identitary, speciesist-, capitalist-, state-, and other relations, in short due to the “manigfold-cum-interlocking processes of domination” (Springer 2014a, 87), appears as the suffering of all. A methodology of discomfort as one aspect of what we unknowingly practiced, as has been shown, has the potential to further such an understanding by making the self felt in-its-relatedness. It argues for the confrontation with suffering allegedly confined to others in shared situations and make the shared realm of life felt. It thus encourages to resist and reconfigure these living relations to ultimately assuage suffering (Heckert, Shannon, and Willis 2012, 23). Anarchism, in all its practical openness, dissent and fluidity (Armaline 2009, 136) encourages us to embrace a rigorous critique of what infuses in-between us; it encourages us to resist our shared suffering and to move towards feeling the freedoms and constraints, the beauties and the responsibilities of the reality of relation; in short anarchism encourages us to embrace the potential of social becoming. Anarchist pedagogies can contribute to this, by making people feel our shared suffering and thus further collective actions, to forging solidarities, to resist, to perpetually re-connect and to gauge the potentials towards connective autonomy and relations in-becoming. Following others (Chokr 2009, Springer 2014a), we name this pedagogical approach of supporting deconstruction, critique and transgression of the individuated self, of moving towards the potentials of the felt self-in-relation and thus towards reducing suffering through our shared constraints and potentials as ‘unlearning’. While cycling together along lines of contentions, this process was initiated.

Moving Towards an Anarchist Field Trip Practice

“Anarchy can't be taught! (De Acosta 2009, 27) […] We make ourselves in the practices that make us, and that process is anarchy, the anarchy of impulse and the ways of living that express or designate it.” (ibid., 31, emphasis original).

De Acosta's strong exclamations certainly concur with our experiences of cycling collectively along lines of contention. Anarchy as a becoming in the relations in-between us found its way via our curiosity for alternative practices and the cycling machine quasi-naturally. Similarly, a great deal of the literature on anarchism re-contextualizes resisting practices as anarchist pedagogy by focusing the realms of learning and unlearning respectively within these practices (Motta and Esteves 2014; Horvath in this book). This shift in understanding is similar to what we have described here. Notwithstanding that there have been experiments to literally “teach anarchy” (for instance Williams forthcoming), which in
consistent consequence resulted in subversion and transgression of the practices commonly understood as teaching itself. What stays from aiming to teach anarchy is nothing more or less than an impulse. And this is good, we should be all about reawakening starting points while searching for the little interstices and cracks to resist the powerful matrices of today and tomorrow. In this sense we understand this contribution as a potential to be many starting points as much for us as for others. Pertaining to the disciplining matrix of Geography, our self-organized, extra-institutional field trips point to a potential for rupture. Leaving the classroom, while still being institutionally bound, had and still is of outstanding importance (compared to other disciplinary environments) for the identity and practical formation of Geography (compare Henniges 2014; Michel 2014). An obsession with the spatial is a double-edged sword. Does everything really need to be understood with a spatial touch? However as with any practice our field trip was spatial, not only in approaching specific places and ethnographically unlearning through pedagogical others, but most intensely also as a collective space of movement. Our cycling machine pushed us into discomfort by disrupting our selves and our archês and thus encouraged anarchist practices and the transgression of the self. Instead of leaving the self void and scattered, emotionally intense moments of discomfort during our trips pointed to the potentials of a connective self-in-relation, an ‘us’, moving toward assuaging suffering while tentatively, experimentally and imperfectly gauging our potentials for collective action. So we hope to encourage scholars and others alike to explore the spaces of autonomous collective movement and to engage with unlearning practices. Organizing autonomous field trips in Geography and thereby disrupting its disciplinning identity, is just one out of the many imaginable ways to practice a geographies of ethics and becoming.

“The spatiality consists of the movement of arrival to the particular place of encounter as well as the link of this arrival to other places, to an elsewhere that is not simply absent or present. These movements further a geography of ethics that does not fix the other but anticipates the possibility of facing something or somebody different – the not yet and the elsewhere.” (Simonsen 2010, 237)
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