

Networked politics

Rethinking political
organisation in an
age of movements
and networks

work in progress

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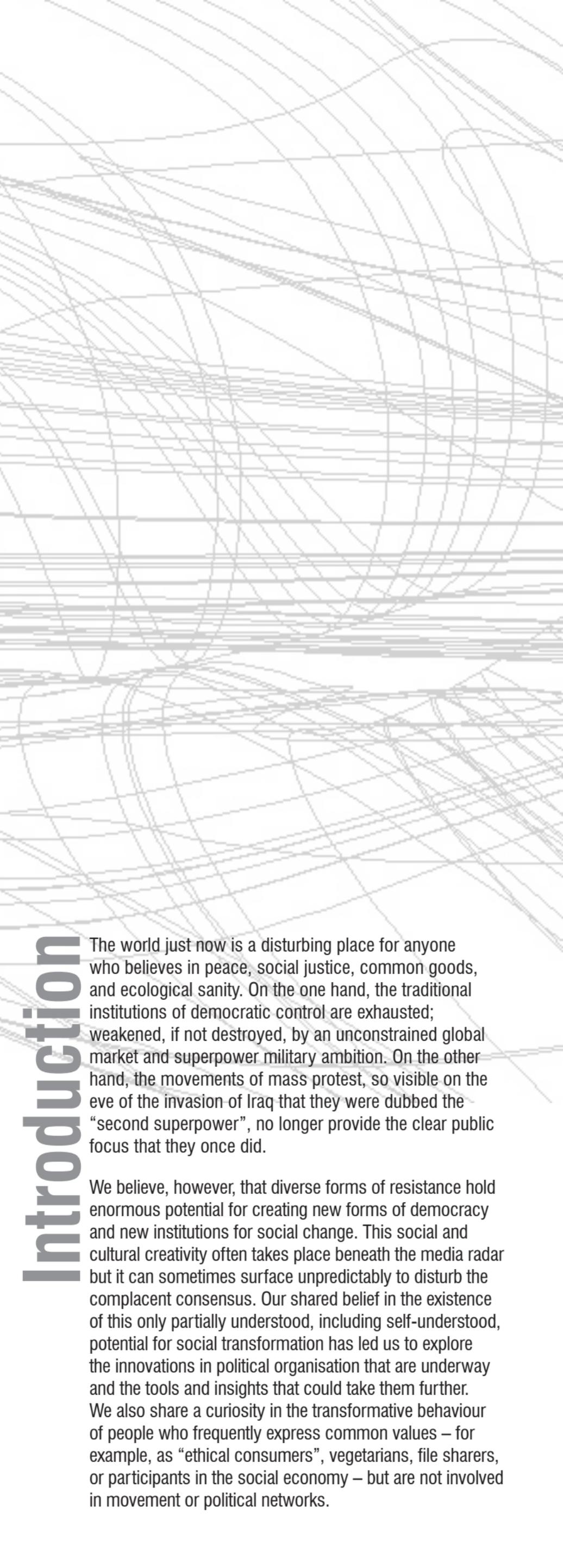
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Introduction

The world just now is a disturbing place for anyone who believes in peace, social justice, common goods, and ecological sanity. On the one hand, the traditional institutions of democratic control are exhausted; weakened, if not destroyed, by an unconstrained global market and superpower military ambition. On the other hand, the movements of mass protest, so visible on the eve of the invasion of Iraq that they were dubbed the “second superpower”, no longer provide the clear public focus that they once did.

We believe, however, that diverse forms of resistance hold enormous potential for creating new forms of democracy and new institutions for social change. This social and cultural creativity often takes place beneath the media radar but it can sometimes surface unpredictably to disturb the complacent consensus. Our shared belief in the existence of this only partially understood, including self-understood, potential for social transformation has led us to explore the innovations in political organisation that are underway and the tools and insights that could take them further. We also share a curiosity in the transformative behaviour of people who frequently express common values – for example, as “ethical consumers”, vegetarians, file sharers, or participants in the social economy – but are not involved in movement or political networks.

Our inquiry is based on four interrelated lines of research:

- * The innovations and problems arising from movements: their development in practice of a new approach to knowledge, new form of action and organisation;
- * The process of renewal taking place in political parties of the left and, more generally, attempts at transformative forms of political representation;
- * Public institutions in the network society: the ambivalences, dangers and opportunities of the emergence of multi-level political systems and the idea of the governance;
- * The new techno-political tools made possible by the revolution in information technology and their potentialities for transformative thought, action and communication.

Much work is in progress on these issues, often by people who hardly know each other or whose paths cross only briefly. Those you'll meet in this pamphlet have come together mainly out of the social forum process, locally, across Europe and, through the World Social Forum (WSF), on a wider international scale, to create a loosely connected community of activist researchers to share resources, compare experiences and debate ideas. The purpose of this pamphlet is to provide a report back on work so far and to promote resources and ideas that we have found useful.

We are a motley bunch: some of us are from the movements of the late 1960s and 70s, aware that our ideas at that time became in part – against our intentions – resources for the renewal of capitalism, but insistent nonetheless that our movements, feminism especially, generated an unrealised potential towards rethinking politics. Some of us are shaped by intense involvement in the movements unleashed in Seattle and continuing into the 21st century, aware that our activism is merely the surface expression of a far deeper popular disaffection for which we have not yet found the cultural tools to reach or the sufficiently innovative ways to organise. Some of us are from political parties, believing in the need to engage with institutional politics but fully aware, against the traditional assumptions of left politics, that parties can only be one actor amongst many and indeed the very nature of a party needs to be radically rethought. And most of us try to make transformative values part of the way we live, the way we work, the way we organise – not that we always succeed! We try to pre-figure our vision of a different world in present-day experiments in new systems of collaboration and creativity. We aim to make this project exactly such an experiment.

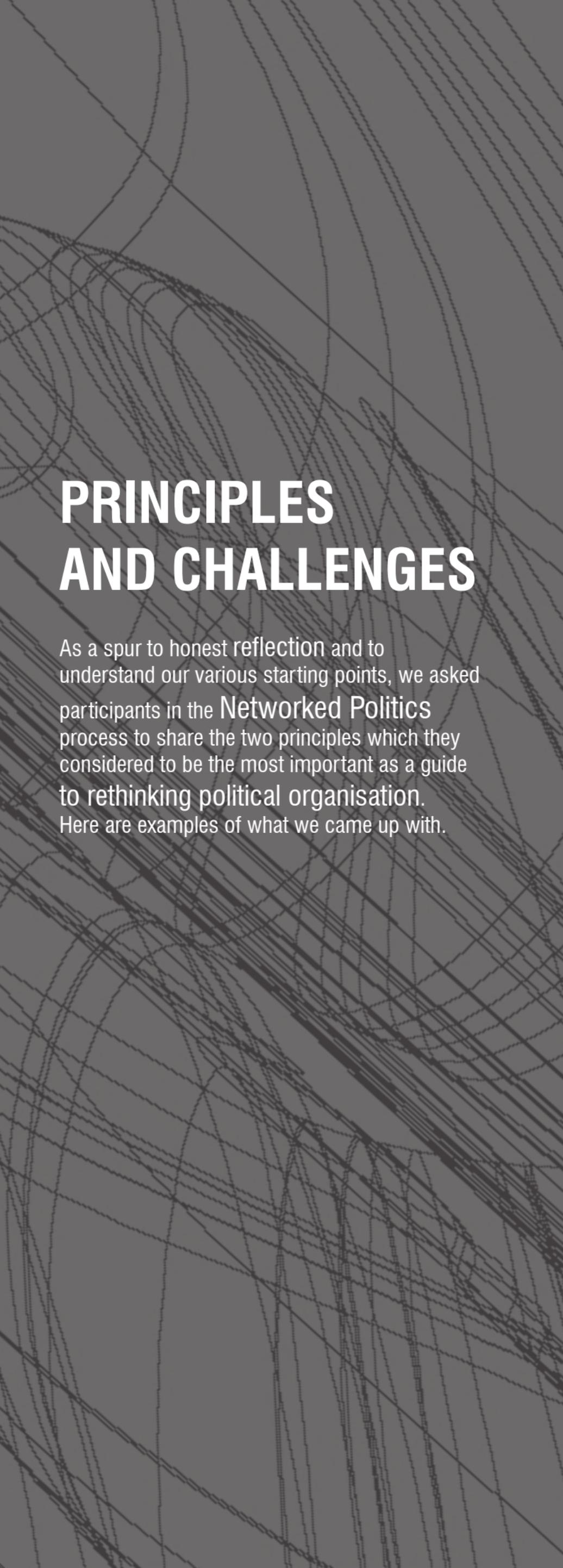
Each line of inquiry has organised its own forms of preliminary research, producing draft documents suggesting some starting blocks and “hot issues” (summaries of these follow later in this pamphlet); organising small brainstorming workshops and setting up a wiki and an e-mail list to enable us to work collaboratively. Several of the partner organisations organised seminars associated with the inquiry at the WSF in Caracas and the European Social Forum in Athens in 2006. A web-bibliography e-library is also a central resource in our collaboration, containing articles, papers, seminar transcripts, and dossiers of interviews from the frontline of political innovation and its difficulties. We are promoting the collaborative production of a glossary of new words (or old words with new meanings) emerging

out of the search for new kinds of political organisation. The www.networked-politics.info website provides you with details of, and links to, all of these aspects of the inquiry.

This pamphlet is a presentation of work in progress. We have produced it as a modest nourishment to many others who, from their own starting points, are engaged in a similar search. We have also produced it because so often a radical politics which recognises uncertainty and values curiosity is sidelined by political methodologies of both a more dogmatic and a more managerial kind. But there is no reason why an exploratory politics should be shy. We think it is helpful to think aloud as long as the process is open, grounded in experience and self-reflexive, not self-referential.

Much of our work has benefitted from public funds or the membership subscriptions supporting the work of both our respective organisations and our hosts in Bologna, Manchester and finally Barcelona, where our main seminar took place. This is our first report back. We would very much like your feedback. Check out the website and let us know what you think.

Joan Subirats (IGOP) Marco Berlinguer (Transform! Italia),
Hilary Wainwright (Transnational Institute) and Mayo Fuster
I Morell (Euromovements).



PRINCIPLES AND CHALLENGES

As a spur to honest reflection and to understand our various starting points, we asked participants in the **Networked Politics** process to share the two principles which they considered to be the most important as a guide to rethinking political organisation. Here are examples of what we came up with.

A radical ethics of equality

Ezequiel Adamovsky is a historian and activist from Buenos Aires. He has been involved in the neighbourhood assemblies that emerged there after the rebellion of 2001. His most recent book (in Spanish) is *Anti-capitalism for beginners: the new generation of emancipatory movements* (Buenos Aires 2003).

Transformative politics needs to be firmly anchored in ethics. We need to rethink our strategy, our structures of organisation, our goals... everything, in relation to a radical ethics of equality. This means an ethics of care for the other.

This is important because so much left politics has traditionally rejected the relevance of ethics. In the past, dominant traditions of left politics were more about organising and struggling for the sake of a Truth, than for the sake of myself and my equals. Left politics was – and still often is – more inclined to be faithful to an Idea (or to a programme or party) than to the people around us. (And here, I don't mean The People, but the individuals around me, with whom I struggle and live).

This has not only produced unethical behaviour on the left, but it also makes listening to each other difficult. After all, if one has access to a political Truth, then there is no point in deliberating with my equals, nor in taking their viewpoints and necessities into account. And if someone argues something that seems not to be in tune with my political Truth, then that person needs to be taken out of my way. For obvious reasons, this faithfulness to ideas and not to other people creates serious problems when it comes to co-operation for shared political goals. That is why I think that a radical ethics of equality, an ethics of co-operation between equals, should be the basis of any desirable new transformative politics.

Understanding the heart of capitalist production

Brian Holmes is a writer with a background in art, writing on aesthetic forms of dissent, critique, revolt and alternatives in public spaces – gestures which, while taking place in physical space, would be impossible without the Internet. He has been involved in and written about numerous activities and demonstrations against corporate globalisation, ranging from the June 18, 1999 “Carnival against Capital” in London's financial district, to No-border campaigns and Euromayday demonstrations in Europe, by way of smaller, more experimental interventions (see many texts on www.u-tangente.org).

The left has been very weak about understanding the heart of the capitalist production process. What's involved are not only technological inventions, but also techniques for forming the loyalty and perseverance of individuals. By ignoring the complexity of the processes, we underestimate the kinds of strategies and tactics necessary for effective revolt. It's important to look beyond what is immediately visible. For example, there are great challenges to intellec-

tual property at the level of music, but if you look at what engineers are creating in terms of industrial patents on potentially useful things like medicines, agricultural technologies, communications devices and so forth, there is very little challenge to the intellectual property there.

If we try to understand what shapes the ways people are motivated, we see the creation of secret codes of value, connected to complex instrumental languages that are giving form to society, constructing cities, modes of transportation and communication, forms of interaction and interrelation. An example at a micro-scale is the way biometric identity cards of various kinds are being implemented and keyed to extensive, searchable databases like the Schengen one in Europe, or the way data is collected on individuals and sold to corporations to create so-called 'geodemographic' information systems for targeted advertising and merchandising. An example at a grand scale are the corridor-planning operations for integrated highways, power grids and communications networks, which you see being built according to the Puebla-Panama plan in North America, the European TRACEA project extending out toward Central Asia, or the so-called 'Golden Quadrilateral' highway project in India. These projects not only directly affect our daily lives, but they also mobilise tremendous amounts of creative intelligence, even though the results are in some ways sad and depressing for almost everyone.

People are strongly caught up not only in what they are doing to rise on the wage scale, but also to rise in the eyes of their peers professionally. Moreover their ideas of the world are deeply conditioned by the received ideas of the media. These are not all stupid ideas but they *are* received ideas: people have neither created them or arrived at them for themselves and only rarely do they question their origins. If the left cannot describe what is happening here, then we are out of the loop. We are reduced to creating a kind of self-referential myth about ourselves which in the end will cause the disappearance of the left, because the force of capitalist instrumentality is too strong to ignore. This can be seen as the pattern of professional motivation which allows each of the branches of techno-science to develop now at really fast rates. We saw it with the Internet, with the surveillance technologies, with the gene-splicing technologies, and I am afraid that the next frontier are cognitive technologies integrating psychological research to powerful new forms of manipulation of consciousness, for instance via the creation of veritable programmed environments, which you already encounter in places like airports. These developments, and their uselessness or harmful effects, have to be described unflinchingly, I think.

Having understood these processes more profoundly, we must then formalise the expression of all that, make it appear for what we are convinced it is, namely a waste of time and resources in so many cases, an almost insane kind of economic growth in which the broad, educated middle classes of the planet participate on the micro-scale of our own lives and professions. I think we should formalise that better, write about it, create images of what is going on, try to make sure that the complexity of the processes is expressed in such a way so that you see the realities. There is nothing to be gained by simplifying things in order to preserve illusions. The reality of the CCCB in

Barcelona, where the Networked Politics seminar was held, is also really important, the fact that we are always operating in these partially alienated situations has to be honestly expressed. A sophisticated and capable political effort has to provide people with some kind of compass, a strong set of ethics that will help them deal with inevitable situations of alienation. Otherwise, what sets in is denial and the creation of fantasy lands of purity that ignore the real struggles.

But the key thing that also has to be expressed are the kinds of fulfilment people get from these radical projects, because we must also be attractive, we must offer a better and richer life – though not, of course, on the same basis as the capitalist professional system. This is the idea of social networking: you must network around something, and ultimately you must network around pleasure, self-expression, sociability and idealism too. So the fulfilment that people have in social movements and alternative politics needs to be expressed more, but expressed not just as individual achievement – that’s how capitalism encourages people to focus on themselves narcissistically – but as it fits into co-operative processes of transformation. All these things I’ve just mentioned are about expression because that is what I am mainly dealing with... but that is just one part of the larger picture.

Rebuild politics as a place for alternatives and common goods

Moema Miranda is an anthropologist and activist based in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. She is co-ordinator of IBASE (The Brazilian Institute of Social and Economic Analyses, www.ibase.org.br), and has been a member of the International Council of the World Social Forum since the first WSF in Porto Alegre. She is a former member and organiser of the Brazilian Workers Party (PT).

Rethinking politics involves rethinking culture and economics understood in the Aristotelian sense of *oikos* (household). How to take care of the common household? How to assure food, shelter, clothes, parties, art and music for everyone? How to create and to distribute wealth and goods without destroying the living conditions of the planet? But what is a “good life”? How much do we need or desire to live well? Who consumes? And what is the cost to others?

If capitalism has been victorious in the shaping the global order, then neo-liberalism has tried to complete and seal the process by undermining the legitimacy of politics and effectively disqualifying serious debate of alternative directions for society. In Brazil, this is leading to what is called the “insignificance of politics”. One aspect of this is the now familiar process of the growing power of vast corporations and international organisations controlled from the US and Europe, which are making the rules of the global economy and undermining the sovereignty of nation states. The second side of it has been the submission of the old left – perhaps because their idea of socialism was so wedded to the nation state – to the notion of capitalism’s inevitability. As a result, we have witnessed the sad pursuit by our parties and leaders to some of the

worst practices of the right, as if there was truth in the old cliché “if you can’t beat them, join them”. The worst scenario now is that we bow to the apparently self-evident fact that we live in a world shaped by forces that cannot be understood or controlled by the population. A world that is simultaneously magic and disenchanting. The only way we can rebuild politics and trust in the possibility of alternatives is to develop proposals which have a meaning for our daily lives, that create hope and that extend confidence in the force of common action.

Facing up to the pervasiveness of fear

We face an almost paralysing obstacle in achieving this aim: the constant feeling of fear. Faced with the apparent inevitability of an economic order that creates systemic and growing inequality, that is locked into the logic of war, that produces wealth constantly at the cost of the destruction of the planet, fear becomes a natural response: fear of crime, of the neighbour, of the immigrant, of the competition for my job, of war and instability. Fear of loneliness, of grow old and losing the pension. We have to make combating fear a central part of our new thinking about politics.

Fear is one of the most anti-revolutionary feelings that I know. It produces passivity and fatalism and makes the absurd and the grotesque acceptable. The only active way of fighting fear is by the radical reaffirmation of hope – and not only by the creation of new sources of security. But let’s not talk about hope as a messianic feeling. It is not the hope that depends on waiting; it is the hope that comes from being engaged in something new; the hope based on our capacity to move in new directions, to break with the existing order, to project new possibilities... for a better life for all.

The omnipresence of the capacity to transform

Hilary Wainwright, based in Manchester, is co-editor of Red Pepper magazine (www.redpepper.org.uk) and research director for the New Politics programme of the Transnational Institute (www.tni.org) in Amsterdam. She has been a writer on rethinking political organisation for longer than she cares to remember!

A guiding principle to our new forms of organisation should be a recognition of the omnipresence of the power and capacity to transform. The existing social order depends on the actions of people reproducing and sustaining that order on a daily basis, as workers, consumers, voters, as creative people. But this also contains the possibility of intentional actions of refusal, in order to set off a dynamic of transformation. A transformative way of organising must therefore be continually open and responsive to initiatives from new constituencies, and the discovery of new spheres and possibilities of change.

A related principle is to organise in a way that gives full expression to the capacities and knowledge of all those sharing common desires and values for change. This requires inventing means of sharing and interconnecting this knowledge and skill (as in the first principle), and also a commitment to support its development. It also implies that

priority will be given to reaching out to people who share transformative values but do not express them through the existing platforms of the left. This principle stems from a recognition of the varied sources of knowledge, valuing experiential and tacit knowledge as well as scientific and historical knowledge.

Starting from oneself ... but not ending there

Frieder Otto Wolf (www.friederottowolf.de), based in Berlin, was a founder member of the German Greens and is a former member of the European parliament. Currently co-ordinator of the European Network 'Sustainability Strategy' and professor of philosophy at the Free University, Berlin.

My first principle is politics in the first person. By this I mean starting from oneself but then reaching out to the far recesses of the global processes of domination in order radically to subvert each and every one of them. This means starting from our own complicity in these structures and relationships and developing with others strategies of refusal and alternatives at every level. It means developing our politics as a process of enlarging our common self-determination.

This principle also implies a further principle of comprehensive personal responsibility – that is, trying to understand the ways in which one's own practices and potential areas of work and action may be transformed from being a means of support (even though unintended) for the established structures of domination into a source of support and solidarity with other struggles against injustice and domination.

De-institutionalisation

Marco Berlinguer is co-ordinator of Transform! Italia (www.transform.it) in Rome, which is part of a wider international network Transform! Europe. He is currently working on links between trade unions and social movements.

He is editor of a geographical map of social conflicts in Rome, and various other books and pamphlets of relevance to the new movements in Italy and internationally.

The principle of "de-institutionalisation" has several dimensions: first, it describes reality. In all dimensions of life – not only the dynamics of the movements – we observe an increasing reduction of the role of institutions in structuring, mediating, or representing the social relations of which we are part. This trend has many negative sides: the power exercised by non-democratic and informal economic and political powers on a global scale, the growth of the precarious economy, criminal activities and networks, the abandonment of entire territories marginal to the priorities of the market and the destruction of social regulation and protection.

On the positive side, this principle recognises the degeneration of the traditional political institutions. It also points to the potential of, and capacity for, self-organisation. It suggests a challenge to re-think the shape, the role and

even the very concept of political institutions, in the light of more advanced conceptions of democracy.

In the most recent cycle of movements we have seen a structural conflict between different logics of organisation. In simplistic terms there is, on the one hand, the traditional organisational logic based on vertical structures, closed identities and boundaries; on the other hand, there is the logic based on open, horizontal, networked forms of organisation. In this conflict, we can see that a new logic of organisation is emerging in which the idea of going beyond any previous institutional space or form has been central. For example, in the WSF process there has been a progressive abandonment of the pretension of organising this political space in a centralised way, through a core group of organisations and individuals. A result of this constant conflict is that all the space in the WSF is – at least formally – organised through a self-organisational logic with networking aims.

The concept of de-institutionalisation also reflects thinking about social transformation based more on autonomous, diffused, decentralised and direct forms of action and less on institutional constraints, and forms of delegation and representation characteristic of traditional mass organisations. In this sense, the concept also emphasises the role of cultural and ethical transformation. If we use the principle of de-institutionalisation to gain a self-understanding of present-day social and political movements, it can help us enlarge the concept of politics and of social movements beyond the constituency of explicitly political activists – including, for example, intrinsically but nevertheless political movements like those around free and open source software or file-sharing and open editing.

Finally, I think it is important to recover the memory of the roots of this principle (with all its contradictions) in the movements of the 1960s and 70s, and their claim for an enlarged concept of autonomy. The feminist movement is particularly significant in this respect. Such a recovery would enable us to explore in more depth the ambivalences and unresolved contradictions of capitalism as it is today, the product of several decades of radical restructuring using a distorted and alienated version of such concepts of autonomy.

Complexity

I have a further principle: of complexity. Consider the WSF with its different organisational scales, structures, cultures and logics. All this variety lives in the same space and interacts in complex (conflictive and co-operative) ways, influencing and transforming each other and their shared environment. Converging around an event and a process they recognise that, in some way, they are part of a common world, though they cannot be unified as, or reduced to a single subject. It is important to understand how such a space has been created and can work.

Complexity is first of all a principle of the reality we face. When we say that diversity is our strength, we show a capacity for re-formulating our cultural schemes and developing new ways of working on the basis of recognising it. The idea of complexity also implies a kind of ecological (or holistic?) approach to

the multiple nature of the global movement, treating it as a world of worlds. The logic of complexity also helps us to understand the swarming processes typical of recent mobilisations. These mobilisations have been the result of decentralised and dispersed initiatives that have bypassed any organised structure or subject. There has been no top-down control or centralised command logic.

As a principle of reality, complexity also has a dark side. It reflects, for example, the loss of control by sovereign states and the world's growing disorder. But to recognise and manage this complexity means to abandon any pretension of reducing things to one shape, one style, one single solution. It points to the necessity of learning how to live and work together without destroying our differences. It means resisting a global politics that tries to be homogeneous. It is a feature of the historical phase we are engaged in where a radical transformation and the new overlaps with the old.

A plurality of actors

Alessandra Mecozzi is International Secretary of Fiom, the Italian metalworkers' union. She is active in many social movements in Italy, especially the peace movement and the movement of solidarity with Palestine, and is also involved in the ESF and WSF. She writes extensively on these issues.

Transformation cannot be made by one actor. We need a plurality of actors with the ability to converge on common issues and at the same time to be rooted in their own social ground. To be transformative it is necessary to be open to others; to be rooted but without a closed identity.

Secondly, the supra-national character of politics must be recognised, as well as the importance of linking the global and the local. Workers in a factory struggle against precarity, a community reacts against the privatisation of water, the population of a city refuses a military base in its territory - these local struggles are necessary in order to improve the conditions of life and implement fundamental rights. But their effectiveness and strength depends on a global struggle for fundamental rights at work, against the power of multinational companies and against militarism and war.

A new horizontality

Ángel Calle from Madrid, Spain is a researcher on the DEMOS Project ("Democracy in Society and the Mobilisation of Society", www.demos.iue.it), working on the ideas of democracy in the recent alter-global social movements. He teaches at the University of Madrid.

In looking for the principles of a new subjectivity we should take into account the crisis that we are living through, which is two-fold. On the one hand, most people feel that daily life is troublesome, fraught with insecurity and precarity, full of sources of anxiety; on the other hand, they don't look to traditional institutions for help – the

state, political parties, and trade unions. Few people rely on these institutions or expect them to express or understand the conflicts that this crisis produces.

People feel they don't have control over the circumstances of their lives. How do we organise in a way which enables people to regain control? We need to break from a "vertical" approach to organisation – that is, an approach based on delegation and on domination. We need more horizontality in how we organise. This new horizontality must be a foundation stone of rethinking political organisation. This implies new common goods, and open access to material and basic information at every level, from local to global. We need ways of organising in which people not only participate but also define the rules of the space in which we are interacting. This requires creating autonomous spaces in which people have real power.

You have to feel this horizontality and build it into everyday life, so that it starts from the local but builds up to the global. It does not only refer to our material needs but also to our emotional needs, our psychological situation, our language. Effectively then, we are talking about not just protest but the experience of new ways of living. At the same time as we are working towards a future project, we are experimenting with changes that bring new benefits in the present. To achieve this real involvement, it is important to engage emotionally, to build cultures based on real networks. The networking cannot therefore be done only by the internet; if the networks are to be a way of developing a new politics they need to be grounded in emotional connections.

Principles making horizontality possible

Dominique Cardon is a Paris-based sociologist working in the France Télécom Research and Development Department and Usage Laboratory. His research focuses on relations between the use of new technologies and cultural and media activities.

I also draw upon the experience of the WSF and the organisational principles enshrined in its Charter of Principles, drawn up in Porto Alegre, Brazil in April 2001. The three principles of horizontality contained in the Charter have become the basic principles of the new network structure of co-ordination and the basis of many recent mobilisations and actions, for example those against the CPE [a controversial youth labour law] in France last spring. It is useful to lay them out.

The first is respect for the principle of diversity. This implies an open forum in which everyone can participate and can value and celebrate their diversity. It also implies a consciousness of the need constantly to extend the networks to new actors.

The second principle of horizontality is that there is no centre. No one individual or organisation can speak in the name of the whole network or space. Like most network structures, WSFs do not have a decision-making centre; they do not have a spokesperson, and do not sign any text or declaration. This clause of self-limitation is one of the essential features of network organisation. There is no

centre to struggle for. Actors can only speak in their own name or in the name of their organisation. Actors can only express their ideological and strategic diversity. This generates many tensions in the movement – as well as causing frustration amongst journalists and other political actors who would like to be able to identify a single anti-globalisation agenda, with a single voice.

The third principle of horizontality is that the only decision-making process that is consistent with the openness and diversity of the movement is one based on consensus. It is the only decision-making procedure that can co-ordinate organisations with a variety of sizes, functions, internal structures, social and geographical origins. It is impossible to define criteria or create a basis for the representation of participants, or to allocate to them differential decision-making power. Each organisation, whatever its structure, past, size, social object or political position, has potentially the same weight in the decision-process of the WSF.

Consensus does not mean unanimity, however. It identifies disagreement rather than support. The participants must continue the discussion until they agree on one compromise and satisfy or neutralise opposition to it. In this process, consensus building appears as a very distinctive political process in which the use of time, bargaining and negotiation are central features. At its best, it produces a special culture of discussion which is less oppositional and more developed than the traditional majoritarian procedure.

Connecting collective and individual transformation; political and economic transformation

Joan Subirats is Professor of Political Science at the Autonomous University of Barcelona and Director of IGOP (Institute of Government and Public Policies, <http://igop.uab.es>), also in Barcelona.

My first principle is based on the renewed exigency of the message of equality that has historically characterised the left. This was, and still is, the driving force of demands for social transformation. But it is true that this principle should today be complemented with other aspects that have not always been sufficiently present in the left wing tradition: individual autonomy, and the recognition of diversity in its broadest sense (cultural, ethnic, religious, life choices, etc.). From this triangle of values, a vision of a new citizenship worth fighting for can be projected on a global scale. I don't think that this aspiration can be found in any particular political actor but, rather, that it should flow from a plural and heterogeneous complex of groups, collectives, institutions and persons.

This brings me to my second principle: the conviction that no durable social change or transformation is possible if it is not simultaneously based on personal change and transformation. This represents a notable correction to the traditions of the organised left that were essentially based on the possibility of ending oppression and inequality through the conquest and exercise of power by a conscious and organised vanguard. There will be no political change without economic change but neither will there be social change without personal change.

The challenge lies in how to advance in the achievement of these principles in a tenacious and efficient manner, without betraying the starting principles. This brings us to the ways of doing politics and what we understand by politics. The institutionalisation of the left has led to a radical impoverishment of what politics is. Politics tends to be confused with parties and institutions, and this separates many people from politics. It also separates many people and collectives that are really doing politics (since they work to transform people and communities) from politics. They feel that what they do has nothing to do with what they are told politics is. We should therefore attempt to salvage and widen the social meaning of politics by “politicising” daily life, social relations and the forms of work and co-existence. In this sense, it is very important to change the concept of political action by linking it to certain formats or rites. Everyone participates in politics and does politics depending on their conditions, realities, knowledge and previous experiences. We should therefore imagine forms of direct participation and leadership that empower people. We should also allow collective learning of these same practices through the deliberation and contrasting of opinions and proposals.

The other challenge is how to transform the institutions without being swallowed up by them. How to maintain their transformative capacity by building alternatives (dissidence), directly opposing new authoritarian tendencies (resistance), and appreciating the influential capacity that exists within the institutions (incidence). It probably isn't necessary for one person, organisation, or collective to try to do all three things simultaneously. The inherent conflict in the three dimensions is not negative either, but the challenge is to make them possible and sustainable without losing connections and mixed potentials.

Participatory democracy: beyond the label

Melissa Pomeroy from Sao Paulo, Brazil, now lives in Barcelona where she works with the International Observatory of Participatory Democracy (OIPD, www.oipd.net).

She was previously involved in the participatory budget of Martha Suppicy's PT government in Sao Paulo.

Today, people's access to public debate is more limited than it has been for some time. There are many reasons for this: globalisation; growing inequality; the speed of change and the depoliticisation of the economy, for example. Although the return of the “agora” is impossible, the failure and growing crisis of representative institutions makes it urgent for citizens to achieve greater direct participation in economic and political decisions. I want to emphasise decisions because mere debate and consultation is not enough for a new politics.

The label “participatory democracy” risks becoming meaningless. Exactly because of its great political potential, it has been used as a label for many different conceptions, sometimes to legitimise existing exhausted institutions without really changing them, sometimes to co-opt strong social forces. As Boaventura de Souza Santos argues, these perversions of the idea can happen through new forms of “clientelism”: bureaucratisation, party instru-

mentalisation, or through silence and the manipulation of participatory spaces and institutions.

We need to promote a strong conception of participatory democracy that is able to open public spaces, to strengthen voices and visions so far excluded (or in the process of being excluded), and to widen the possibilities for political struggle, developing what Hilary Wainwright calls “counter power” in her book *Reclaim the State*. In other words, the spaces and institutions of participatory democracy should be such as to have an educative and mobilising capacity. They should be based on a concept of positive citizenship (against the negative and passive kind assumed by our present political institutions). Active citizenship has duties, rights and, especially, a creative aspect by which it is capable of generating new spaces, new institutions and new rules. Francisco de Oliveira describes active citizenship as involving a “full autonomy – to know how to decide, to be able to decide and to be able to make decisions be complied to”.

A good test of genuinely participatory processes is whether or not participants experience a learning process, through which they develop as an individual in their social and community context, through discussion and reflection. What are the conditions for this? This is difficult to talk about. Personally, I believe that the first condition takes place at the individual level. Although I may be labeled as individualistic, I can not imagine any real change without a whole change within ourselves. But this change can only happen as a result of very varied and intense interaction and collaboration.

Secondly, I think that the principles of participatory democracy that I have mentioned cannot be restricted to the relationship between traditional institutions and citizens. They will only realise their full transformative potential if they are applied to every sphere of social life. I would prioritise the spheres of work and communication. Counter power and autonomy can only be supported through information, interaction and recognition, and the opinion moulded by the “neutral information” flows from today’s dominant media sources does not provide a basis for this.

Parties should be bombarded by movements

Luciana Castellina is “a survivor of the 20th century”, as she puts it – and of many historic political struggles within the Italian and more widely the European and international left. These include a 25 year experience as a parliamentarian. She is a founder of *Il Manifesto* and of at least one political party – after being expelled from the Italian Communist Party.

I would speak in defence of political parties, despite not belonging to or liking any existing political parties. Good movements became parties and good parties were born out of movements. Mao Tse-Tung said that parties should be bombarded by movements. Much of what he said was catastrophic, but he had a good formula when he said that we should ditch the old and regenerate every 10 years. It is unavoidable that when movements stabilise, they tend to acquire all the worst characteristics of the parties. I say “worst” because they can produce the worst forms of “leaderism” I have known, worse than that existing in political parties,

where at least there are some rules to control the leadership.

The importance of parties arises precisely because of the complexity, diversity and multiplicity that others have remarked upon. The people are not homogenous: it is therefore not enough just to speak about 'participation' without debating the kind of structures that will take account of all the differences of interest and culture. Without such structures you will simply have the lowest common denominator of combining different interests. In order, by contrast, to develop a form of mediation which brings everyone forward, there needs to be a way of developing a long-term strategy. Historically, this is where political parties came in. Movements were seen as being concerned with specific issues, whereas parties were seen as capable of developing a vision of the world, an interpretation of history and a long-term strategy.

Political parties have lost relevance because politics has lost ground. We talk a lot about the privatisation of public services, but what was really privatised is political decision-making. The power lies now in commercial agreements, not political institutions. What is democracy now, as a result of this process?

Go beyond the “we” of social movement activism

Mayo Fuster Morell is co-founder and co-ordinator of the Glocal Research Centre -Infoespai (www.infoespai.org) in Barcelona. She is involved in developing Euromovements (www.euromovements.info) – a multi-faceted guide to social transformation in Europe, and is working on a PhD on knowledge and social movements at the European University Institute in Florence, Italy.

We need to rethink politics in a way that ensures that the “we” of social movements goes beyond activism and the organisational forms which are now seen as political. Aren't file sharing, open-editing (as in wikipedia), or squatting by non-squatters part of a wave of new politics? The participants are not generally part of political networks, but they share some principles with those of us searching for a new politics. We must create a form of politics which includes them.

Don't take gender equality for granted

We must not assume that gender equality is something already won. In anti-global organisations (for example, in my experience, the Moviments de Resistència Global of Catalunya; campaigns against the World Bank; etc), gender equality was taken for granted and this was a great error. Instead, we need to behave and organise in ways that pre-figure the gender equality that we want to see in a future society. We must especially develop a deeper awareness of the consequences of gender inequality on men and homosexuals.

Gender inequality is about everything

Carolyn Leckie is a Member of the Scottish Parliament for the Scottish Socialist Party (www.scottishsocialistparty.info).

We have learnt that it is important to apply feminist analysis and consciousness-raising to the dynamic of your own organisation as well as society at large. Gender inequality is not just about economic inferiority and institutional inequality; it is about everything. Sexism and misogyny can exist in organisations whose members unanimously support formal equality. But is it a priority for today or tomorrow? In a radical organisation, failing to give it a priority may just be a symptom of underlying sexism, but faced with a challenge or a crisis it can come to the surface and be a fundamental source of weakness. Don't be complacent.

In particular, avoid mirroring the patriarchal structures of society in your organisation. "Leaders" tend to be men. More democratic, collective decision-making by flatter, grassroots structures and a zero tolerance approach to chest beating, dogmatic, long winded self styled "experts" (generally men) might help give women the time to think and contribute more than they often do at present. Such a supporting environment will contribute towards the creativity and effectiveness of the organisation more generally. I sincerely believe that if the left doesn't constantly strive to achieve this then, wherever they succeed in gaining power, they will inevitably replicate unequal, undemocratic unequal power systems. You can't wait for the revolution to change attitudes. It is a process that needs to be constant if a new democracy is to have the best chance.

In the SSP, we have a policy of a worker's wage for parliamentarians – a wage based on the average wage. But it has not proved sufficient as a way of keeping parliamentarians accountable. Certain personalities (most likely male) are not checked by fiscal accountability on its own. Time limits for elected representatives, subservience of a parliamentary group to a thriving grassroots party, open transparent decision-making by an empowered membership: all of these are ideals. But this list is not exhaustive, and it does not deal with all of the contradictions of our situation.

Challenges

The participants in the Networked Politics process were each asked to indicate two challenges that they hoped our collective efforts to rethink political organisation would address. These were used to stake out the terrain that the debates in our Barcelona seminar, in particular, would need to cover. It quickly became clear that several themes and questions recurred and overlapped in a striking way.

First, there was a shared sense of urgency. In some cases this came from a generalised sense of foreboding - especially regarding the US and its junior partners in Europe. Brian Holmes, just back from the US, concluded that “the strongest challenge right now is how to communicate a sense of urgency, a sense of pending dystopia to people whose basic narcissism and basic vital energy seems to be completely caught up in their professional activity”. Frieder Otto Wolf presented the most difficult challenge as “how to re-anchor the daunting issues of the global crisis to our own practices, identifying our own kinds of complicity and from this inventing effective ways of resisting and taking alternative initiatives”.

In many cases, the sense of urgency concerns a situation where left parties are in government. Several participants in the Networked Politics process are active in Brazil, where the second round of the presidential elections was taking place as we gathered in Barcelona, and where the left and social movements have been engaged in heated debates over how to rebuild themselves in the context of Lula’s second term. Moema Miranda from Rio de Janeiro, a leading activist in the development of the World Social Forum, stresses the importance of working with poor people: “the definition is hard – the excluded, the voiceless – but the point is clear: the left, certainly in Brazil, has lost many of its linkages with the daily life, sorrows, concerns and desires of the largest part of the population, the millions that live near the poverty line (not to mention those below it). Over the past decade or so, we have lost a wonderful tradition of political activity rooted in these experiences. It was built here through the popular education movement, liberation theology groups and the base of the PT (Brazilian Workers’ Party). Today, to take the WSF as an example, 80 per cent of participants have university degrees. We must learn from movements like the MST (Landless Workers’ Movement) and indigenous initiatives in many parts of Latin America, and not just talk about but work with the poor.”

Movement independence from governments and markets

In Italy too, social movement activists are facing the sweet and

sour – and getting increasingly sour – experience of a left party being part of the government, with Rifondazione Comunista being part of Prodi's Unione coalition. Alessandra Mecozzi of the Italian Metal Workers Union, and a leading activist in the Italian peace movement, spoke at the Manchester workshop at the time that Italian troops were going to Lebanon about the pressing challenge of “how to maintain the identity of the movement: in particular, how to develop the capacity to follow an independent strategy and develop its own perspectives. This is an urgent issue now in relation to questions of peace and war”. She described the problem as “how to strengthen our critical analysis of the drive towards a militarisation of government politics. This would also make our action more strategic. In this way we would support the more radical forces inside the Government, which are currently in a weak position. For example, sending a force to Lebanon was necessary to stop the massacre of civilians – and was therefore a quite different mission from Iraq or Afghanistan – but at the same time, it is exposed to the risk of becoming another part of the global “war on terror”. The challenge for the peace movement is whether and how it is possible to prevent conflicts and to demilitarise the politics. The peace movement should function as an independent actor, defining its position in relation to the groups, workplaces and citizens, who are their “constituency”, rather than in relation simply to whether it supports or opposes the Government. The need for independence – a condition for the survival of movements - is vital in the field of peace and war, and in spheres of social policy”.

Melissa Pomeroy, who has been involved in several of the experiments in participatory budgeting initiated by the Brazilian Workers Party, also addressed the question of what strategy movements should adopt when a party that came from the left is in government - in the case of the PT, actually leading the government. Like Alessandra, she stressed “the importance, and difficulties, of the movements constructing and confidently promoting an independent and self-confident agenda and timetable of their own”.

Independence was also an important issue for Branka Curcic, an editor with the New Media Centre in Novi Sad, Serbia. She described the situation after the closed experience of state socialism and the illusion of self-management. “What is this autonomy?” we asked each other, “when do we live freely and autonomously?” Autonomy from the rampant market and global capitalism became increasingly important but also illusive. “After the experience of self-management and people's uncritical attitude towards the conditions of their work, we believe we must be very careful about how we create our own autonomous spaces for action”. For her, a key challenge concerns “how to avoid the dangers of making ourselves precarious, and of our innovations and practice being absorbed by neo-liberalism?” In her view, addressing this should involve “extracting the positive aspects of the period of self-management in the former Yugoslavia, and escaping the usual conformist position that revolutionary transformation is daydreaming”.

Franco Berardi (Bifo) from Bologna, who has been involved in numerous projects on the theory and practice of communication ranging from Radio Alice, the first free radio station in Italy, to Telestreet, a network of over 150 pirate TV stations across Italy, made a more general point about the

importance of autonomy: “the main factor of change has always been the autonomy or irreducibility of daily life (desire, imagination, expectations) to the capitalist organisation of labour. This autonomy has always been the source of rebellion, solidarity and political rebellion”. He argued that today, the capitalist fabrication of desire, imagination and expectations, and the constrained and imposed process whereby people build their identities, is drying the very autonomy of daily life, and paralysing the ability of self-creation.

The sense of urgency infusing our explorations illustrated the usefulness of making similar opportunities for reflection – and the tools to facilitate it – a consistent part of the life of any would-be transformative organisation. Many people made this point, regarding it as a necessary condition for rethinking political organisation. “How do we organise in a way which acknowledges the incompleteness of our knowledge about the consequences of our action and, therefore, the fact that we are always working with uncertainty?” asked Hilary Wainwright. “How do we build self-reflection and experimentation into our methods, at the same time as taking the decisive and concerted action that is often necessary?”

Enlarging our self-understanding

Another common theme was the need to reach out at the same as experimenting and regenerating – indeed, to make “breaking out of restricted and self-referential mentalities (with their related pretension of control)”, as Marco Berlinguer put it, an integral part of our rethinking. Echoing and expanding on the challenge from Moema Miranda, he continued: “This means enlarging the self-understanding of our movements, rooting their formation and growth in the tensions, conflicts, choices and alternatives of daily life, rather than reducing our sense of ourselves only to circuits, culture and organisations of political militancy”.

Bifo followed Marco’s challenge with a more specific one of his own: “how do we find a language to communicate with the first generation of humans who have learned more words from the machine than from the mother? This affects the relationship between language and emotion; it is also affecting the imagination, depriving it of autonomy and creativity. What are the problems of translation, of emotion, of finding ways of talking to what maybe we should call ‘the post-human humans’?” Mayo Fuster came at the enlargement of our nets from another angle. Her challenge was to develop a “curiosity – always a work in progress – about the key principles and logics for a new politics which will go beyond the boundaries of traditional politics”.

Christophe Aguiton, a French-based trade union and political organiser and activist, whose research focuses on information and communications technology issues and social movement organisation, reinforced the idea of an open, investigative dimension to rethinking political organisation. He insisted that something new is being invented in today’s struggles that we do not yet understand, yet which could be of huge importance. “I come from a country with a strong tradition of direct democracy. We have had general strikes and huge social movements in which people organised themselves in large assemblies and elected delegates, and many different committees to lead the movement. 1968 was

a classic example". But the movements that we see today appear to be organised on quite different principles, he argued, giving the example of the successful spring 2006 mobilisation against the First Employment Contract (CPE), an oppressive youth employment law. He explains: "In the past, the movements organised in a direct way and really involved people, but they organised through a sort of pyramid of elected officers. Now the movements organise on a horizontal basis, without a pyramid, without the classic delegation, through methods of co-ordination of autonomous initiatives. We are seeing the emergence of huge networks of very heterogeneous bodies." We have to understand the novelty and distinctiveness of what is going on, Christophe concluded.

New methods, new tensions

These new ways of organising bring with them various tensions that need to be addressed. For Dominique Cardon, who is researching both the use of new technology and also social movements in France, the question of individualism poses an important challenge: "We talk about networks, but we should refer to the individualisation of involvement. We hold back from saying this because we know that individualism is linked to the sphere of consumption. But the fact is that political involvement is more and more individualistic. It's a challenge to reflect on why people are not engaged in parties but associate as consumers. We can see them as militantly peer-to-peer or something like that".

Christophe Aguiton wanted to explore "how consensus-making in networking is really working; how relations of power are at work. These consensus methods are very efficient sometimes, e.g. in organising the huge global anti-war demonstrations in 2003, but we need to look at how they worked". Several people raised challenges that stem from the movement's strength: its diversity, multiplicity and heterogeneity. Alex Foti, based in Milan and, among many things, an organiser of the Euromayday (www.euromayday.org) network against precarity, described a frustrating side of this: "We've seen that multitudes online can reach decisions. But the consensus approach has prevented us from taking strategic decisions. In order to make sure heterogeneity is respected, that everyone agrees, we missed out a lot of opportunities. Indeed our biggest failure is that our objectives, in my case against precarisation, have retreated back to the national level. Our challenge is really to create major battles, with achievable and significant aims, at a European level. But how can this level of coherence be achieved while maintaining the multiplicity and diversity which has proved in itself, in some circumstances, to be a source of the movements' efficacy – for example, in achieving unprecedented levels and depths of mobilisation?"

Institutions?

The sense of being in the midst of an uncertain institutional transition was common to many people's challenges. Marco Berlinguer suggested the principle of 'de-institutionalisation', and his challenged focused on the opposite side of this: "how do we conceive, develop, and affirm new

kinds of institutions? If old institutions are dying, some kind of institution still remains a fundamental necessity in any community. The building of new institutions is one of the most difficult challenges that the movement is facing". Ezequiel Adamovsky spelled this out further: "We have rightly rejected the parties and the other institutions of the traditional left; we know that elections and parliamentary politics can be a very limited and dangerous path; we know that social movements need to be at the forefront of political strategy; we know that diversity and multiplicity are values we want to protect against centralisation; we know we need to develop more horizontal and less hierarchical structures. But we still have no clue how to organise ourselves in a new, different way. We have all toyed with the metaphor of the network, and with the ideas of direct democracy, participatory politics, assemblies, autonomy, and so on, but we still haven't come out with concrete tools to bring together the dispersed anti-capitalist struggles in an effective way".

One particular theme of our inquiry surfaced on several occasions: the search for non-hierarchical and transparent forms of mediation. Many people presented their challenges, like Ezequiel, in terms of what the conditions and forms of a new kind of connectedness are. Branka posed such a challenge in terms of language:

"What would be the new language that could articulate (in a positive sense) those initiatives that are dispersed worldwide but based on shared principles of thoughtful involvement and dedication, complexity, essential discussion, participation and ethics? Without falling into the danger of uncritical convergence of disconnected initiatives, what kind of language can express and help realise a 'shared horizon' or common interest (if there is only one)?"

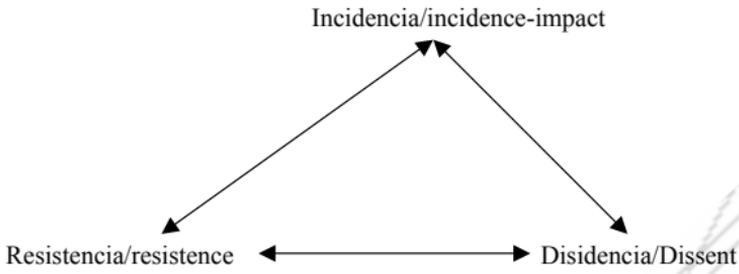
Mayo Fuster focused on a particularly growing communication challenge: "how do we develop a synthetic language of communication which can overcome the problem of excesses of information (visualisation techniques, for example)? This could help the processes of mediation that make possible wide participation".

Several people, including Ricard Gomà from Barcelona and Gemma Galdon Clavell, also from Barcelona but now working with the New Politics programme of the Transnational Institute in Amsterdam, stressed the importance of public spaces as a resource for the development of new institutions. Ricard stressed the destruction of these spaces in recent years and the need for the left to reclaim them – something which will not be done by governments. Gemma stressed the challenge of making public spaces political spaces: "What are public spaces in political terms?" she asked.

One of the institutions addressed was leadership. Sometimes, reliance on an individual to symbolise a cause or a vision is an unintended substitute for developing transparent democratic institutions through which members have real power and the cultural self-confidence to use that power. Hilary posed the challenge of how to deal with the problem of leadership: "Allowing individuals to symbolise a cause has had many destructive consequences – think of Lula, Tony Blair or, now, Tommy Sheridan in Scotland. The symbol ends up devouring the organisation. Do we need individual leaders as distinct from transparent, demo-

cratically agreed rules through which many people take responsibility?”

How is our thinking – or lack of it – about new institutions influenced by our attitude and relationship to existing institutions? Here Joan Subirats posed a challenge: “I can see a danger in the fact that a lot of social movements see institutions as something very weird and separate from their life. They have decided that the institutions are not important to them. I try and explain my view with a triangle.



The three corners are: resistance, dissent but also influence. The triangle illustrates the tension between being against the dominating power and against the political institutions while at the same time being able to construct new alternatives; it concerns influencing and connecting with institutions in a conflictive way, including by being present in the life of the formal political institutions”.

Identity, culture, knowledge

Rethinking political organisation is not just a matter of communication, institutions and rules, it also involves questions of identity, argued Geraldo Campos. He learnt from an intense experience in Sao Paulo of participatory budgeting, which has led him to stress the importance of a tension between dynamics, as he puts it, of ‘belonging’ and ‘becoming’: “In an age of networks and fluid movements where flows are permanently crossing each other, more and more people are in contact, and communities are super-imposed on each other, the identity issue can be a problem. The challenge is to think of ways of addressing this that do not consolidate the fixed identities and stereotyping imposed by capitalism. We need to go beyond ‘identity politics’”. He drew on his experience of building participation amongst traditionally excluded groups – women, blacks, youth, indigenous people, homeless, disabled, elderly GLBT and children – to show the potential of mixing participatory mechanisms and the discussion of identities. The process of sharing a space whose rules they defined together showed them that, as well as their singularities, they shared something. “The result was a sense of opening of the identities we had before the experience”, reported Geraldo.

This state of open and fluid identities is potentially a source of strength and, therefore, one basis for an answer to the difficult challenge posed by Alex Foti: “when the anti-globalisation movement was born, it was cool to be multi-identity. But in a world with global war of Bush’s Christian right and Anglo-American Israeli Occidentalism versus fundamentalist Islam; a world where there are many strong identities, a strong Shia identity, a strong occidentalist identity, a strong Indian identity in Latin America, we are weak, we do not have a strong sense of identification”.

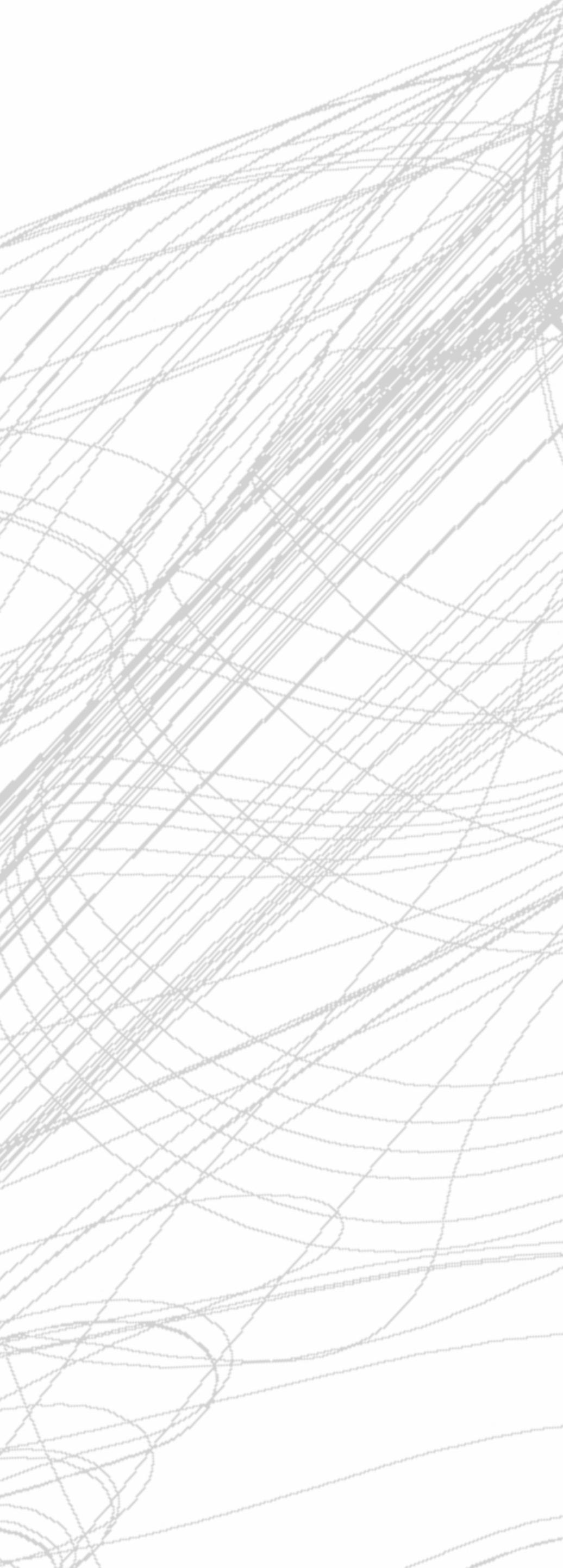
Moema Miranda also provides insights for an answer to Alex, as well as posing further challenges: “We cannot face the challenges of today if we reduce our understanding of anti-capitalist struggles and of politics to just the rationalistic dimensions of our movements. For example, here in Brazil, Liberation Theology and the Ecclesial Grassroots Communities were essential in the struggle against dictatorship and in creating the basis for the PT. Today, we can only oppose fundamentalism effectively if we engage with spiritualities and forms of art and liberation cultures, with their capacity to relate to the majority of our populations. These dimension of spirituality and of the arts were badly interpreted in the formulations of classical left. So there is a great challenge to open up the scope of who we talk to”.

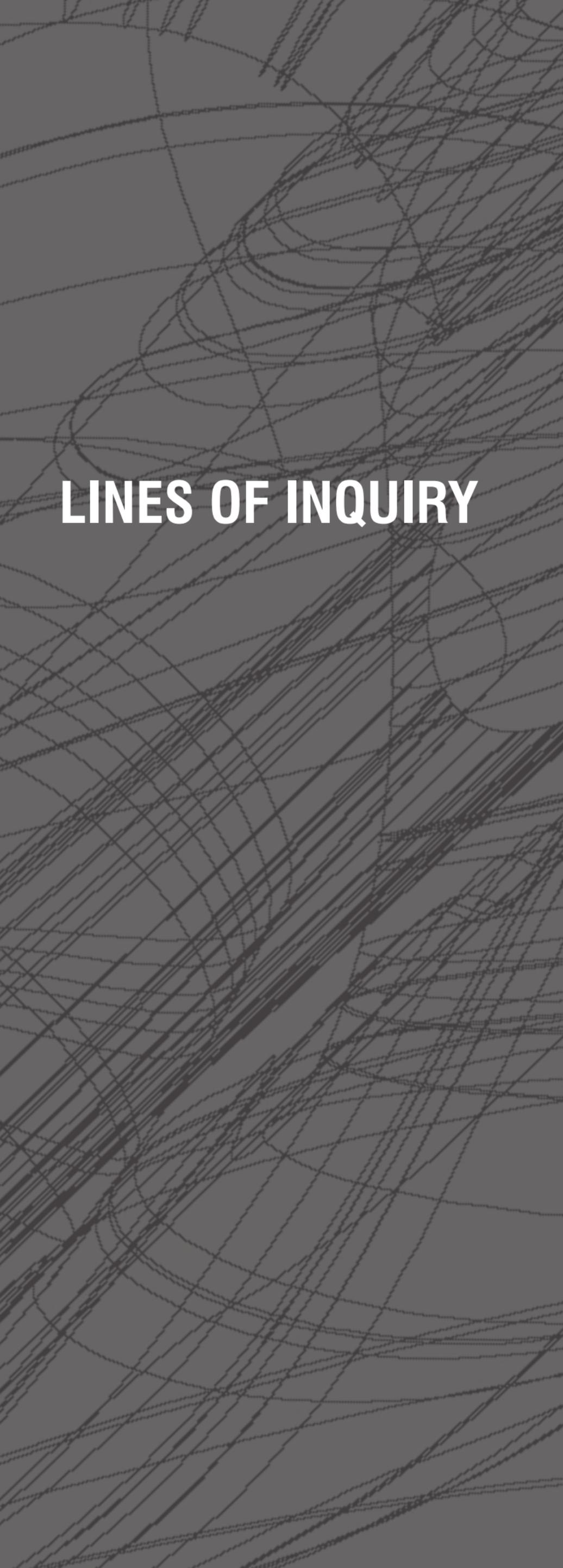
She adds to this the connected challenge of overcoming Eurocentric ways of articulating concepts and values. As she puts it: “globalisation can hide differences between us. Differences may be the source of a rich diversity, but to realise this richness requires a renewed effort to establish an intense dialogue with the Other, the really diverse. Boaventura Dos Santos has been talking about the importance of ‘intercultural translation’ as a condition for this mutual understanding. Whatever we call it, this is a challenge for the dialogues of the innovative, radical left and for linking movements and alternatives across North and South.

Another challenge from Ezequiel Adamovsky reinforces this sense of the limits of the culture of the left: “We need to reinvent left culture. We are actually in the process of doing it, but there’s still a long way to go. By culture I mean values, language and structures of feeling, not just ideas. The culture of the traditional left tends to be very militaristic, a ‘macho’ culture; we need to reinvent our culture as one of openness, co-operation and creativity”.

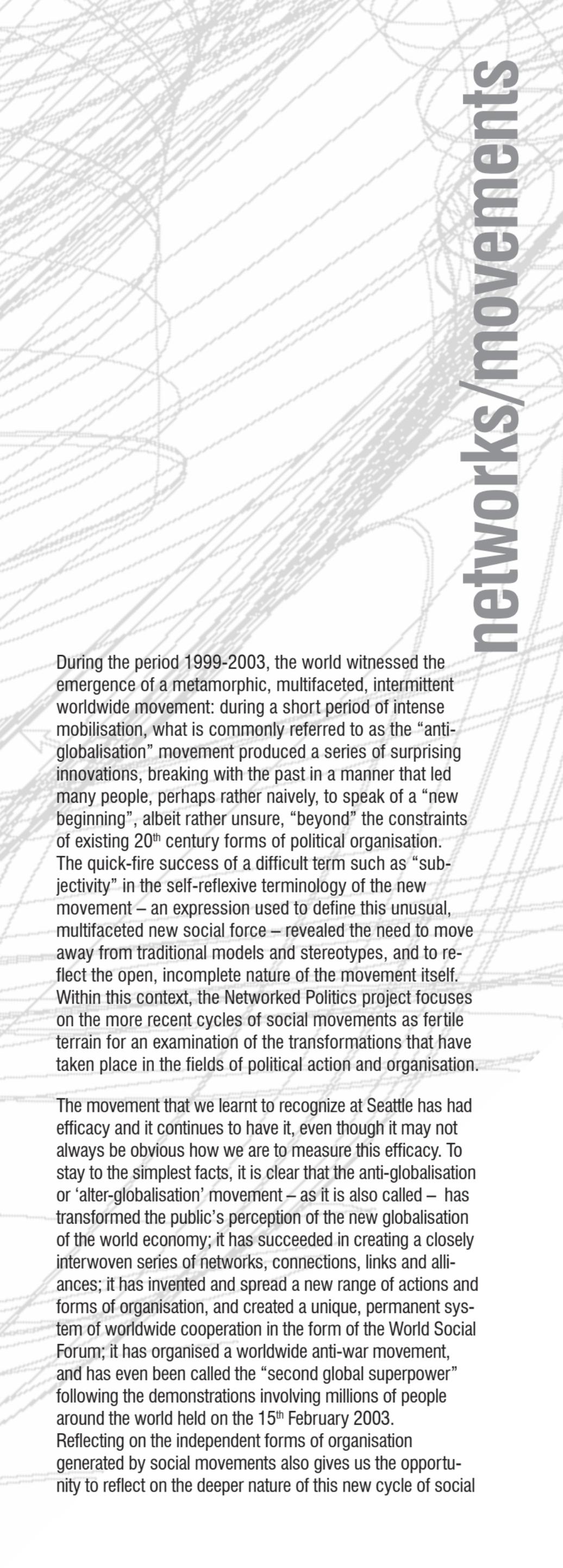
This brings us to the question of how we understand knowledge, and the importance for rethinking political organisation of valuing the knowledge produced in the process of transformation and struggle. It might seem overly rationalistic to treat culture as a cue to a discussion of knowledge. But a challenge posed by several people concerned the importance of recognising the validity of different kinds of knowledge, which includes knowledge of different levels of reality, and knowledge arrived at from various angles. For Mayo Fuster, a vital challenge is to “develop the means to systematise the knowledge produced in the process of transformation, to make it accessible, to protect it from use and saturation by capitalist interests”.

“What do we mean by knowledge?” asked Joan Subirats. “Old knowledge, new knowledge, science, social construction of science. It is very important to be able to connect traditional with new ways of thinking and not to lose the strength of translation between traditions, between languages, between experiences. That for me is one of the most important challenges”. It is also we hope, one of the aims of the Networked Politics process.





LINES OF INQUIRY



networks/movements

During the period 1999-2003, the world witnessed the emergence of a metamorphic, multifaceted, intermittent worldwide movement: during a short period of intense mobilisation, what is commonly referred to as the “anti-globalisation” movement produced a series of surprising innovations, breaking with the past in a manner that led many people, perhaps rather naively, to speak of a “new beginning”, albeit rather unsure, “beyond” the constraints of existing 20th century forms of political organisation. The quick-fire success of a difficult term such as “subjectivity” in the self-reflexive terminology of the new movement – an expression used to define this unusual, multifaceted new social force – revealed the need to move away from traditional models and stereotypes, and to reflect the open, incomplete nature of the movement itself. Within this context, the Networked Politics project focuses on the more recent cycles of social movements as fertile terrain for an examination of the transformations that have taken place in the fields of political action and organisation.

The movement that we learnt to recognize at Seattle has had efficacy and it continues to have it, even though it may not always be obvious how we are to measure this efficacy. To stay to the simplest facts, it is clear that the anti-globalisation or ‘alter-globalisation’ movement – as it is also called – has transformed the public’s perception of the new globalisation of the world economy; it has succeeded in creating a closely interwoven series of networks, connections, links and alliances; it has invented and spread a new range of actions and forms of organisation, and created a unique, permanent system of worldwide cooperation in the form of the World Social Forum; it has organised a worldwide anti-war movement, and has even been called the “second global superpower” following the demonstrations involving millions of people around the world held on the 15th February 2003. Reflecting on the independent forms of organisation generated by social movements also gives us the opportunity to reflect on the deeper nature of this new cycle of social

movements. A question that has never been answered, and which appeared even more pertinent after the 2003 events, is that of how to interpret change when its borders and effects are increasingly blurred by its “re-immersion” in the social body. Are we to see this change as a form either of dispersal or of spreading, either of ebb or of metamorphosis ?

The aforesaid “wave” of social movements has been characterised by a number of surprising features, first and foremost that of the ability to welcome diversity and transform it into a force capable of generating a new inclusive, expansive form of identity. Another important feature of the social movements has been their exalting of the ideal of the “openness” of organisational forms, as was previously promoted by the free software movement (this organisational principle is currently feeding a series of important experiments in the digital network community, which lie well beyond the confines not only of political militancy but also of the state and the capitalist market). Moreover, it imposed a mass training to the use, both practical and metaphorical (and, at times, rhetorical) of the networks; to the emergence of a dispersed, multicentric, always open to negotiation, concept of power; to temporary convergent actions, for specific purposes; to organisational “galaxies” and to multifaceted, “ecological”, living forms of rationality.

“They resemble events. The networks are dense social structures on the point of collapse, and it is doubtful whether any sustainable models capable of freezing them actually exist” .

The innovations have not been completely linear of course: the “anti-globalisation” movement has been fed by a variety of different sources, some of which are clearly rooted in the (recent and not so recent) past. The movement has always maintained a complex relationship with pre-existing organisations (political parties, trade unions, NGOs and governmental institutions, to name but a few). Its organisational complexity, while successful in creating an interwoven pattern of networks, designed to guarantee communication between a series of very different realities, is also clearly resistant to any form of unification,

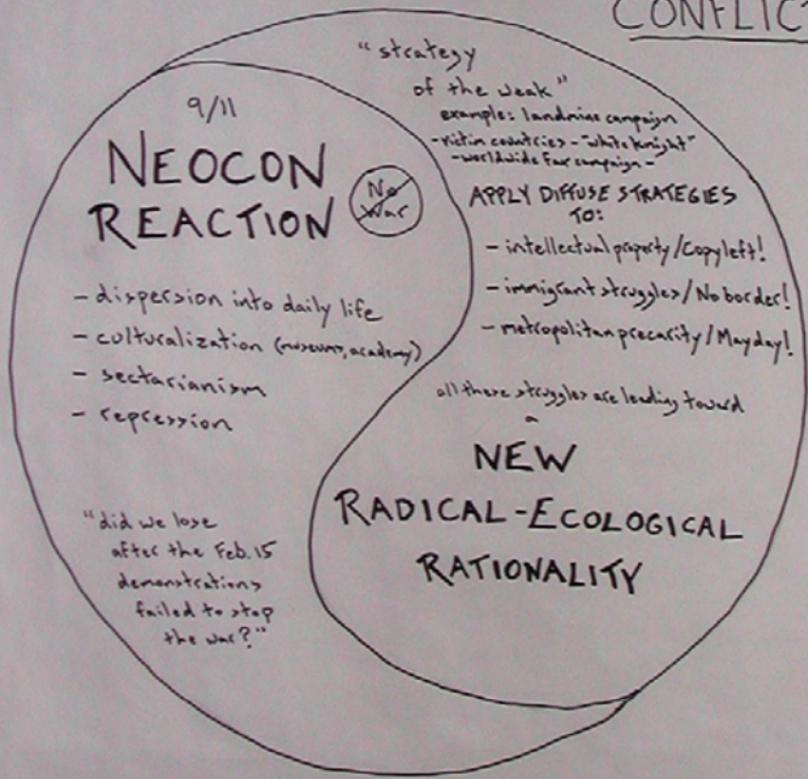
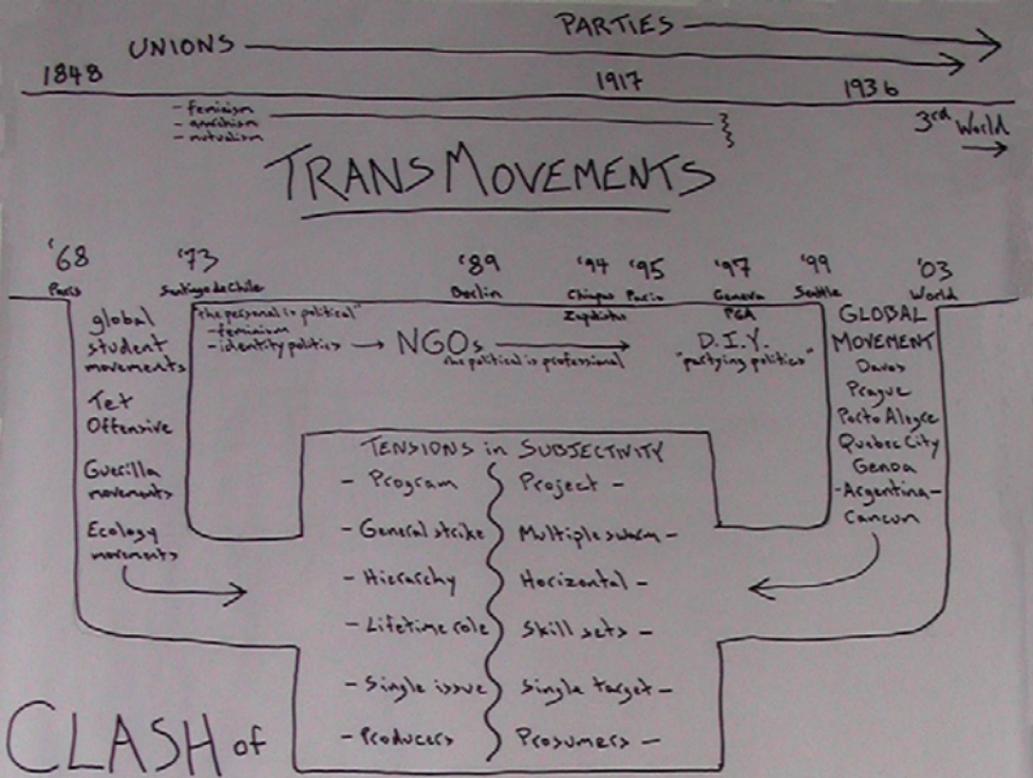
“The most open system theoretically imaginable perfectly reflects the foreseeable inequalities of the world within which that same system lies” (Rodrigo Nunes).

and as such restricts the degree to which the said realities cohabit and cooperate. The resulting construct is a highly uncertain, unstable “we”, one that is exposed to the risk of having to define its own boundaries – thus excluding and smothering diversity and creativity – or to the risk of being a simple receptacle for a multifaceted reality bordering on indistinctness, where the loose, fragmented, rather unstable structures present in real life are simply reproduced in other shapes and forms. The risk is one of excessive information with no real communication; a multiplicity of relations with no real commitment. While, a new series of asymmetries, inequalities, forms of exclusion and foci of power have emerged in the same movements dynamics, hidden in the informality of an opaque framework, that lacks clear rules.

There is now a real need within this multiplicity of movements for an exploration of the new aspects and contradictions of these emergent organisational forms. One cycle has come to an end, and in the rather confusing current impasse, the risk is that of being reabsorbed into spent political forms filling what otherwise appears a void, or of remaining a marginal, non-influential presence within the political arena.

The present study is designed as part of a wider analysis of the limits of networked politics, and as such hopes to constitute a genuine contribution towards future attempts to overcome the said limits.

Marco Berlinguer



"OPEN SOURCE for the OPERATING SYSTEMS of PLANET EARTH!"

http://www.euromovements.info/yearbook/index.php/Movements_subgroup_report

The "map" represents the report of a working group on "social movements" within the framework of a seminar organised by the Networked Politics Project (Barcelona, October 2006). Alex Foti, Brian Holmes, Christophe Aguiton, Gemma Galdon Clavell, Lluç Pelàez and Marco Berlinguer contributed to the work of the group. In the final report, Brian Holmes has attempted to provide an account of the brief, albeit intense, brainstorming session lasted two hours.

The chronological history is somewhat fragmentary, becoming more intense from the 1960s onwards, but nevertheless reflects the need to elaborate and even to selectively re-appropriate the past. The two-columned diagram attempts to represent those opposing elements that characterise the present-day and the former subjectivity. The chronological reconstruction of a brief history of the social movements, designed to enable an interpretation of the "anti-globalisation" movement, revealed a common awareness about a cut between 1999 and 2003, together with more uncertainty regarding what happened thereafter.

The Tao symbol succinctly encapsulates present-day ambivalences: from one side, the conservative stiffening, the dark "after 11 September", the arising fundamentalisms promoting the "clash of civilizations"; from the other one, a global class conflict, that seems to follow a "strategy of the weak", asymmetrical, micro-political and to tend toward a new living, manifold, open idea of society and rationality. The concept of the "open-source for the operating system for the planet" attempts to propose an horizon, vision and catalyst, even of institutional type (see discussion of open source operating systems as a metaphor for new institutions that ended the seminar of Barcelona).

New principles in practice

The movement in France in 2006 of young people fighting a casualising employment law provides an exemplary illustration of how democracy is being re-appropriated through practices of self-organisation, where people are being linked horizontally through co-ordination rather than vertically through traditional modes of representation. Sophie Gosselin analyses the process based on a longer input she gave to a network politics seminar held at the European Social Forum in Athens in 2006.

In March 2006, a new wave of social protest rushed across France giving new generations the experience of politics, self-organisation, collective decision-making, conflicts of interest, power relationships, purposeful use of information and language – in short, what is called “democracy”. It began when a group of undergraduates, secondary school students, unemployed people and activists called a general assembly at the University of Nantes. They voted to occupy the university, stopping classes while they organised a protest against the proposed CPE (Le Contrat Première Embauche – law on first employment)¹. They posted blogs on the Internet and spread the word through Indymedia sites and e-mail contacts.

This insurrection was totally spontaneous. It took political activists by surprise and unfolded regardless of us. At the same time, France was also rocked by the Clearstream affair - a forged document purporting to show secret bank accounts held by the French political elite in a Luxembourg finance company, Clearstream. These two events followed the revolts of suburban youngsters in November 2005. Taken together, all the eruptions constituted a major crisis in the French republican system. They also shaped the contradictions of the protest movement as it struggled with issues of representation and new forms of organisation.

On the one hand, in the media, we could see trade unions negotiating or discussing with the government, whereas on the other, there was the battlefield of the general assemblies and the blockaded universities. Here, other alliances were formed, most importantly between youngsters and the ‘precarious’ (the unemployed and part-time workers). This hiatus between “representative” organisations and informal groups highlighted the tension which currently drives social struggles, the tension between traditional structures, which stem from the struggles of the 19th century, and the emerging social forms based on network practices.

This is a crisis of representation. Who represents the “people” of a democratic state, how is that representation arrived at? In the general assemblies in the universities, the formal unions of students and of wage earners were sharply criticized and rejected. Thus, it was laid down as a rule that those who spoke in a general assembly should say from the start if they belonged to a trade union or a political party. Who spoke and from what standpoint s/he spoke, became the increasingly momentous question.

If trust is the foundation of and legitimation for authority, then trade unions have lost much of their authority and legitimacy. Their strength is based only on the institutional workings of the system itself, which has recognised and integrated them, the better to neutralise their anti-establishment potential. This loss of trust was caused by the practice of trade unions fulfilling their role of representatives, but actually having answers confined to their role as trade unions. Students and the 'precarious' waited desperately for unions to fulfil their promise of a call for a renewable strike. The call has never been issued.

The media all hunted for the head they could set up as the "leader" of the movement, denying the multiple forms of action. They focused on spectacles, presented a pseudo-debate around the red herring of the pros and cons of the blockade. Meanwhile, blogs and websites were created to diffuse other representations and analyses of what was going on, a virtual conflict. These non-specialists used the media not only as a way to convey information, but also as vectors of collective consciousness and as a means of self-organisation. A process of convergence has started between the traditional social movements and the political activism linked to the process of re-appropriating the media. This is transforming the practices of the struggle.

Some students from the University of Nantes created a union called Sud étudiants (South students). Interestingly, it does not pretend to be the students' representative. It functions in parallel to the student movement and intervenes to inject necessary elements (techniques, finance...) for the self-organisation of the student movement. But above all, it works as an organ for the transmission of self-organisation practices and as the disseminator of these practices inside the movement. Sud Etudiant of Nantes works with an informal network of individuals rather than with a hierarchy whose frontiers of belonging or not belonging would be strictly established. There have been several possible levels of belonging to Sud Etudiant, from being the totally committed activist, bringing the union alive and giving it legitimacy through practical experience, to somebody who is committed through affinity, neither completely inside nor completely outside, who is very motivated for one action and less for another. Those who "lead" this union are not those who have a privileged position by reason of their representative status, but those who bring it alive by their activity. Support came not for its ideology but for its practice: from what they did and how. And it's this practice, by an effect of "infectious" affinity, which will attract new people.

One of the conclusions, which emerged from my interview² with these students, is that the movement was centred on the re-appropriation of democratic space by the new generations. How has this re-appropriation of democratic space manifested itself in practice? First, it has manifested in the general assemblies of each university and through their national and regional co-ordination. This means that the political organisation of the struggle has been done outside the local associations in the networks, which weave together the levels of co-ordination. Any student appointed by a general assembly could participate in the co-ordination meetings. But above all, the dynamic of self-organisation stretched beyond the multiple micro-

blockades at the universities to blockades of stations, roads, shops, airports, etc³. The inactivity of the trade unions and the paralysis of the working world triggered off a process of “flying blockades”: in place of a general strike by workers in production, resistance was moved to a blockade of the flow of transport.

The double struggle, of resistance in the world of work and of appropriation of images and information via the Internet, corresponds to a transfer in the forms of power distribution and operation. This connects technology and power in a new way, condensed in the idea of network as a means for organisation and a technological device. This raises the question of the form of “political power” we give to technologies? To quote Michel Foucault, we can think of the power as technology (that is to say, as social struggles fixed in procedures and techniques of domination) and, conversely, technology as a social struggle fixed in a material structure. A technical tool is only one of the elements in a network of a technology of power. This implies that the functioning of some procedures or techniques propels the user into a network of determined social struggle.

Inside the traditional social movement against the CPE, we were able to see the emergence of new political practices as regards resistance and representation. The crisis of representation is related to the obsolescence of the traditional model of political organisation, which supposes a homogeneous body (the nation, the people, the workers, etc.) creating its own image, delegating its power to some representative authority. On the contrary, what has been shown recently is a fragmented and multiple representation, tied to the practices of self-organisation, with links between autonomous cells coming from co-ordination and not representation. This re-appropriation of democracy has occurred through a re-arrangement of the relation between collective consciousness and ways of organisation. Central to this re-arrangement is the space – the “agora” as the open space in the heart of Athens was known. We had multiple new spaces in which to speak where everybody is considered equal, spaces in perpetual transformation according to new bonds and networks into which the cells enter. As a movement against the CPE, this process of democratic space re-organisation was underground and, to some extent, latent since it didn’t have time to develop and to express itself as such. But today, this alternative continues to be invented by the new paths opened up by this eruption.

Sophie Gosselin

Notes

¹ To know more details about the events chronology:

http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mouvement_anti-CPE

² The interviews are available online at:

http://www.nomadfkt.org/ressources/doku.php?id=politiques_alternatives_libertaires:l_engagement&s=cpe

³ Some unexpected relations were weaved between the students in fight and the movements of squatters or punks.

state/public institutions

Institutional crisis and transformation

In the institutional sphere we have diverse and serious problems. There is a clear disproportion between the ability and formal powers of institutions, and their real capacity to transform and change at a time when the economy and the market have managed to “escape” political-institutional control, maintaining and even increasing their ability to blackmail and condition public action. In this sense, the obsolescence of the political foundations of the nation-state (which linked power to territory, population and sovereignty) is highlighted, at a time when the three elements mentioned present very different profiles to their traditional ones. The contradiction of political legitimacy based on a popular plebiscite every x years is also highlighted when the political dynamic and the actions of the media submit institutional actions to daily referenda. The institutions insist that the only means of democratic political action is representative democracy, while there are evermore people that are separated from this representative politics through legal inability (immigrants), by indifference, by verifying that it changes nothing in their lives. This very political weakening leads institutions to take refuge in legality, increasingly confusing legitimacy and legality. In this context, institutions tend to a biased utilisation (unidirectional, hierarchical and controlling) of technology in order to maintain their hegemony in a drift that is increasingly authoritarian and autistic.

How can institutional transformation be tackled? It is not about improving what already exists. That cannot be the objective, although the reforms may be instrumentally necessary. Today, the main objectives are the improvement of the institutional system that sustains representative democracy: the electoral system, laws of political parties, centralisation, the role of parliament etc. On the other

hand, a policy of transparency and good government in such areas as access to information, management of government assistance, the ethics of administrative actions, the behaviour of the top ranks etc is spoken about and publicised. While at operative level, the source of inspiration for changes to public administration is sought in the “New Public Management” from ideas inspired in the way non-public organisations function.

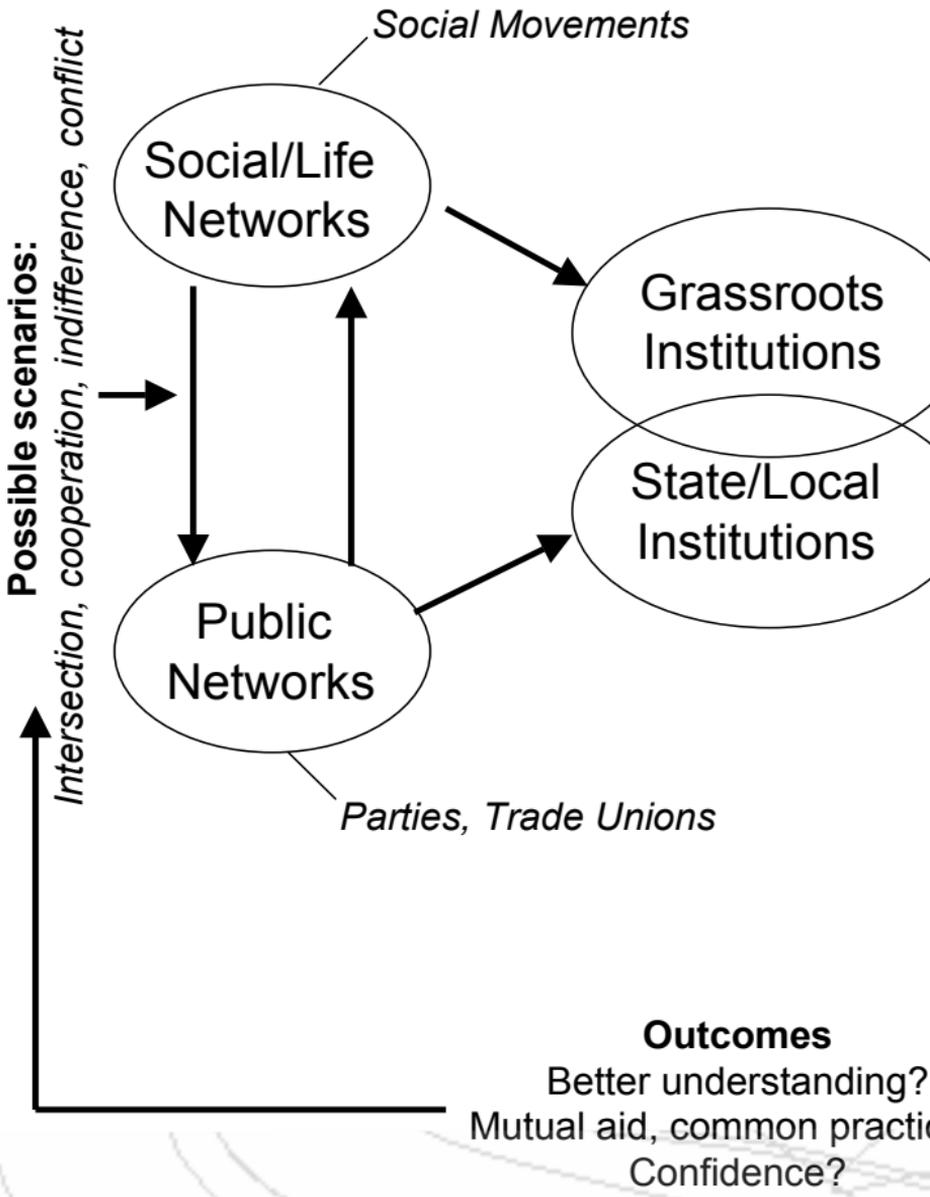
Institutions and administrations should be something else. They should be an essential part of implementing policy in a non-exclusive and non-hierarchical manner. Their work cannot be “monopolistic”. Without popular leadership there will be no transformation “from above”. The legitimacy of institutions and administrations lies in their capacity to respond to popular needs and expectations, without that meaning dependency, clientilism or submission. This means that in today’s complex society, our institutions and administrations should be capable of affecting the transformation of our societies, incorporating the diversity and transformative capacity of people and collectives. Inclusion and creativity should therefore be two central factors. How should they work? The responses of New Public Management are of no use to us. We suggest certain working approaches. We must advance towards a deliberative administration in which dialogue substitutes for specialisation. This could become concrete by making transversality effective, breaking the myths of specialisation and segmentation, as well as by incorporating new management concepts such as trust and collaboration. Operationally, this creates the need to formulate mechanisms of citizen participation and new forms of intergovernmental relations. To do this, we believe it is necessary to generate belief in another administration being possible (salvaging the value of the public and the prestige of its institutions) and having new reference points in relation to time (more patience), sentiment (more affection) and collaboration (less competitiveness).

Joan Subirats and Quim Brugué

“Today, political leaders throughout Europe are facing a real paradox. On the one hand, Europeans want them to find solutions to the major problems confronting our societies. On the other hand, people increasingly distrust institutions and politics or are simply not interested in them”

White Paper on European Governance, EU Commission, Brussels, 2001, p.1

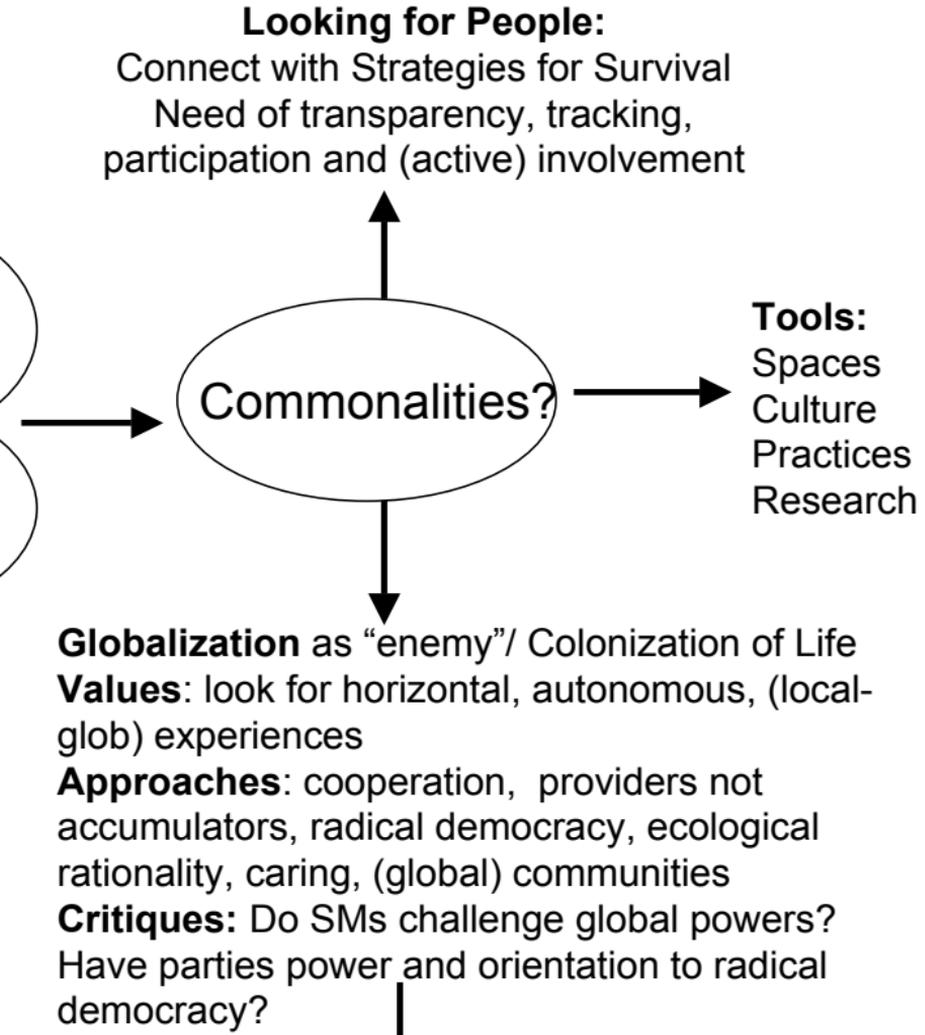
How to build up new (social) institutions



Life networks (neighbourhoods, consumers, labour environments, people affected by some conflict, etc.) are the breeding ground for social networks that develop grassroots institutions such as associations for mutual aid or to protect their rights, formal gatherings to press authorities, social centres, non-commoditized markets, etc. They coexist, from cooperation to conflict, with other institutions more embedded in representative public frameworks (local or national authorities) endorsed by organizations as parties and trade unions.

Globalization tends to render more and more powerless these public institutions as market forces (multinationals, financial groups) seems to be ahead in the control of international agreements (from WTO to EU). Citizens

from a radical democracy perspective?



ces?

perceive also that these forces colonize part of their life, where and how they get by (if they can). Radical democracy could be envisaged as a driving counter-power aiming to promote horizontal and bottom-up experiences in the satisfaction of human needs: material, expressive or environmental.

Could both type of institutions (State, grassroots) to build up common tools, strategies to involve citizens or to offer alternatives to their common “enemy” from this radical-democracy perspective? In this graph we offer some hints about it. When both public and social networks interact aiming to construct a social and horizontal world against neoliberal globalization, possible outcomes could lead (or not) to a better mutual understanding.

political representation/political parties

Rethinking political representation and political parties

Five themes underpin this line of the inquiry – themes that arise out of the social movement left of the last three decades or so.

1. A critique of the predominant notion of politics reflecting the declining legitimacy of the traditional political institutions and the definition of politics that underpins them and collapsing allegiance to political parties.

The classic definition of political parties is organisations that aim to be in government or to be in a strategic relation to government. Since the late 1960s – though with many precursors – an understanding of politics has developed as far broader than matters of state, government and legislature.

This breaks the monopoly of political parties over politics; it also produces a situation where many of the functions traditionally carried out by political parties, and carried out in a particular way, are done by a multiplicity of actors in innovative and independent ways. Even electoral activity is no longer the exclusive preserve of political parties. Political parties are not a necessary condition of electoral activity; and electoral activity is not the only activity of a political party.

The narrow definition of politics exclusively in terms of government, state and legislatures is associated with a degeneration in the meaning of representation. It has slid from the aim of “making present” within the legislature the demands, ideas and knowledge of active citizens down to merely “symbolising” the people as an electorate that merely chooses between competing symbols. In the visions of the early, radical campaigns for democracy e.g. before the end of the 19th century, representation meant “making present”. This implied a causal relationship between a presence in the political institutions and the autonomous force which it represented, based outside these institutions; an autonomous force or forces expressing popular feeling, opinion, activity, organisation, deliberation. In most of today’s “representative democracies” repre-

sentation has a primarily symbolic function, to symbolise the people or particular sections of the people, with the implication that those who are represented are generally passive in the process of the organisation of society, only periodically assenting or dissenting to how they are thus represented. Electoral politics is the competition for this symbolic role. As parties become absorbed in this process they lose any connection with the people as actors for social change in their own right. The idea of representation becomes associated with alienation, separation and frequently a presumption of superiority.

If representation means “making present”, it is only one off many moments of politics, understood as purposeful transformation of society. This broader understanding of politics leads to theme 2.

2. The importance of distinguishing two senses of power:

Power 1: as transformative capacity

Power 2: as domination, as involving an asymmetry between those with power and those over whom power is exercised.

The recent reassertion of power as transformative capacity first by the feminist and also radical trade union student and community movements of the late '60s and '70s and more recently by the global justice movement of the late '90s underpins and sustains a far wider understanding of the scope of politics beyond the traditional focus on state, government and legislation.

This recognition of the importance of power as transformative capacity and an associated enlargement of the definition of politics, also lays the basis for rethinking representation. It suggests a direction of strategic thinking about social transformation which goes beyond the counter position of movement forms of democracy on the one hand, and representation – as “making present” – on the other. It implies the need to inquire into forms, conditions and limits on representation as a way of “making present” within the political system, movements and struggles and the sources of transformative capacity that they contain or indicate.

This implies that rethinking political organisation must be guided by investigating and understanding the present sources of transformative capacity; and this in turn requires recognition of:

3. The multiplicity of levels of creative human activity – all of which are potential locations of transformative capacities.

This involves an understanding of social reality as consisting of at least four levels:

- interactions/relationship between people;
- enduring social structures that pre-exist particular individuals and relationships;
- the formation and character of human personality and consciousness;
- transactions and relations with nature.

Social movements and struggles involve all these levels of social being but their importance will vary from case to case, as will the appropriate forms of political organisation.

Just to list these indicates the dramatic enlargement of politics which flows from a recognition of power as transformative capacity and also points to the importance of a multiplicity of autonomous levels to politics. It also indicates the complexity of giving organisational reality to the idea of representation as “making present” autonomous forces for democratic transformation.

The other side of this enlargement of politics and recognition of the different levels at which transformative activity takes place is:

4. A radical development in our understanding of the mechanism of social change.

The assumption dominant on the traditional left was that leadership or political action – the state, government or party – the social subject, acted on the rest of society, the social object. It was a model which takes no account of the way in which change is coming from within society, the ways those who were previously considered the objects of change are themselves actors for change and the ways in which the would-be external subjects of change are themselves drawn into processes of change – not necessarily in ways they intend (for example, political parties like the British Labour Party have been completely transformed – hollowed out – by a process of imposing, in this instance backwards, pro-market change, on a membership that was expecting public reconstruction).

Amongst mechanisms of progressive change are people’s-conscious efforts at change to live their lives consistently with, for example, values of co-operation, ecological sustainability or egalitarianism. They do not necessarily have a full picture of the structural causes of the obstacles to these values or a full vision of social change, but they act in a way which creates conditions for these structural changes.

In the past it was the party which claimed to concentrate and co-ordinate this purposeful activity and plan its character. Now purposeful efforts at change are very diffuse. The task to strengthen its impact is less to concentrate or co-ordinate it and more to stimulate and support its inter-connection and self-co-ordination.

This implies a very different view of knowledge from that which has dominated political organisation in the past.

5. We are working with a knowledge of open systems, an incomplete knowledge; we are increasingly aware of knowledge as tacit, practical and experiential as well as scientific.

These understandings of knowledge are closely associated with the understanding of power as transformative capacity and with the diffusion of efforts at social change. The implications for political organisation point towards an emphasis on horizontal sharing and exchanging of knowledge; co-operative attempts to build a common memory; the

self-consciousness of action and struggle as also an experiment and therefore the importance of ensuring spaces for reflection, debate and synthesis.

6. Implications/questions.

These conceptual themes are intended to sum up the direction of innovations and developments in the practice of social change with their associated implications for political parties and representation over the past thirty years or so. These developments effectively turn upside down the role of political parties in social change, challenging their monopoly, transforming the nature of their relationship with social movements, questioning the very nature and need for political leadership, radicalising the idea of representation and dramatically enlarging the notion of politics.

The first phase of this line of the inquiry was to explore critically the experience so far of attempts to change the nature of political parties in the direction indicated by these conceptual and practical shifts.

Hilary Wainwright

A sobering experience: the German Greens

The attempt to rethink political representation and political parties is not new. In 1970 the German Greens, a new party created as the voice of social movements in the political institutions of Germany, tried to transform the nature of political representation. It is an experience that contains many lessons for us now. Frieder Otto Wolf, a founder member of that party presented this experience at a workshop in Manchester. Here he writes a brief version of his analysis.

In the late 1970s, the West German Green party adopted a series of principles of 'grass roots' or 'base' democracy to guide their organisation. The aim was to enable emancipation from domination, practise gender and ecological responsibility, and to design the building of a counter-power capable of changing the course of events. What were these principles of grass-roots democracy, why were they given up, and what would still be relevant about them with a view to realizing the same aims? These are the questions I, as someone involved in the party, try to answer here, by retrospectively examining each principle in turn.

1. Beginning with oneself

This principle is based on the argument that a constituent element of the structure of domination is the complicity of the dominated. Recognizing this element and learning to withhold one's complicity is therefore a necessary first step. It has been the starting point for the massive rediscovery of consumer action, such as the boycott of products that entailed ecological destruction or child slave labour. It has also led to the insistent moral questioning of male-dominated gender relations.

This principle of refusing complicity seems to be derived from the feminist principle ‘the personal is political’ or, in another formulation, “the private is political”. The first can be understood as “politics in the first person”, which claims the “political” character of personal initiatives and relations. It can also mean the principle of “beginning from oneself”, which adds the idea of going beyond one’s immediate personal domain to all kinds of political issues, ideally developing a practice of self-determination at all levels, but always beginning with refusing complicity. The principle of ‘the private is political’ seems to be more specifically geared to feminist uses because it addresses the specific problematic of the private household, which shields male-dominated relations from outside scrutiny or intervention – by public authorities as well as by those acting in solidarity with oppressed and exploited housewives or daughters¹.

In practice, this principle has turned out to be ambivalent: On the one hand, it has inspired creative work on consumer action, community-organised child-care and even foreign policy, where a strategic conception of unilateral disarmament has invoked this principle. On the other hand, it has occasionally reinforced a regressive tendency to favour individual whims, which may stop any movement towards collective ‘really’ political action. And, most importantly, it has been found to be difficult to adapt to electoral policy, which is necessarily aimed at getting the votes of many people who were a long way from “beginning with themselves”.

Despite an elaborate camouflage of references to later feminist debates on the ambiguities of “the private is political”, the electoral imperative – in which the principle played no part – led to its being abandoned. This began when the Greens became established as a complete electoral party in West Germany in the mid-1980s and was cemented when they fused with the electoral organisation created by the dissident “citizens’ movement” of the GDR, who suspected this principle of being “totalitarian”.²

2. Consensus before majority decisions

Majority decisions are potentially an act of domination (as Thomas Hobbes said). It became a principle of political practice to avoid this danger by asking all participants to seek consensus before taking majority decisions. This principle was adopted in the euphoria of an historical new beginning that seemed to promise imminent emancipation from all structures of domination. Its premise was also that anxiety in the face of imminent common destruction would create a new solidarity among all human beings. It has, in fact, helped make possible rather improbable alliances – e.g. between rural peasants and urban queer groups in the face of an escalation of nuclear armaments. The principle infused the new party with a powerful cultural dynamic, perhaps the strongest vector of transformation the party has carried.

On the other hand, the intensity of conflicts within modern bourgeois societies, especially in those shaken by the crisis of Fordism, did not make consensus easy to reach even within a party broadly agreed on its political programmes. Once the utopian moment or the moment of common anxiety had faded, competing “alternative” or “traditional” identities effectively blocked almost any kind of meaningful

debate on possible areas of consent. In practice, the principle of arriving at consensus became a process of negotiating compromises via intricate voting procedures, proceeding from a “snapshot of opinions”, through several rounds of amendments, to a final definitive vote. The corollary principle of minority protection through, for instance, the introduction of minority statements into party programmes, has never been put into practice. A formal minority would be unable to survive over time because of the majority principle built into the election procedures for party offices or for parliamentary mandates. This principle therefore has been largely forgotten by newer generations of party activists since the mid-1980s.

3. Primacy of common action over individual projects

This principle was devised to counter spontaneous tendencies towards fragmentation. In practice, however, it has worked as a tyranny of common politics in which the individual duties of ordinary life – bonding, family building, or passing examinations – were neglected. The principle also fomented hypocrisy. Individuals would present their very particular concerns as an occasion for common action.

It has been largely forgotten now, and slipped out of use without major conflict. The problem of an adequate balancing of individual concerns with the needs of common strategic action remains, however, high on the agenda of any political organisation with transformative aims.

4. Respecting individual conscience

Given the variety of backgrounds of Green activists, this principle has been invoked to address problems of discipline and common action without crushing individuals. This was adopted in more or less conscious opposition to the traditional practices of “democratic centralism”, which forces the minority to carry out the actions it has opposed. In practice, however, it became the traditional liberal principle of ‘liberty of conscience’ of deputies that served to diminish the control of the party over persons elected to parliamentary mandates

5. Gender parity

The existence of this principle is the most direct impact of the women’s movement on the principles of party organisation, forcing other political parties to introduce similar principles. It has deeply shaped the “alternative” political culture of the German Greens, although it has also served the instrumental strategy of winning a larger share of power. In spite of strong media pressure against this principle, especially when it involves prominent male figures having to stand back, it has generally been upheld. Since unification and the fusion with the East German citizens’ movement organisation, however, important exceptions have been made which were previously unthinkable. The main ambivalence of the principle has turned out to be its compatibility with the neo-liberal notion of career women putting themselves forward in open “political markets”.

6. 'Rotation' in mandate and in office

This principle was introduced to avoid the emergence of professional politicians. Its inherent disregard for parliamentary and, more generally, political experience have made it difficult to defend though. Furthermore, the difference between this principle and the liberal, inherently middle-class critique of "professional politics" has been neither sufficiently explained nor understood. In the current practice, it has either been dropped entirely or reduced to requirements of stronger reselection after two legislatures. In part, it has been replaced by requirements of a quota for "new candidates".

7. Public character of all party proceedings

This principle was introduced to prevent secret proceedings of party committees undermining party democracy. In practice, however, it has led to an increased tendency towards informal preparations and conspiracies. It also made it possible for observers from organised sub-groups to exercise disproportionate control over the deliberation of party organs. It is now largely discontinued – although it still offers an important challenge for transparency as a first step to an enhanced internal democracy within a political party.

8. Separation between party office and parliamentary mandate

This principle was introduced to counter the 'sucking in effect' of parliaments and governments. It has delayed the effect, but not countered it because of the absence of clear political projects of transformation. It did not provide, most especially, a counter-weight to the strength of parliamentary leaders in relation to party representatives, nor prevent the emergence of positions of informal leadership (Joschka Fischer) based upon media presence and media intervention. Nor could it prevent the long-term influence on party recruitment of the "realist" majority of the parliamentary group. This has led to the dominance of the realists even at the party base.

The principle could be effective in a situation where the party organisation turned away from the (almost impossible) task of 'controlling' the activities of its parliamentary wing, and focussed instead on developing links to social movements with a view to longer-term changes in public opinion. Then it could function as a principle for institutionalising a realistic division of labour between different departments of party politics. In spite of strong contrary pressures from the media and from coalition partners, this principle is still largely in place though modified by exceptions for party leaders and a 'mixed institution' acting as a forum for strategic consultations.

9. Imperative mandate

This principle of the accountability of representatives has a long and well-documented history within the 'councils' of 19th and early 20th century revolutions and especially within

organisations of the workers' movement. The green movements and parties have made this a distinctive principle of their political organisation without, however, adequately distinguishing between a prior mandate and consequent accountability and, most fatally, without clearly defining to whom this accountability is due: to local party members, to delegating party bodies, to social movements, to the general public, to the electorate at large...

This principle has largely been discredited. It was open to tactical uses and abuses and implemented in a mechanistic and dogmatic way without regard to existing conditions. Yet, there seems to be something essential about it for reclaiming effective democratic accountability and participation. It would certainly be worth distilling something of this principle of direct involvement in democracy out of the muddle of anarchist ideologies and incompetent practices that has overgrown it. This principle is now totally discontinued in party practice, not counting ordinary practices of reporting back.

10. 'Ordinary wage' for parliamentarians

Introduced as a measure for reducing the distance between the elected and their electorate – as practised in the 1870 Paris Commune, this principle meant an income reduction for activists relative to better paid professions. Inflexible implementation plus arbitrary exceptions further discredited the principle.

If freed from workerist austerity and implemented with flexible adaptations to specific life situations, the principle would still have the potential of limiting careerism within the party. And it would help to raise sizable funds in the form of donations, which could be put to good use, especially in financially reinforcing social movement infrastructures and institutions. This principle is now discontinued, though party levies are still higher than in most other parties.

11. Autonomous administration of party finance

This principle was introduced to heighten the difference between the Greens and other parties. In practice, this has put great stress on internal practices of financial self-control. The alleged risks of slipping into illegal practices of tax avoidance etc. have been avoided, although often at the high price of internal conflict. There were successful attempts at making scandals about practices implementing the internal rules.

This principle contained a valuable kernel, of making explicit the political criteria underlying an alternative system of controlling of party finances. This could be rethought, although this practice is now discontinued.

12. Primacy of social movements over parliamentary politics

This principle has often been illustrated by the metaphor of the “standing leg” (the social movements) vs. the “playing leg” (the parliamentary practice). That image grossly

underestimates the weight of parliamentary and electoral practices in a political party. It also obscures the tasks of political integration and alliance building, which are most closely linked to the informal workings of parliaments as organs of political representation. Yet, it is a principle of continuing great importance: at the very least, it marks the need to find forms of co-operation between social movements and parliamentary parties as autonomous organisations. This is a key issue in contemporary debate on political organisation.

This principle has now clearly been inverted in the present practice of the German Green party – as could be seen by the Green parliamentary group’s criticism of the non-representative character of NGOs in the “alter-globalist” movement.

13. Programmes based on projects, not on theories

In the face of the sectarianism of the 1970s, in which dogmatically received theory played a central role, this principle at first seemed a liberating stroke. In the longer run, however, it has led to the utter neglect of theoretical debates, effectively abandoning all efforts at an in-depth analysis of established relations of domination. This has led, in the longer run, to a thinning of theoretical debates within the party and of real substance in its programmatic debates. These degenerated into rhetorical exercises without any basis in evidence. This principle has now been totally forgotten – as, in actuality, both theory and programmes have been increasingly replaced by political marketing.

14. Authentic concern for political culture over mere ideology

This principle, harking back to pioneers like the concept artist Joseph Beuys and embodied by strongly moralizing leaders like Petra Kelly, was meant to maintain a fundamental difference between the Greens and ‘traditional parties’. It has, without doubt, suffered from not being linked to strong theoretical analysis and strategic thinking. This has made it susceptible to wild illusions about the effects of the apparatuses of dominant ideology. It remains true, however, that such a principle of a strategic break with established culture should be at the heart of any transformative movement with a strategic perspective. The unsolved problem in this respect seems to be how to achieve such a break without, as it were, closing the windows to the world of the others and shrinking into a cultural ghetto. This principle does not seem utterly beyond reach, but it has, again, now largely been forgotten. Instead, the cult of media presence as an element of power is holding the political culture of the party in its sway – probably even more so than in other parties where they have established arenas for a practice of an internal party culture.

Frieder Otto Wolf

Notes

¹ In retrospect, this idea of “public” conceals a harmful ambiguity – defending privacy against the disciplinary practices of public authorities is quite different from defending the “private space” of the male-dominated household against women’s solidarity. But at the time, nobody could entertain the idea that the “institutions” of the establishment were anything other than an external support of male domination within the “private household”. The neo-liberals made use of this ambiguity in their counter-attack in the 1980s and 1990s, helped by the lack of clarity in these elementary theoretical issues about gender relations, families and households as well as the state and politics.

² The objection to the very idea of ‘basisdemokratie’ as a kind of “basisdiktatur”, a dictatorship of the grass roots activists with ‘totalitarian’ tendencies, had been the staple of the ‘liberal’ or ‘libertarian’ party right wing since the foundation of the Green Party. They were defending the principle of the “free mandate”, based on the ‘liberty of conscience’ of all representatives, which is, in fact, explicitly enshrined in most Western constitutions of liberal democracy.

techno-political tools

Techno-political tools have emerged from the practice and social transformations of the recent cycle of social movements. The term “techno political tools” refers to strategies and a rich variety of experiences that seem to have something in common. For example, they apply the new technologies to political goals, putting an emphasis on decentralised “swarming”, placing a high value on a collaborative and open environment, stressing the importance of the systematisation of the knowledge generated by social movements and, through this systematisation, the collective building of a shared memory.

Some of the questions for discussion are:

- i) What are the characteristics of a techno-political tool?
- ii) What kinds of tools are there? (Conceptual tools and metaphors; networking tools (directories of groups); search tools; visualisation tools and maps; communication tools etc.)
- iii) How could technological tools be designed and used to improve the possibilities for, and the means of achieving, more direct, more transparent, less mediated forms of democratic organisation?
- iv) What are the socio-economic conditions necessary for widespread access to and use of techno-political tools?
- v) Can we extend the Free Software organizational model to other fields of social organisation?
- vi) How far do the activist/movement networks correspond with networks of users of techno tools? For example, amongst networks involved in the WSF there is a low correspondence between the two networks and therefore a low use of the techno tools built around the WSF.
- vii) Which are the key event/moments that make a techno-political strategy useful?
- viii) Does the movement around technological innovation go beyond the market?
- ix) How does the nature of Internet Global Governance affect the strategy of techno-politics?
- x) Is there a problem of the individualisation of the users of

techno-political tools and how can it be addressed?

xi) What would be the classic tools of techno-politics and why they would be “classic”?

xii) Could the visualisation tools afford new forms of representation, different from the classical organisational view?

xiii) What have been the experiences of technical tools created for transformative political propose

Initial list of people participating at the discussion on techno-politics: Franco Berardi (Bifo); Jaime King; Jaume Nualart; Branca Curcic; Ines Pereira; Luciana Castellina; Dominique Cardon; Mayo Fuster. Presentation of the people is available at the wiki.

Steps planned and done at the Techno-political team

Building a chronological map of key developments/ moments historically

An initial map *map of the main issues* and a chronology of key developments/moments historically and specifically over the past 20 plus years has been developed by Jaume Nualart and further developed with input from Branka Curcic: http://www.networked-politics.info/index.php/Map_on_techno_-_politics_tools

A reflection on meaning of the concept of techno-political tool concept – a draft entrance to Wikipedia

A first draft of techno-political terms for an entry to Wikipedia is being developed (initially by Mayo Fuster), which explores several meanings: Techno-Political Tools.

– By **political**, we mean tools used and/or built for political ends. That they be *built* for political ends is a sufficient condition; that they be *used* for political ends is a necessary condition. This term would include new technologies already circulating in society which are put at the service of a political end or cases where programmes are built or technologies developed with this intention. An illustrative example of the first case would be when mobile phones are used for swarming, for example, the use of SMS messages in Madrid to call for street demonstrations after the bombings of 11th March 2003. An example of the second case was the establishment of Indymedia. This is a reason for the considerable variance in the weight of political identity or the logo of techno-political tools. But *what politics?* We mean the politics that proposes and prefigures the global movement. The politics for a participatory democracy with more direct, less mediated mechanisms for participation.

– By **techno**, we mean where the content and/or the mediation of such practices is carried out through technology. Through the use of technology, meaning the different forms of new information technology (e.g. Internet, mobile telephones, etc.) The term contains a novel element in that, above all, it collects practices around new technologies, and is used to refer to already consolidated practices, as was the case with previous technologies, such as radio or television. What stands out as “new” is the use of technologies that favour *multi-communication*.

– By *tool*, we mean that it is open to being re-appropriated; to being used for any purpose. The tool can be used for multiple purposes and is not intended to “direct” the nature of its use, or to be restrictive, or to exert control over whoever wants to use it. In this sense, the tool aims to combine autonomy and a sense of acting jointly. *Autonomy* insofar as it does not attempt to limit the autonomy of the user; *acting jointly* to the extent that they share the same instrument, the same practice. When tools are built to favour their re-appropriation and use, they include user manuals, kits, an open code, etc. so that the know-how for its use and re-use is accessible, following the logic of *Do it yourself* (DIY)¹.

Types of techno-political tools

Some significant differences between techno-political tools can be found around the following fields:

- Whether it concerns a “derived” techno-political tool (the use of new existing technologies for political ends) or a “built” one (the conscious construction of the tool for a political end)
- The dimension which they are aimed at: local, regional, global
- Link with time (particular kinds cases: for a concrete, lasting etc. action)
- A political project or action that underlies the use of the tool
- Support technology (website, email, mobile telephones etc.) and whether their use is online or offline.

Call for contribution to a newsletter on techno-political tools

In collaboration with the E-library for and on social transformation, we are preparing a multilingual compilation of online material on “Collaborative creation, Free software organizational model, Techno-political tools and memory”, in an attempt to give an overview on what is under the umbrella of those fields and to stimulate the circulation of ideas.

Please send us your contributions as fast as possible. There are two alternative ways of sending us a contribution:

- A) (The best option!!!) To publish the resources

through the e-library form and send us the link of the resource page (To do it so, go to the register at <http://www.openlibrary.info> and publish it).

B) Send us an e-mail to info@euromovements.info containing these information: Title; Author (s) name and e-contact (optional); Abstract (maximum 1800 characters); Keywords; Year; Licences; Language; Number of pages; Type of text; External link; and, the text or resource itself.

The newsletter will be published under a Creative commons – non commercial, share alike licence, but if you send us resources under its own licence, this will be respected.

The resources sent would be included in an organised compilation newsletter, accessible through the Networked Politics wiki (www.networked-politics.info), the e-library on social transformation (<http://www.openlibrary.info>), the wiki e-yearbook on and for social transformation 2006 (www.euromovements.info/yearbook), and will be spread through several e-mails lists, web pages and other networks of exchange and conversation.

Case studies

The documentation of case studies of experiences is planned. The case studies identified as relevant for development in the coming months are “*Global Internet Governance (in comparison with other institutional logic like UN or WTO)*” and the free software development model.

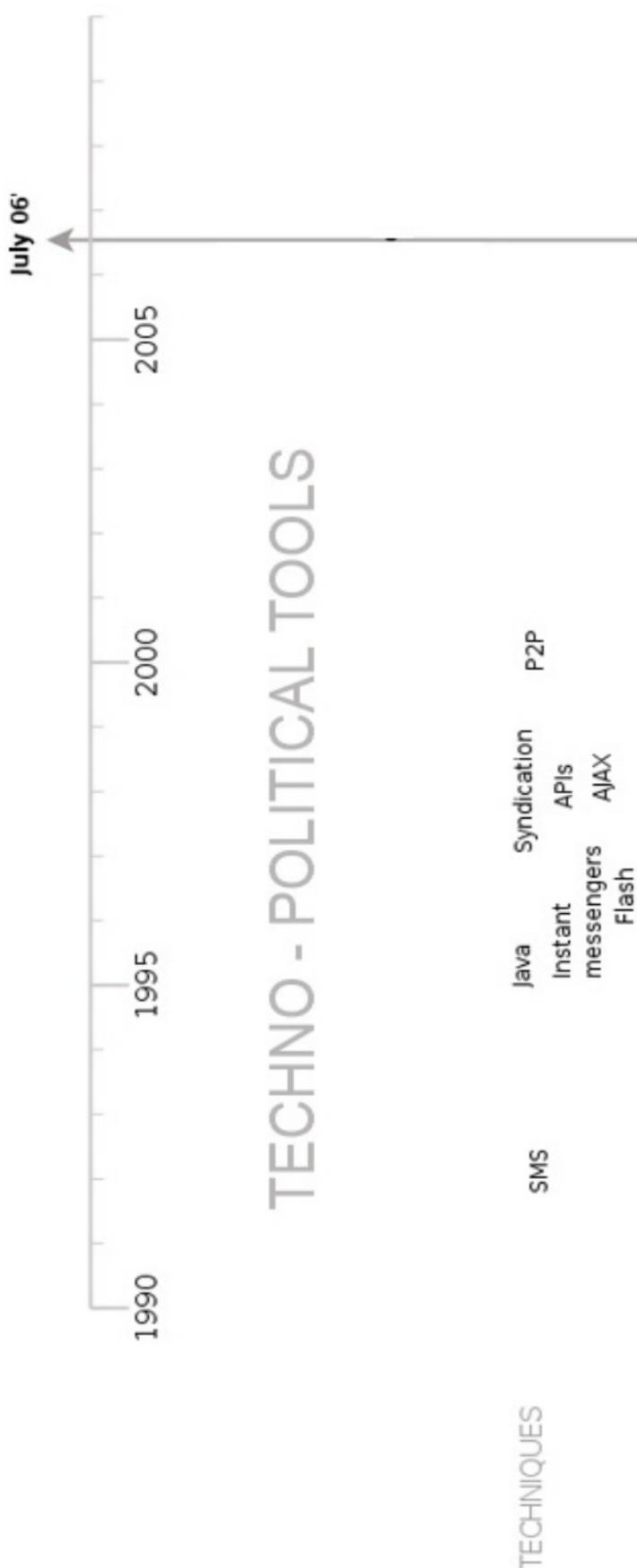
More on techno-political discussion team

More materials (Such as reports of seminars and video of a debate) are available at the wiki techno-politics section: http://www.networked-politics.info/index.php/Techno-political_tools

Waiting for you to develop and discuss them further!!!

Contact us if you would like to participate in the discussion group at euromovements.info.

Mayo Fuster i Morrell



If you would like to know more about each of the map entries, a good resource on technological keywords is Wikipedia.org. On <http://geuzen.blogs.com/historiography/> you can also find an interface of the main terminology of technical developments at Wikipedia and other good online resources. Here is an explanation of the main terms used on the map.

TECHNIQUES: This refers to the different programme languages and techniques. (For example, P2P is a computer network that relies primarily on the computing power and bandwidth of the participants in the network, rather than concentrating it on a relatively low number of servers. Ajax is a HYPERLINK "http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Web_development" web development technique for creating interactive web applications).

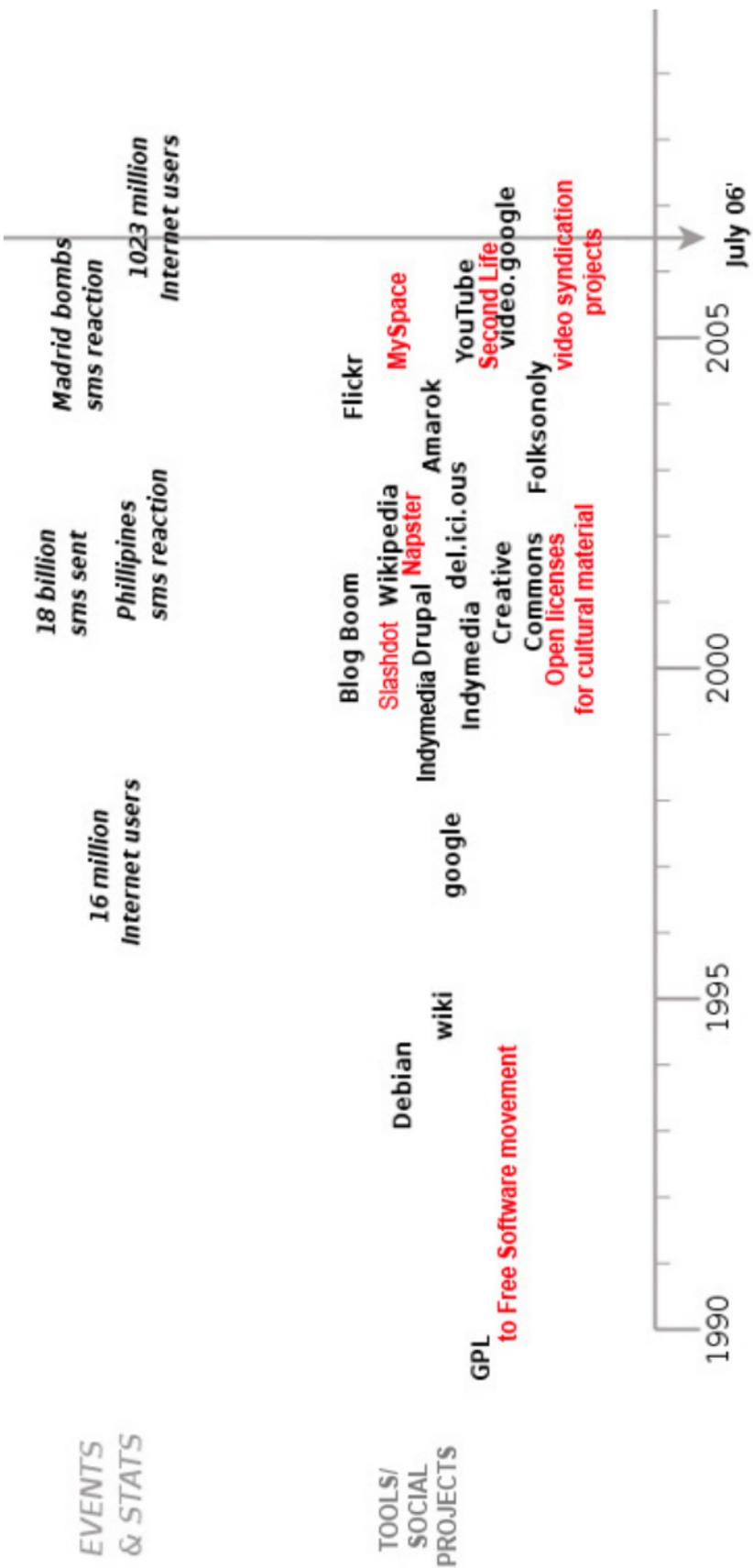
GPL: General Public Licence (also known as GNU GPL or simply GPL) is a widely used free software license, originally written by Richard Stallman.

Wiki: is a HYPERLINK "<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Website>" website that allows the visitors themselves to easily add, remove, and otherwise edit and change available content, and typically without the need for registration. This ease of interaction and operation makes a wiki an effective tool for mass collaborative authoring.

Debian: is free software package developed through the collaboration of a community of volunteers from around the world.

Flickr: is a photo sharing website and web services suite, and an online community platform, which is generally considered an early example of an application of Web 2.0 - the new phase of web development.

Drupal: is a Content Management System (a whole city of free software) developed by an online community. The CMS look to "democratise" access to web.



Amarok: is a free software music player. Amarak's tagline is "Rediscover Your Music" and its development is based around this ideology.

Del.ici.ous: is a social bookmarking web services for storing, sharing, and discovering web bookmarks.

Folksonomy: is an Internet-based information retrieval methodology consisting of collaboratively generated, open-ended labels that categorize content such as Web pages, online photographs, and Web links. The authors of the labelling system are often the main users of the content to which the labels are applied. The labels are commonly known as tags.

YouTube: is a Website for storing and and sharing videos.

Creative Common: Licences based on Copyleft (as opposed to copyright) principles, mainly for products other than software.

MySpace: is a social networking website offering an interactive, user-submitted network of friends, personal profiles, blogs, groups, photos, music and videos.

Second Life: is an online virtual world. Users, who are often called "Residents" amongst themselves, explore, meet other users, participate in individual and group activities or "events", buy items, HYPERLINK "http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Virtual_property" virtual property and services from one another.

Napster: is an online music service which was originally a file sharing service created by Shawn Fanning. Napster was the first widely-used peer-to-peer (or P2P) music sharing service, and it had a major impact on how people used the Internet.

Slashdot: is a technology-related news website which features user-submitted and editor-evaluated current affairs news with a nerdy slant. It is known for the Internet forum-style comments section attached to each story. Slashdot was one of the first popular websites to include so prominently a commentary section.



DISCUSSION

Open source for the operating systems of the earth: a metaphor for new institutions?

Marco Berlinguer. The relevance of analogies and metaphors from the world of information technology for new thinking about institutions has been a recurring theme of our discussion. We'll focus on one of them and ask Brian to make a short introduction following his suggestion of "Linux for the operating systems of the earth".

Brian Holmes. My idea behind the slogan "Linux for OS Earth" was to use processes of structured co-operation to redesign the operating systems of a planet in danger.

But first I should explain why the free computer operating system, Linux, is a fruitful source of metaphoric thinking. "Free" in this context means that it is to be kept in a state of "open source" where the code can be used and altered by anyone to fit into new projects, as long as those projects in turn remain free and open for use by others.

Linux is obviously a very hi-tech endeavor and though most people know it is free they also find it forbiddingly complicated – all you have to do is look at all those lines of code to feel scared of even talking about it. But let's look at how this particular operating system was made. How it was made is very beautiful, and it can become a foundation of communication between us at a global level. (In fact, free software in the larger definition has already become a foundation because most web-servers use it, even the commercial ones).

Linux was started from an invitation to participate in something purely for fun and curiosity ("a program for hackers by a hacker"). But it also grew in response to a typical capitalist privatisation scheme: the corporations (let's call them Microsoft and Intel) were producing a new kind of chip for personal computers. It was impossible to install on it the Unix operating system that was widely and freely used at public universities. No one at the corporations ever thought that a Unix-type system could be rewritten for this new chip, because it would take so many thousands of hours of programming, and only huge corps have that kind of time. So they were counting on having a monopoly and being able to deny this option without any risk of a challenge or a rival. But one person, Linus Torvalds, had the idea of writing just a bit of the necessary code and then throwing it out on the Internet and saying to others: here's a beginning, if you all do a few bits, then soon we will have the core of a free operating system to go on doing the things we want. People responded. They gradually wrote the core system, and from the very start they used tools from another free software project called GNU, which had not yet finished its free core. What's more, a special legal contract called the General Public License or GPL already existed for GNU, which allowed any code written for free to be kept free, in the sense of open source. The result today is that we have dozens or maybe hundreds of different distributions or "flavours" of the basic GNU/Linux operating system, adapted for different purposes. The one I use is called Ubuntu, which was made for people with very little computing knowledge. It is supported by a very dedicated foundation that wants to make available what they call "Linux for human beings".

There is another important aspect to this story. Developers

open source as a metaphor for new institution

who make new applications for Ubuntu or any other flavour of Linux use a website database called Sourceforge, which basically serves to keep track of the changes continually being made to specific co-operative projects. This means that every developer can still do whatever he or she wants, but each one knows the exact state of the current collective projects. They can therefore see where their work would be most useful, and can participate in the real pleasure of doing what they could never do alone: the pleasure of helping to offer practical tools for the use of hundreds of thousands or perhaps millions of people. Every time I install a new tool on my computer, what I see is not the face of the commodity, in the form of a demand for money which in turn will force me to do more alienating work. What I see instead is the generous result of thousands of people's efforts, and I admire it, I am glad about it.

The metaphor of "open source for the operating systems of the earth" is a way to evoke and illustrate the possibility of drawing multiple solutions from common resources. It means that communities can take basic ideas and adapt them for local conditions, creating solutions that are tailored to fit their actual problems and the real collective capacities of their situation. But those solutions are in turn open as a knowledge base for use and adaptation by others. So the metaphor also points to a process and the need for people to constitute the archive of knowledge, to keep track of the evolution of projects and make available the offers of participation, but without any attempt to control what gets done. This is what we are already achieving in the knowledge-and-experience exchanges of the social forum process, and this approach is in the line with the larger notion of a new radical ecological rationality: a sophisticated, comprehensive, solidary and directly democratic way of co-operatively applying our brains and our hearts to take care of this fragile world we are living in. I guess that's something like an overarching goal for cultural and intellectual production on the left today.

This idea comes from what we observed in our working group on movements and networks. One of the many big problems affecting the last cycle of global protest was what we called "the culturisation of struggles" – that is, people being involved in the thinking about and symbolising of struggles at museums, universities and so on - the very kind of thing that we're engaged in now. On reflection however, we felt that this was also a source of strength: many people are now trying to elaborate forms of knowledge that can respond to the difficulties that we face in changing real situations.

We know that there are now a lot of people involved in trying to transform the political process and the economy, but their tools are not always good enough. Tools of every kind, both conceptual and practical, are always important, but especially now. The future is dark, and there's clearly going to be some sort of crisis in the short-to-medium term. If we have developed deep social knowledge and usable practical tools by that moment, it's going to be extremely useful. Already today, better ideas actually gain some purchase and are successfully applied in exactly those places where poverty and social problems are so great that the capitalist system, with its endemic production of inequality, breaks down. It is our responsibility as thinking people to prepare for the upcoming crises. And if

we reflect on the meanings of this metaphor, “Linux for the operating systems of the earth”, we might see the path we are already walking on somewhat more clearly.

Jamie King. We must remember that, unlike code, human effort and labour are finite resources. Once a piece of code has been produced, it has a portability that political processes do not. For example, under the terms of the GPL those wanting to take a project in a different direction can simply reproduce a piece of code and do as they will with it. The originators do not lose the code, since it is a non-rivalrous resource. The same is not true of political processes, where people leaving a process diminish the process insofar as they remove labour that is not replicable. This is to speak in very general terms, of course: some parts of the political process *are* replicable, such as documents, articles and so forth, but by and large it holds true. Human beings are not replicable, even when they reproduce, and their labour is absolutely finite and precious.

Brian Holmes. Yes. I used a slogan, and one which included a brand name. Everyone should be aware that even if they all remain open source, some of the flavours of Linux are specifically designed to fit into capitalist production and to help make big profits. So behind the slogan and the brand name there is a much larger context which definitely involves compromise. But society is generally impure, surely? And the interesting point in the slogan is that there's not just one operating system. Ecological problems, problems of organic systems, are multiple: there is human ecology, natural ecology, energy ecology, the ecology of labour relations, there are all sorts of whole systems in themselves, and yet they fit into the biggest whole system of all, planet Earth, which is always beyond us, always more than we can conceive. I definitely agree that it is not a matter of exporting the same model everywhere, because no one model can fit everything. But maybe it is also good to draw specific and concrete inspiration from others...

Mayo Fuster. In free software development there is a practice called “forking”. This expression is used to describe a situation where the process generates a replica of itself which becomes autonomous, and is then further modified without conflict or opposing the “mother” project. Forking is possible because the code is open. The software is left open so that when a community of developers do not all want to go in the same direction, they can diverge – in effect split - by creating a fork, a copy of the software, and then develop it in a different direction. At the same time they leave open the possibility of co-operation.

I think there is a parallel between this practice of forking and the organisational model emerging from social movements. I found this to be the case particularly in my experience of social movements in Barcelona. Social movements reject the need to have permanent institutions. Every attempt to have a permanent co-ordination space in Barcelona has failed. Instead, there is a logic of flexibility. There are moments of massive convergence around the same goal – for example, actions around the World Bank Summit, and then moments of a return to action on a decentralised basis. This involves building new structures appropriate to the common goal at hand rather than building permanent structures. What makes this organisational logic possible is effective communication tools and means

of accumulating knowledge: for example, directories of groups so that people can contact each other when needed rather than having to do it through centralised structures.

Hilary Wainwright. I would like to pick up on one of the several principles implied by these information technology metaphors. The one that immediately strikes me is the idea that to divide is not to take away. I wouldn't be as cautious as Jamie on this point. He argues that the human effort, labour and resources involved in politics are finite in a way that the programmes/codes are not and that, therefore, in movements for political change to divide *is* more likely to be to take away. While there is a certain logical truth to this, in reality, the more creative our political imagination is – or, to continue the Linux metaphor, the more we fork and collaborate to elaborate on promising political innovations and codes - the more likely we are as movements to reach the huge reserves of transformative political energy that at present lie dormant.

Open software metaphors potentially help release the political imagination from a mentality which tends to think in terms of concentrations of power. The more we move away from politics as a profession or a cadre activity towards politics as a transformative process that starts from ourselves and from people's daily lives, the more multiple are the possibilities. Libertarian socialists have long insisted on the idea of many routes to a shared goal. Edward Carpenter, a libertarian socialist from the late 19th century, talked about people reaching the destination of socialism by many different means. From an earlier period, the words of PB Shelley, the English romantic poet and revolutionary, provide inspiration for thinking about divergent and yet empowering possibilities. He was writing ostensibly about love but hinting at wider themes:

True love in this differs from gold and clay,
That to divide is not to take away.
Love is like understanding, that grows bright,
Gazing on many truths; 'tis like they light,
Imagination! Which from earth and sky,
And from the depths of human fantasy,
As from a thousand prisms and mirrors, fills
The Universe with glorious beams...

The inspiration that open source software provides, not only for recognising the possibility of many paths, but also for thinking about them in the context of a living system, points us towards new ways of thinking about self-regulatory forms of interconnecton, co-ordinaton and co-operation.

Politics has for too long been stuck effectively in the metaphors of clay, assuming that there is one form in any particular context. Take the example of the anti-war movement here in the UK. There is one powerful political tendency which argues, incessantly, for demonstrations in London and sees other activities such as actions at US bases as divisive. If only they were guided by an open source or a Shelleyian mentality, they would see that all these other actions do not take away. If they are encouraged and followed up by forms of co-operation, creative combinations would result, activating many energies which any one single focus would have left untouched.

This leads me to ask about how far the metaphor takes

us. What about the processes of selection, co-ordination, aggregation? Once the new codes, the thousand prisms and glorious beams have revealed the possibilities, what can we learn about these difficult questions from IT metaphors?

Christophe Aguiton. These metaphors are an interesting stimulus and are useful because in the story of the left, of the progressive movement, we always had metaphor.

To be very schematic: in the 19th century, for Marx, Proudhon, or Bakunin, co-operativism was the main tool to build socialism. You can see this in Marx's inaugural address for the founding of the International Workers' Association and in the Critique of the Gotha Programme. Then you see a very different vision appearing at the beginning of the 20th century, after the collapse of the first case of capitalist globalisation. The funniest political statement that I've ever heard was written by Karl Kautsky in 1907 in a polemic about socialism: "Socialism is the railway administration at the scale of the society". The metaphor of the railway administration gives us a revealing glimpse of socialism in the 20th century; a socialist vision for which the state was the main tool with which to change the society. If you look at the ideologies of the left during the 20th century: Keynesism, Fordism or Soviet planning, they all gave the state a central role. And now, we can use this Linux metaphor to inspire our vision of another form of co-operative work.

The Linux metaphor is useful to highlight the contrast with the implicit vision of 20th century socialism. It presents a more realistic vision for the present era, since it captures to some extent a hybrid between the three levels I have just described – traditional forms of co-operativism, the state and the IT-inspired forms of co-operation. We all rediscovered co-operativism with the inspiring example of the landless workers in Brazil. We know that we need a state for many things, and the Linux metaphor gives an interesting idea for a new kind of co-operation.

But let's follow the metaphor, and enter into more detail on this model of Linux to try to answer the question... The first useful thing to know is what Eric Raymond talks about as the "bazaar versus the cathedral". In the late 1990s, he wrote an interesting book saying that for him the bazaar worked well for the very small-scale sharing of shareware, freeware, and other small software; but, for big systems, like operating systems, he thought we needed an architect to design such a large and complex machine, like a cathedral. But working with the Linux operating system project, he discovered that it was possible to design large, complex systems using the bazaar logic.

The second principle that could be useful is what Marcel Mauss called the principle of gift and counter-gift. At the level of individual developers in the free software community, as well as at the company level, the gift/counter-gift logic is widespread. For example, some of the biggest users of free software are Sun Microsystems and IBM. And they are developing free software because they think that, as a result, they will receive from the free software community tools which will help them to develop cheap and good alternatives to Microsoft. This logic of gift/counter-gift is interesting in trying to understand the relationships of individual people in development communities, such as the Debian one (www.debian.org).

Beyond that, a third level of discussion concerns the institutions related to Linux. In dealing with regulation, evaluation, memory and so on, we face several problems which are interesting but difficult. The first of these seems simple but is actually most difficult: what kind of tool can help this co-operation, how can the bazaar be regulated? Because in a bazaar you have someone giving you the possibility to have your small shop or its equivalent. Someone or some organisation is still present to organise the space.

The second interesting issue is to explore the institutions and governance of the Internet to see whether the logic of horizontality is possible at all levels. There is a discussion in France – and probably everywhere – about the governance of the internet, about which people hold very strong opinions. Some people are enthusiastic, others are very critical. ICANN (Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers) has been heavily criticised, but we should also look at the role of IETF (Internet Engineering Task Force). It is an organisation which makes the rules for the internet, but works in a totally decentralised system on a consensus basis. Everyone can be part of it: companies, governments, NGOs, individuals. At real meetings and also virtual meetings on the internet every decision has to be taken by consensus, and it works pretty well. But if, at the same time, you look at the board of that organisation, its 12 members comprise eight Americans, one Chinese person (living in California), and two Europeans, who are also within the American research system. There was, I think, only one other person who came from another part of the world.

The IETF is a good example of an international institution working well in a totally flat system. But with a common culture... North American of course! But it is more about a common culture than a “take over” from the US government. More generally, it would be worth trying to see if this kind of institution provides a good answer or not to questions of co-orientation and regulation, questions of governance. A classic counter-argument to the IETF model is to say: let’s take the different nation-states and create a sort of UN for internet. But I’m not sure that this is any better or more “democratic”.

One final issue, which is not simple either. Even if there is a logic of gift/counter-gift, IBM and Sun Microsystems are clearly not Caritas International! They are big corporations, and we have to accept that. What other answers can we give? Influenced by the writings of Antonio Negri, there exists this idea of a universal wage and salary for everyone and, after that, free co-operation. But that is not so easy to achieve, and I don’t think that it would be such a good idea anyway.

Jaume Naulert. We are talking more about similes than metaphors. The free software way of working is now a reality. In the last three or four years, the phenomenon of free software communities has been exported to other modes of cultural production, with the emergence of music, videos and books that are all issued under Creative Commons licences.

The use of Linux as a tag to attract people is not a bad idea. But Linux refers to neither a particular community, nor a particular way of being organised. Maybe free software was the beginning (“in the beginning was the com-

mand line...”) but right now, lots of programmers are talking about free culture, where free software development is included as one among many means of free production. Instead of saying I’m a programmer, I’d say that I’m a free knowledge or culture contributor.

Moema Miranda. I am worried by the overvaluation of this dimension of our thinking on new technologies and networks, for two main reasons. First, we could end up mixing concepts like “movements”, “networks” and “WSF” in a way that is not clear to me. Each of these elements, although in dialogue, has different realities, senses and goals. To use the metaphor of the network and the internet as a main reference point for our reflection may be confusing, if we do not have a mechanism to control and to include this diversity. For example, the Hemispheric Social Alliance (www.asc-hsa.org) is not a network or a movement similar to the WSF. How should we deal with each element in its specificity and use that diversity to feed our debate and our search for greater understanding about the political facts of our time? Another essential element is the reality of digital exclusion... or the difficulties that many of us experience in taking part in dialogue processes that are based above all on the use of those tools. Prioritising this cyberspace, how can we create links and strong articulations with other dynamics to allow the interaction with the world beyond cyberspace?

Ángel Calle. I like the idea of using metaphors, they are quite powerful: think of the neo-liberals’ invisible hand. But from another perspective, we can’t be satisfied just to have found a metaphor or a format. It is not enough simply to think about methodological containers. We have more resources in common, as people, upon which to base the search for common concepts and views – language, feelings and, above all, the format that will condition us to define common rules: ethics.

Secondly, a co-operative system does not guarantee that you have a global overview. We still constantly find ourselves facing local or thematic problems in this interconnected world.

Thirdly, how are we going to promote transformation change? How is it going to be developed and encouraged? We have to look very carefully at existing experiences, how to reflect on them. For example, how and why do people switch from Windows to Linux?

Furthermore, we should not be too enthusiastic in using one metaphor, one language, because the world is already made up of proposed solutions based on multiple languages. For example, indigenous languages as they are used in Bolivia and Venezuela are quite distant from the language adopted by the European grassroots movements. So it is not simply a question of establishing one language, but rather one of how to enable translations between emancipatory languages. Finally, we should ask how any new language is going to work. What constitutes its common grammar?

For these reasons, I prefer to use the concept of radical democracy, because sometimes metaphors like “Linux” are quite entrenched in a world which is not accessible to most people.

Dominique Cardon. I want to add a small point to Christophe's use of the Linux metaphor for the organisation of social movements. One thing that strikes me when we study the Linux community is that it's a strange bazaar, because it implies an individualistic contribution. There is no pre-programme asking anybody to perform this task or contribute to this part of the software. Everyone does what they want. There is no prescription of order. It is really a self-organised system, where you decide on your own basis to make this kind of contribution to this part of the programme. The control, integration or recognition by the community of what you've done happens after you have proposed something. So you do what you want, and everybody looks at what you've done and then decides whether it's a good solution and should be integrated into the collective.

In a certain way we use this example when we study how the social forums work because those are also quite a self-organised system, where everyone comes and says "I want to make this kind of workshop, this kind of seminar or organise this kind of mobilisation". There is no overarching programme decided by a group of representatives saying "we will talk about this subject and that subject" but everyone is proposing different topics, agendas and campaigns. So it's the same kind of co-operation, where different organisations and social movements decide what they want to propose. But we don't have the second part of the Linux collaboration, which is the collective and public appreciation and evaluation of what has been done and what has been said at the forum. We don't have the evaluation which asks: what is being done? What is being proposed? What is the agenda of all those individuals who want to contribute to the forum? We could improve the WSFs by having a collective reflection and memory of what has been said,, a collective evaluation of what has been said in order to create a common language and common acquisition after the forum, if we are try to take the Linux form for the organisation of World Social Forums.

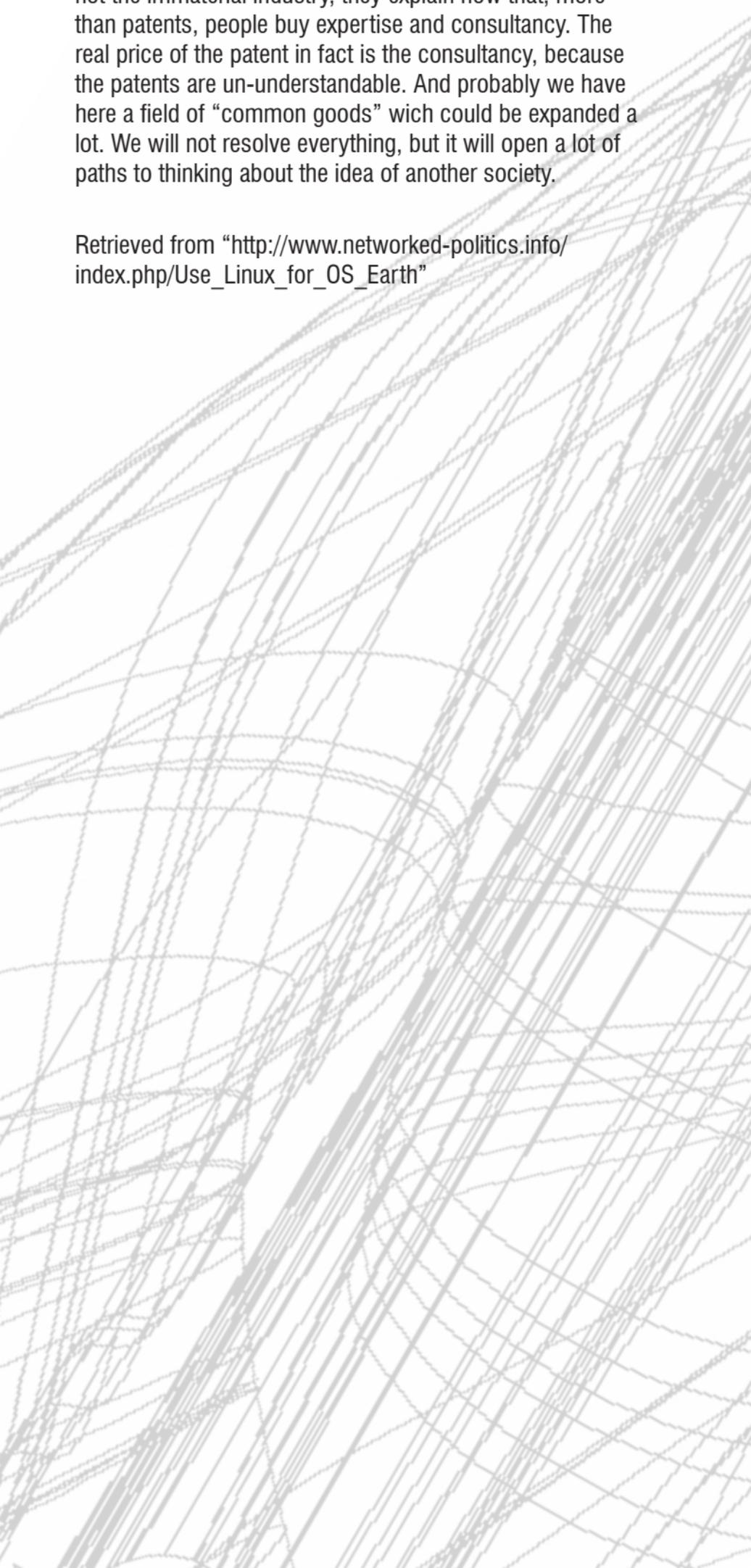
In WSF debates, there is a lot of talk about the propositions and strategies of the no-global movement. But we know that it's impossible to let a few people decide of thoses strategic aspects for the whole movement. That's the reason why the Linux metaphor could be very helpful for us in order to define a collective process of evaluation and co-ordination of individual contributions. Technical tools appear in this way, such as the WSF workspace, or some new Web 2.0 development such as "Folksonomy". But technical tools are not political solutions. We also need a common definition of processes of discussion that can be compared to what happen in the free software community using a consensus methodology for decision-making.

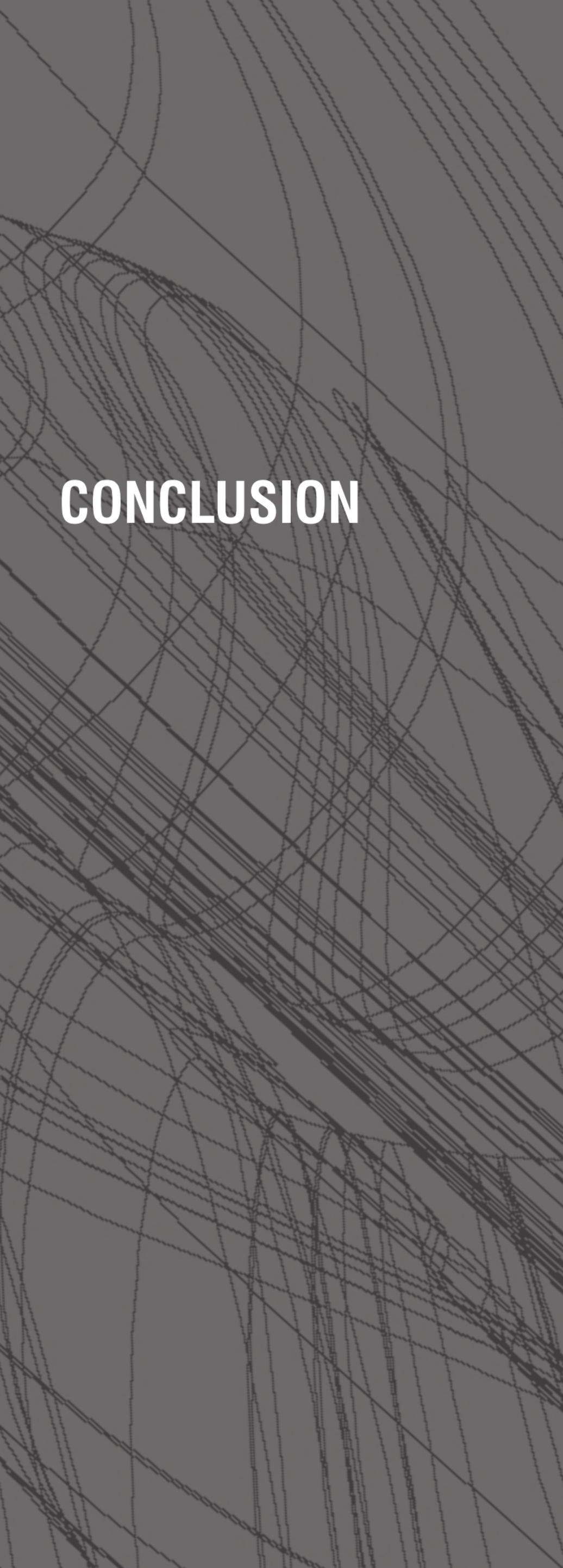
Christophe Aguiton. When I described the Linux metaphor in terms of the principles of gift/counter-gift and the bazaar versus the cathedral, I forgot to mention a third and important principle: the extension of the domain of common goods. But that is actually a key point. It is what Richard Stallman refers to when he describes Free Software as a common good for humanity. This idea of extending the domain of common goods is a vital dimension of the "Linux for the Earth" metaphor. It started with Free Software, then extended to the work of Lawrence Lessing and others in forging a "Creative Commons" for all intellectual creation,

artistic research, and texts. It is now becoming generalised to address the problem of patents.

If you look at why patents were created in the 19th century, two reasons were given at the time. The first was to make inventions public: you designed this bottle, and you had to let others know how you did it. But the second reason was to protect the small designer or inventor against the big company. If you look today, patents are used in the opposite way. They are designed to be un-understandable by others and are generally designed by the big companies in order to maintain their power against small companies or Southern countries. If you really start to talk with the people who are working in the industry, the hard industry not the immaterial industry, they explain now that, more than patents, people buy expertise and consultancy. The real price of the patent in fact is the consultancy, because the patents are un-understandable. And probably we have here a field of “common goods” which could be expanded a lot. We will not resolve everything, but it will open a lot of paths to thinking about the idea of another society.

Retrieved from “http://www.networked-politics.info/index.php/Use_Linux_for_OS_Earth”





CONCLUSION

Lingering thoughts and unanswered questions

At the end of the Barcelona seminar, we agreed to write down the two most vivid thoughts and the two unanswered questions that remained with us. Here is a summary of what people said and also an indication of how we hope to develop this project as a resource for similar or related discussions doubtless happening all over the world.

There was an unusual intensity about these discussions. This was influenced, perhaps, by the unusual mix of common values, very different histories and involvements combined with a shared sense of the risks and possibilities of trying to move forward on a very uncertain terrain. Branka Curcic saw it as: “a struggle for new solutions and new models of political organisation – models or forms that do not yet exist or are necessarily to come. It is a struggle that does not say what these new models are but tries to identify intermediate solutions and the potential that exists, and to do so bears in mind the heritage of what social and political movements have achieved or hoped to achieve in the past”.

As far as potential is concerned, several people’s memories focused on different dimensions of what Marco Berlinguer described as “A stronger sensibility and a more ‘dramatic’ perception about what I would call the world of de-institutionalised relationships, growing everywhere outside formal, institutional, organised relations, far away from the official world of politics”. Ezequiel Adamovsky referred specifically to what he saw as “a clear pattern of spontaneously non-capitalist behaviour in the new forms of social interaction that new technologies enable. Activists do not usually pay attention to apparently ‘non-political’ behaviour. I think we have a lot to learn from that.” Joan Subirats’ memories from the seminar, influenced particularly by movements around housing becoming strong in many parts of Spain, focused on a broader potential. He observed that: “the emergence of new tensions that could favour new waves of mobilisation, taking advantage of the ‘resilience’ that exists in different ‘nodes’ of the network; tensions in circumstances of daily life that call into question the foundations of the system, for example, the movement for decent, worthy housing in Spain and France”. Angel Calle sensed potential in the way that “in addition to organising protests, social movements build up autonomous spaces for organising daily social life with alternative values – through social centres, community organisations and co-operative, social economic initiatives.”

Most people pointed to potential sources of transformatory action against the background of an assessment, which Franco Berardi (“Bifo”) characterised as “the end of cycle of the movement started in 1999”. It has been a successful experience because it destroyed the consensus on neo-liberal ideology. According to Bifo, though, it has also been a “failure because it has been unable to act effectively in the field of production of value. Hundred thousands people were marching every Saturday afternoon and protesting against exploitation and war, but on Monday morning the demonstrators were back in their places of work, unable to transfer the political strength of the demos from the sphere of social production. This has created a strange situation: a strong movement has been unable to fulfil any of its goals... The beginning of the infinite war has changed the scenario so deeply”, Bifo concludes, “that since February 15th 2003 the movement has lost its strength and its hope”.

Most people highlighted, as we did in our introduction, sources of resistances and alternatives still flowing over a rocky terrain and often beneath the ground – *movimenti carsici*, as the Italians describe the process, using the metaphor of rivers in the mountains that disappear for long stretches, only to reappear somewhere else.

Bifo's understanding, however, led him in the opposite direction. While he starts from a recognition that "the unpredictable is the most important force", he believes that the present state of social relationships does not offer any grounded source of hope. He developed the arguments he put in the seminar (see Challenges section) about the destruction of autonomy, the life blood of the imagination to argue that, "the effects of hyper capitalism are irreversible at the level of the environment, at the level of military proliferation, at the level of the social disaggregation of labour, and – most discouragingly – at the level of the human mind". He stays very much on the alert, though, waiting for the unpredictable to emerge.

Others pointed to the dispersal of sources of hope and resistance, and the search in different ways for new forms of connection. Ines Pereira from Lisbon, a young activist in the fair trade and free software movements and a member of the radical left party, Bloco Esquerda, stressed the importance of developing more effective tools for coordination and networking among different groups and organisations at a global level, avoiding vertical approaches. She also argued that consensus and horizontality should be rethought because they aren't always suitable for big groups: "It's necessary", she says, "to make use of central nodes, without falling into verticality".

Adamovsky stresses the importance of connecting presently disconnected levels of 'radicalism'. One of his unanswered questions was how to connect the spontaneously 'radical' behaviour of people building autonomous spaces and having non-capitalistic relationships, in p2p exchanges or through the Wikipedia for example, with the "activists" and social movements. Connections between social movements and parts of the trade union movement were discussed in depth in Manchester. What can be learnt from large networks like "Our World is Not For Sale" and the Hemispheric Social Alliance? Or from smaller networks like local alliances against privatisation in the UK or local chambers of labour in Italy, where trade unions and social movements appear to have created something more than the sum of their parts?

Jamie King, drawing on informatic metaphors, wanted to explore how the many nodes of the Internet have become an inter-network, and how this might relate to "binding" and interaction within and between political formations. Mayo Fuster's stress on the importance of systematising social movement knowledge points to a tool for connection that provides a shared memory, a source of continuity and cumulative experience. This makes possible a significant flexibility in organisational form while also offering a fundamental tool of connection and a source of common language. The question of a new language of politics is a recurring theme. Berlinguer, reinforcing a challenge of Curcic's (see Challenges) raised the unanswered question of how to find a language to articulate the unfolding new politics beyond the traditional political culture reflected in mass media representations.

Another type of question concerning communication and connections arose when contrasts were made between the impact of dissent in different social spheres. Bifo contrasted the strength on the streets in the early days of the war on Iraq with the weakness of resistance in the daily reproduction of capitalism. Others pointed to the gap between the strength of cultural dissent, and the weakness of dissent and alternatives within political institutions. Several unanswered questions had to do with how to relate to political institutions. How to build on the transformative processes that people observe in daily life? How to achieve sustained challenges to “hard power”, the enduring institutions of capitalist political and economic power?

Both Adamovsky and Pereira raised this issue. Adamovsky observed that one of the biggest dilemmas that movements now face is that not to participate in electoral politics leaves state power to the right (with catastrophic consequences), while participation usually ends up subverting the very principles of the movements (with catastrophic consequences). How do we move beyond this lose-lose situation? Pereira commented that parties, institutions and movements tend to be considered separate entities with their own models, languages, supporters and spheres of action. But, she asked, is this really effective? Parties and institutions need to change, to learn from the tools and ways of organising common among social movements. On the other hand, she noted, social movements should be more explicit and self-confident about their own role as political actors and interlocutors. This takes us from the sphere of transformative action in micro-politics – within social and cultural relations, the spheres where people have sufficient autonomy to daily create new social exchanges and connections – to the institutions, the level of hard power, the concentrated, embedded institutions of domination. Alex Foti is an elected councillor for the Green Party in Milan but at the same time his roots are in movements firmly independent of political institutions – most notably EuroMayday, a European wide organisation of precarious workers. So his views on parties are of interest: “The principles that have emerged after the end of the cold war are horizontality and self-organisation”. That means post-Leninism, and that’s clear. So even if we talk about parties, then it cannot be about Leninist parties. In addition, there is the emergence of an ecological consciousness – which is a rejection of the industrialist left – and the way the many of the new movements keep faith with the struggles for social equality and global solidarity of the sixties and the seventies which are still very much alive especially in Latin America.

Throughout the seminar, Berlinguer and others stressed a process of fragmentation and de-institutionalisation, both for good and for ill, changing rather than destroying “hard power”. For Hilary Wainwright, the thought that lingered was of “a more powerful sense of the force of de-institutionalisation and fragmentation than I had ever had before. The micro-politics in the UK of struggling to defend from the latest wave of neo-liberalism public services or other still progressive institutions, sometimes makes me a little myopic, not fully comprehending the full force of the ocean and the speed at which it is sweeping traditional institutions – progressive and some reactionary too – away in its path”.

What are the implications of this process for how the movements relate to the institutions? What are the implications

for the strategies to achieve the independence of the movements from government discussed by Alessandra Mecozzi from the Italian metalworkers' union or Melissa Pomeroy active around participatory democracy in Brazil? (see Challenges) One of the central challenges of a new politics is the creation of new kinds of institutions, institutions that do not become 'hard'. This was an underlying theme made explicit in the discussion of Linux. Is the idea of transformative institutions a contradiction in terms? What conclusions for future engagement with political institutions can be drawn from the German Greens' experiment to refound their party on new institutional principles? To understand in depth the character of these would-be institutions, several people raised the "mother of all questions": Why do we need institutions? For what purposes do we need institutions?

Joan Subirats opened up one direction for an answer in posing a question about property and "the commons". He presented his lingering thought as an insight from the discussion of the Linux metaphor of "a collective construction without a master or leader but capable of gathering together people and entities in its daily and creative function". In this context, he talked of the recovery of "communalism" from an understanding of property that is neither individual nor collective but "common" to all of us together and each of us alone. He asked whether it is possible, drawing from the tradition of "the commons" to configure institutional rules of property that manage to make access equal and free while doing it in such a way as to ensure the future sustainability of these principles?

It is clear, as the questions multiply, that our work has just begun. We should perhaps explain why we are reporting conversations and not conclusions. This pamphlet is unlike most reports in this sense. There are no bullet point conclusions, no measurable "outputs". There is good reason for this, one that is intrinsic to our search. Like many activists and activist researchers we are in a moment of exploration and this pamphlet is simply "work in progress". But we are also in a moment of urgency. As Lluç Peláez says, "If the social movements' diagnosis of the world situation is correct, we have no time to lose. What must be the emergency strategy?" That's a question for everyone. But effective strategies need regular moments and resources of collaborative reflective work. Surely that is the lesson of Frieder Otto Wolf's analysis of the experience of the German Greens.

We hope this project, as well as providing such moments for us, will also contribute to a broader discussion in which others will participate. We intend to continue the discussion both on our collaborative website (www.networked-politics.info) and through occasional seminars. We are working on case studies on several aspects raised in these seminars: the insights of feminism for rethinking politics; the organisational principles and methods of the free software movement; the nature, possibilities and problems facing social movement trade unionism; global internet governance (in comparison with other institutional logics like the UN or WTO); the Hemispheric Social Alliance as a global network, and more. We hope you'll contact us, if only to keep the connections alive within the galaxy of interconnected activism – thinking and action – in which we are all engaged.

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