NETWORKED POLITICS

READER

WORK IN PROGRESS

Barcelona seminar for an inquiry into political organisation in an era of movements and networks.

NETWORKED-POLITICS:
A READER OF WORK IN PROGRESS.

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION TO THE INQUIRY AND ITS FOUR LINES OF RESEARCH

INTRODUCTION:

NETWORKED POLITICS: AN INQUIRY INTO RETHINKING POLITICAL ORGANISATION IN AN AGE OF MOVEMENTS AND NETS

Welcome to a space where people from different generations and political histories are sharing ideas and experiences with the aim of reinventing democracy in a context where traditional forms of democracy are exhausted. Networked Politics is a contribution to the continuing debates and practical experiments concerning new forms of political organization. It's purpose is to help the activists who act in movements, collectives, associations, parties, trade unions to develop a deeper understanding of the innovations of which we are all a part.

Some of us are from the movements of the late 60s and 70s, aware that our ideas at that time became in part – against our intention – resources for the renewal of capitalism but at the same time we are insistent that these 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. 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.

We start from a common recognition of the crisis of existing political institutions and also from a belief in the enormous potential that exists in diverse forms of resistance both visible and beneath the surface, for creating alternative worlds. But what also motivates our collaboration is a cautiousness and an anxious curiosity as we come up against the problems of creating sustained forces, agencies or subjects of social change. With these thoughts in mind, we have initiated an inquiry based on four lines of research:

  * The innovations and problems arising from movements: their
    development in practice of a new approach to knowledge, new forms
    of action and organisation;
  * The process of renewal taking place in political parties of the
    left and more generally with attempts at transformative forms of
     the political representation;
  * Public institutions in the net 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.

Many people are working on these issues. You will find many of these people here. Around this search we are creating a loose and worldwide community of activist researchers to share resources, compare experiences, debate ideas. We will use this wiki to allow collaborative writings and open discussions. We promote the cooperative production of a glossary or dictionary of new words (or old words with new meanings) emerging out of the search for new kinds of political organisation. We will encourage debates on "hot issues" emerging from practical experience and reflection. A central resource in our collaboration is also a web-bibliography e-library: articles, papers but also accessible transcripts from seminars, dossiers of interviews from the frontline of political innovation and its difficulties.

Share your work; make use of ours; stimulate collective reflection.

The basic language is English, but the contributions can be offered in other languages as well.

Networked Politics is an open project promoted by Transfrom! Italia (www.transform.it), Transnational Institute (www.tni.org) – New Politics, and Institut de Govern the Polítiques Públiques – IGOP (igop.uab.es) and developed in cooperation with Euromovements (www.euromovements.info)

Introducing the E-library

http://www.networked-politics.info/library

One of the aims of the Networked Politics inquiry is to create a community for sharing and exchange reflections. In order to facilitate this process and to make the access to web-bibliography resources easier we are developing an online e-library.

The "Networked Politics E-library" is an open and collaborative online space for the storing and sharing of bibliographic resources.

Its main goals are to create a meeting point between different disciplines and analytical approaches and to create a multilingual communication channel between different regions of the world on themes connected to rethinking political organization, including: the organizational innovations arising from movements; new forms of political representation; public institutions in the net society: and debates about techno–political tools.

What could you do with it?

The e-library allows you to consult, read and downloud bibliographic materials. At the e-library there are different search channels: you can search by keywords, by author, by theme, by title.). And the e-library also enables you to uploud texts, that is to introuce texts to the e-library and share it with the others. And not just text, but also multi-media materials, such as: photos, recorded interviews, etc.

The e-library has being designed to be as easy and intuitive usable as possible.

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2.

THE INSTITUTIONS LINE OF INQUIRY

ELEMENTS OF INSTITUTIONAL CRISIS AND TRANSFORMATION

Jon Subirat

> *"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

From an institutional point of view, we are facing grave and diverse problems:

- Disproportion between the remits and formal powers of the institutions and their real capacities for transformation and change.
- An economy and market that have "escaped" from political and institutional control.
- Obsolescence of the political bases of the nation state.
- Electoral legitimacy every *x* number of years, its legitimacy daily questioned through the "media".
- Institutions with borders, politics without borders.
- Growing confusion and polemic between legitimacy and legality.
- Emphasis from the institutions on the unique prominence of channels of representative democracy, failing to consider the growing number of people who do not use these channels, because of indifference, legal incapacity, or because they see that it doesn't change anything in their lives.
- Biased use (unidirectional, hierarchical, controlling) of technologies in order to maintain their hegemony.

The crisis of the institutions and the administration, and the need to transform or reform them has become a cliché. How to achieve such reform? Four basic questions:

1. WHY CHANGE? WHAT IS THE OBJECTIVE?

There are two possible responses to this question, and both should guide a program for change:

1.1. *To improve what exists*

This is not the central objective. It is clear that improvements are necessary, and it is only by demonstrating the capacity to tackle these, that the strength will be developed for the fundamental transformations that are necessary. The reform processes are currently defined by:

- Improving the institutional system that supports representative democracy: the electoral system, the laws governing political parties, decentralisation, the role of parliament, etc.
- Politics of transparency and good governance, in fields such as access to information, management of government aid, ethics in administration, the behaviour of high-ranking officials, etc.

1.2.   To transform it into something new

This should be the medium- to long-term objective, as the challenges facing administrative institutions must include transformations that adapt them to the new economic, social, technological, (etc.) circumstances of the 21st century.

Creating something new, not only reforming what already exists, requires asking two basic questions about the future of our administrations: what should they be? How should they function?

2.   WHAT SHOULD THEY BE?

Our institutions and administrations have a double mission:

- In the first place, they are an essential part of implementing politics; that is to say, a key tool that serves to modulate our society, to transform it from what it is into what we would like it to be.
- In the second place, this task cannot be "monopolistic". Without popular involvement playing a leading role, there will be no transformation. Transformation cannot take place just "from above". The institutions and administrations acquire their legitimacy from their capacity to offer responses to popular needs and expectations, without implicit logics of dependency, patronage or submission.

This means that, in a complex society such as the current one, our institutions and administrations:

- Must be capable of influencing the transformation of our societies, of incorporating diversity and a capacity for change and using this capacity to produce creative responses. **Inclusion** and **creativity** should therefore be two central factors.
- Must be capable of offering services that go beyond technical efficiency, and would be effective in responding both to the diversity of the populations they serve and to the internal complexities of each and every one of their users. It is essential therefore to incorporate **diversity** and **complexity (affective and effective)** into all processes.

3.   HOW SHOULD THEY FUNCTION?

The responses of the New Public Management don't help us. There are no magic recipes. We can propose some lines of work.

- A **deliberative administration**, in which **dialogue** replaces specialisation. The reason is simple: without dialogue, neither diversity nor complexity can be comprehended or incorporated, and creativity (and affectivity) are not generated.

From an operative point of view, this dialogue should permeate the *how* of the administration. An agenda for administrative transformation therefore emerges, summarised in five points:

3.1.   Dialogue in structures and processes

Incorporating dialogue into structures and processes means making **transversality** effective. It is a difficult task, which means breaking with the myths of specialisation and segmentation, as well as incorporating new concepts into management, such as **trust** or **collaboration**.

3.2.   Dialogue in leadership styles

Leadership is fundamental in all transformation, but coherence between this leadership and the transformations it promotes is also fundamental. Leaders should **personify** their objectives for change. In this sense, neither the traditional positional leaders, nor the more recent heroic leaders, are any use to us. We must promote **relational leadership**, expressed through mediation, dialogue, the recognition of others, collaboration, etc.

3.3.   Dialogue in relationships with the citizens and with other institutions

The institutions should recognise that they cannot work alone, that they need the contributions and complicity of both civil society and other institutions. In terms of operation, this creates the need to articulate mechanisms of **citizen participation** and **intergovernmental relations**. At the same time, the complexity of the actors emerging on this new stage obliges us to incorporate the idea of **network management** as a tool to explore and develop.

3.4.   Dialogue and values

Finally, we should not forget that we are talking about a fundamental transformation; we are talking about cultural change, and about the need for a new mentality. It is, therefore, vital to permeate the administration with these new values. However, in order to achieve this, we believe it is vital to **recover confidence in the administration** (recover the value of the public sector and the prestige of its institutions) and to have **new points of reference** in terms of time (more patience), feelings (more affectivity) and collaboration (less competition).

References for further reading will soon be available in the E-library

DEMOCRACY, CITIZENS' PARTICIPATION AND SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

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I don't think it would be right to enter into a debate about improving channels of political representation, a discussion of whether the function of representative democratic institutions needs modification or not, or an evaluation of the experiences of social participation of this or that place, without looking at the social and historical context to the issues. How can we talk seriously about these topics without considering them in relation to the massive changes affecting our societies? If we socially decontextualise the debate about representative democracy we fall into the political "autism" which currently affects many democratic institutions. These reflections aim to situate the debate about democratic innovation and citizen participation within a wider debate about social transformation, the failings of representative democracy, the general framework of a changing era, and the need to look for alternatives to the grave social problems we are facing after more than a decade of neo-liberal hegemony.

1. THE CHANGE OF ERA

Many of the parameters that define democratic institutions have changed substantially. The original liberal bases developed over time, in a way that increasingly offered opportunities and access to sectors and social strata not previously "enfranchised". Liberalism's political institutions were based on a relationship that placed them second to the demands of the liberal economic order. In this design, as we know, possibilities for political participation were restricted to those people openly considered to be "citizens"; that is to say, landlords whose income met the threshold that allowed them, or not, to participate in the political process of representation, depending on the liberal or conservative nature of the hegemonic political forces of the moment. Concern for political participation was not a topic that would have been on the agenda of debates within the institutions. It was an extra-institutional issue, raised by those outside the political circle, precisely because they were excluded from institutional political life. To speak of 'democracy' at this time was to refer to a revolutionary desire, a desire that essentially contradicted the dominant institutional logic: to talk of democracy was to talk of equality. The subsequent transformation of the economic system brought with it, not without tension and conflicts of all types and dimensions, the democratising transformation of the political system. We could say that in Western Europe, following the overwhelmingly important role played by the masses in the major

wars, political democracy, and (not by chance) social participation in economic growth through social policy, reached previously unheard of levels. Democracy and wealth redistribution appeared side by side. The new model was one in which the territorial area covered by the state, the population subject to its sovereignty, the system of mass production, the economic exchange market and the rules defining all kinds of relationships, combined with a logic of citizen participation. This model acquired canonical dimensions and went almost undisputed in the years after 1945.

In recent years, many things have changed in this respect. The principal socio-economic and cultural parameters that formed the basis of industrial society are being rapidly left behind. Many of the analytical tools, which would have helped us to understand the transformation from a liberal state to the Fordist, Keynesian welfare state, are now clearly useless. Now is not the moment to reiterate the nature of these changes, but we can give a brief outline. Economic globalisation and technological development have totally changed the nature of industrialism. We no longer see productive situations in which large concentrations of workers make vast quantities of products for mass consumption at affordable prices, and at the cost of a noticeable homogeneity in the range of goods produced. Of course, this was only ever true in certain parts of the world, but in these places, these changes have had a tremendous impact. We can no longer speak of stability, continuity, or unique professional specialisation, when we refer to working conditions that are increasingly precarious and fluid. Working situations are becoming increasingly discontinuous, precarious and without prospects or stable links. This has already noticeably affected people's lives, altering and fragmenting their social ties and changing their understanding of systems of reciprocity or involvement in questions that transcend the merely individual.

The impact of this transformation is felt, not least, in the field of social relations. We have passed from relatively stable social orders, with well recognised scales of inequality that allowed for more or less homogenous and collective processes to deal with redistribution, established with notable guarantees of continuity, to situations characterised by heterogeneity, fragmentation and complexities that are only explicable in terms of a vertiginous process of individualisation. Inequalities still exist, but their nature has changed significantly. There is no longer a predominant axis of inequality. Instead, there is a multiplicity of axes of inequality and vulnerability. The historic accumulation of risk in certain social sectors had allowed them to develop many diverse collective responses to hardship, that sought not only to attempt to provide concrete solutions to the problems of collective living and working conditions, but also to make themselves heard on a political stage that was designed for other collectives and other sorts of problems. Compared to previous social structures based on large groupings and significant continuities, today we have an increasingly fragmented social mosaic, with infinitely diversifying conditions of living, working and citizenship. This makes it very difficult to articulate responses that incorporate a collective sense of belonging and a natural and spontaneous strategic direction. Even patterns of cohabitation no longer look the same as they did in the industrial age. While this has created very positive changes in terms of feminine emancipation, through training and access to the job market, it also

has repercussions in terms of weakening the primary instances of socialisation and the transmission of criteria for community involvement.

This combination of changes and profound transformations in productive, social and family spheres has undermined the fundamental bases on which the public powers are built. The market and underlying economic powers have been globalised, while the representative institutions and the power that they emanate remains, for the most part, anchored in national territories. Globalisation has imposed new logics on the political relationship between economic power and political institutions, noticeably reducing the power of political forces to affect economic activity, which is increasingly presented as being a "natural" process. It is in this context that the problems generated by economic globalisation and the processes of individualisation reveal themselves on a daily basis. Institutional fragmentation increases, as the state loses power upwards (to supra-state institutions), downwards (through processes of decentralisation, devolution, etc) and to the sides (with a significant increase in public-private partnerships, private management of public services, and a growing involvement of not-for-profit institutions on the public sector scene). At the same time, the hierarchical logic that has always characterised the exercise of power does not help us to understand today's processes of public decision-making. These are increasingly based on logics of interdependence, capacity for influence and relative power. At the same time, the role of the law and the exercise of formal hierarchies are becoming less relevant.

It is in this new context that we must situate the debate about the possible deficiencies of representative democracy. We must relate changes in the political system to changes in ways of living and working. Understanding that today's political dynamic moves in an unsalaried, deregulated and disconnected context, with considerable material, familial, educational and sanitary precarity. We have not grown accustomed to this. Democracy is discussed in terms of it's health, vitality and capacity to recapture the public imagination, as though it were an *acquis*, something undisputed, and undisputable from any perspective, be it territorial or collective, and accessible to anybody. Furthermore, it is discussed as though everyone understood the same thing when we speak of democracy.

2. DEMOCRACY?

It is not easy to enter deeper into the debate about democracy and its meanings, past, present and future, if we do not clarify a little to what we are referring. This is no simple task, given the many volumes that have been written and continue to be written on the subject. We accept that some minimum rules should exist about what a democratic exercise consists of[1]. However we know that the existence of these rules

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[1] According to the most generalised convention, these formal rules would be: representative assembly chosen by the citizens, and with the capacity to make laws; non-descrimination in the conditions of citizenship and equality of voting for all those legally of age, whatever their condition; freedom of election between candidates and parties that compete with each other, with diverse alternatives in order to be representative of the nation; decisions taken by majority, with respect and guarantees for

does not imply that the ends of equality, not only juridical, but also social and economic, which have always inspired the struggle for the democratisation of our societies, will be achieved. This aspiration for equality has been the *raison d'etre* of democratic movements since they first upset the theocrats and authoritarians in power. The "Levellers" in England, or Babeuf's "egaux", to go back to the origins, did not make the principle of representation a constitutive element of their new regimes. Instead, they sought to make the egalitarian, democratic aspiration a reality.

In recent years, the great change of era we are experiencing has emptied our capacity to influence the actions of government. This is despite the fact that many of the formal elements of our condition as citizens who live and exercise our rights in a democratic state remain intact. With this growing disempowerment of the popular capacity to influence and shape decisions, the legitimacy of a democratic system that maintains only its formal and institutional rites and trappings is being lost. Hirschman[2] says that a democratic regime achieves legitimacy when its decisions emanate from complete and open deliberation amongst its groups, organs and representatives. However, this is less and less apparent in the case of citizens, and increasingly limited to the entities, corporations and economic lobby groups that are escaping the logic of state-market-sovereignty and taking advantage of their new capacity for global mobility. Public powers are less and less able to affect business and economic activity, and, on the other hand, the corporations continue to influence and apply pressure to institutions that no longer have the mechanisms to balance out this game that they used to have at their disposal.[3]

The very evolution of the liberal-democratic regimes has always excluded those social sectors that did not meet the minimum capacities and conditions vital to fully exercising their citizenship. This political exclusion was achieved through laws (assigning the already mentioned income thresholds that turned suffrage and political life into a things of the few; gerrymandering; excluding the young, women, and those who wandered the country looking for work; prohibiting the existence of certain parties, or making their existence difficult,) or through simply leaving by the wayside those who, although they could, do not exercise their political rights, as they are more concerned with more urgent issues, such as survival, where to fond shelter, or how to find work. Recently, since the end of the "Thirty Glorious years"[4], this politically excluded sector will not stop multiplying. That is because circumstances of social exclusion are also multiplying (and social exclusion always brings with it a reduction in the exercise of citizenship), and because there is a growing sense of the futility of the institutional-democratic exercise in this "low intensity democracy". People are becoming increasingly aware of the limitation of governments' and

minorities; the ptinciple of government responsibility to the people's will expresse in the assembly or in the head of state elected in the same way. For a synthetic analisis and an "authority" on the topic, see N.Bobbio, "Democracia" in *Dizionario di Politica*, Milán, 1990, TEA, p.287 and ss.

[2] A.O.Hirschman, *The Rethoric of Reaction*, Belknap, Harvard, 1991, p.169
[3] C. Crouch, *Posdemocracia*, Taurus, Madrid, 2004
[4] The name given in France to the years 1945 to 1975, in which the principles of the market and compensating for its inequalities were with powerful policies of redistribution were established.

institutions' real capacity to do anything on the new globalised economic stage, and the political-institutional actors are becoming increasingly closed into a self-sufficient world of their own. The reservoir of legitimacy for this democracy is running dry, just when it's apparent hegemony as the "only" acceptable and viable system of government appears to be stronger than ever.

In this context, the transformations and changes to which we have already alluded have reduced democracy to a mere word. These days it is an expression, a term that, as time goes by, means less and less. The use, and abuse, of the word, and its apparent inviolability, makes it increasingly redundant, and less politically defining. The big international organisations, the big world powers (directly responsible in many cases for local and global situations of severe inequality), and states or political actors all over the world, use the term, brandishing it in order to justify what they do, or criticise what they do not do. However, no doubt, if we attempt to recover the complex, underlying meaning of the word democracy, and the aspirations to equality essential to put it into practice, it is not exactly something that will be taken on by this enormous and varied collection of actors and institutions in a peaceful way, without contradictions.

If the institutional actors, and with them the political parties and the big Trades Union organisations, which have become increasingly inextricably embroiled in the institutional fabric of the state, do detect the signs of disconnection and disaffection among the citizens, they attempt to accommodate themselves to the new situation. They seek, new ways to survive, in an often perverse game played with the media, that great receptacle of internal and external institutional interaction. Either social movements extend their nepotistic links with the institutional structures, or they attempt to find alternatives that immediately distance them from the conventional political game. The citizens become more cynically sceptical about the activities of political institutions, and we could confirm that most have simply "accepted" that a system of genuine representation simply does not exist, and that this is just another hardship to be bourn in societies where life is increasingly complex. In this sense, the relationship with politicians and institutions must become more utilitarian, more one of use and discard, with few hopes of influence or "authentic" interaction.

Faced with this barrage of problems and assertions, how do we advance? Democracy is still the answer. We just have to regain our capacity to rephrase the question.

3. SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

Democracy has no reason to be considered an end in itself. What is at stake, what the question could be, is: how can we move towards a world in which the ideals of liberty and equality can be fulfilled in the most satisfactory manner, whilst at the same time maintaining the acceptance of diversity as a structural element of an inevitably global stage? The answer remains: democracy. A democracy that recovers the transformational, egalitarian and participatory sense that it had in years gone by. With this, it will overcome the utilitarian, formalist, minimalist vision has so often

been accessory to the many deep inequalities and exclusions in existence around the world. A democracy that is a response to the new economic, social and political challenges we are facing. We must remember that capitalism and democracy have never been terms that easily coexisted. The equalising force of democracy marries very uneasily with an economic system that considers inequality something natural, inevitable; to be lived with, as any effort to the contrary would be considered something that distorts optimum market conditions. We do not mean to say that democracy and market economics are incompatible, only that they cannot coexist without tension. This tension emerges from the eminently confrontational and antagonistic character of policies that cannot break from social divisions. Instead, they often attempt to minimise this conflict or silence the discordant voices, using an apparently universal consensus called "democracy". There may be consensus with those who defend the ethical and political values of liberty and equality for all, but there will always be political conflict as to the specific interpretation of those values, and the subordinate conditions that are unequal from the outset will continue to be destabilised.[5]

We have to find new forms of economic development, recovering the capacity of government to balance and create borders that restrict what is currently an apparently limitless expansion of corporate power at a global level, with growing inequality levels of inequality and despair for many collectives and individuals. For this we need different things. On the one hand, we need to reinforce existing social-economic formulas and find new ways of creating both individual and collective wealth and welfare. We need to take the debate about democratisation and break into spheres that seem to be armour plated: what is understood by "growth"? What do we mean by "development"? Who defines costs and benefits? We must consider apparently objective and neutral economic options in terms of who wins and who loses in each case. On the other hand, we need to find formulas that regulate, arbitrate and tax those international economic and financial transaction that currently follow routes that make it extremely difficult for governments to supervise them, even in the hypothetical case that they wanted or intended to really exercise this control.

We must also explore and strengthen forms of social organisation that favour the reconstruction of social links and the articulation of collective senses of belonging that are respectful of individual autonomy. In this sense, reinforcing communal approaches and experiences of formulating and implementing public policy is something that we must, without doubt, follow up and consolidate. In the same way, it is important to articulate frameworks and platforms that link different local experiments, allowing cross fertilisation and reflection on the different practices used in different areas. It is also important to recognise the political and transformational significance of the many social experiences that are currently considered mere curiosities, or as contrary to the dominant individualism. Finally, it is important to understand that there is a considerable amount of "politics" in what can apparently be defined as merely "new social dynamics".

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[5] On this see: Ch.Mouflle, *On the Political*, Routledge, 2005

From a more strictly political point of view, the first thing we must do is understand that politics does not stop at the institutions. The second thing we must understand is that politics means that capacity to respond to collective problems. It therefore seems important to advance new forms of collective participation and democratic innovation that are not disconnected from the specific changes that are taking place in the ways people live their lives. There is little sense in continuing to talk about participatory democracy, and new forms of political participation, if we limit ourselves to working in the narrow field of political institutions, or on how to improve the channels of relations and interaction between the institutions of political representation and society itself. This is particularly the case, when these institutions base their position on a principle that is openly flouted every day. The principle is that all citizens have the same conditions of access to all forms of legally established political expression. On the contrary, the reality is that these conditions of access are socially determined and unequally distributed. To further the universalisation of the capacity and propensity to act and think politically, we must universalise the means that give access to the historic exercise of citizenship that we have called democracy.[6]

Owing to these tensions, it probably often seems that the political organisations aiming for social change debate alternatives that seem to be mutually exclusive. For some, if you want to have political influence and/or survive as an organisation, you have to work in and from the institutions. Only in that way will you reach broad swathes of the population, and that is the only way of really changing things. For others it is only possible to transform the situation from outside the institutions. To be "on the inside" is to implicitly reinforce the institutions and give legitimacy to their way of doing things, a way of doing things that loses all capacity to effect real change. From this point of view, no transformation is possible within the narrow confines of the democratic/media game. Political action does not change anything if it is limited to the institutions, without taking into account the regulations, and the social contexts that produce relationships of domination. Among this group are those who are simply on the "outside", who rebel against the institutions, and there are others who try to find alternatives, and to show that another politics is possible. It is clear that, outside the institutions, there are fewer internal contradictions, but the capacity to influence and to spread ideas and messages on a media stage that is extremely focussed on the interaction of elites can also be significantly reduced.

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[6] See L.Wacquant, "Pointers on Bourdieu and Democratic Politics", in L.Wacquant, (ed.), *Pierre Bourdieu and Democratic Politics*, Polity Press, 2005, pp.10-28

Image 1
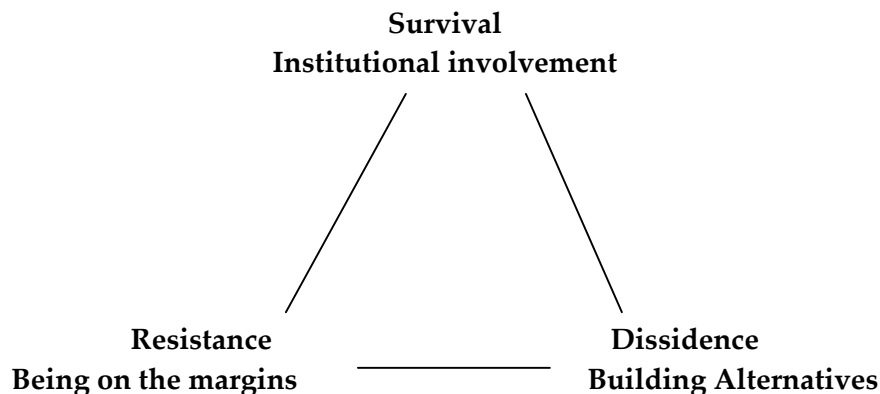
The question is whether it is possible, to combine these different alternatives (See Image 1). To express "resistance" and "rebellion" against a reality that is presented to us as the only possible reality, whilst building "alternatives" to this reality, applying pressures and tensions to the institutions in order to "influence" them and achieve substantial changes in the way they operate, and above all, advance the processes of change to a system that still maintains high levels of social and political inequity. This requires going beyond the debate about participatory democracy and its relationship with representative democracy, framed as though it only served to complement, improve and reinforce the one (representative democracy) by means of the new wisdom brought by the other (participatory democracy). If we talk about egalitarian democracy, we will probably be marking a point of inflection. We will combine political democratic innovation with social and economic transformation. We know very well that equal rights to vote does not solve economic or cognitive inequality, nor does it solve inequalities in power and resources of all types that exist between some groups and others. If we speak of egalitarian democracy, we are signalling the necessity to confront all these inequalities from a global point of view focused on transformation. From this perspective, it becomes necessary to analyse and promote new experiences and participatory processes.

4. EXPERIMENTS IN DEMOCRACY

If the proposal is to work in the places where institutions and social movements meet, between institutional politics and unconventional politics, combining representative democracy with participatory democracy from an egalitarian democratic perspective, with political involvement, and the will to effect change, then issues, problems and ways of acting should be chosen that connect well to this perspective. In this way, we can try to operate in this border country, or, to put it another way, we can try offer the body of collectives and interested parties that are relating to this double dynamic responses that have criteria and equal legitimacy. However, we must take care not to fall into pure experimentation, which has already

been seen to simply attempt to improve "communication", "empathy" and "synergies" between the existing institutions and society as a whole.

It is not simply a question of defying conventional politics, but of working at the limits of the conventional. What is required is the generation of autonomous spaces, that confront the capacity of the institutions to "recuperate" everything, and that confront those political organisations that work exclusively from within. What is "useful" will therefore be that which (also) reinforces the autonomy of the social actors, not only that which proves "useful" to the institutions. What is "useful" will be that which helps us to learn, and that which reinforces and consolidates, that which gives more power to movements and social organisations, and not that which (only) serves to give more legitimacy to the institutions. What is "useful" will be that which comes from the local, and connects to the concerns, problems, movements and debates that go beyond the local, not that which is only resolves the "local problem". What is "useful" will be that which goes beyond a strictly utilitarian and instrumental vision of politics.

We must insist that the issue is not to "improve" what is already there, nor to "correct" the current deficiencies. We are facing problems of structural change and of growing complexity, to which we have already alluded. These problems require coming to terms with structural and complex issues. We therefore propose orienting experiences of egalitarian democracy towards a perspective of alternatives to the predominant models in our society. We should not forget questions of interpersonal relations and coexistence in these experiences and processes of transformation. It is not simply a question of talking about change, but of feeling and experiencing different ways of living together, which defend individual autonomy, and also build collective autonomy and a sense of community. In this way dynamics of responsibility and personal implication in the processes of change are created, that go beyond the logic of delegation and representation that currently predominates.

The numbers of the excluded, of those "without voice", are increasing. Institutional politics works within a logic of mediation in which political involvement is essentially based on the concept of adhesion from a distance. It does not require, nor does it propose any mobilisation apart from at election times. Even then, the important issue is not so much how many people participate, as the proper development of the "rites", in order to then resume a process that, outside of the elections, is not a matter for the electorate, but for the individuals who have been elected. The principal concept of citizenship is a negative one. When the next election comes around, the citizens will have the power to oust their governors from power if they do not like what they have done. They can also appeal against a government action via the appropriate judicial channels, or ask that the leader resign if they believe he has crossed the line that surrounds exercise of his power. The routes available to exercise a positive vision of citizens rights, through campaigns, mobilisations, legislative initiatives, popular consultations,…, are narrow and torturous, because it is understood that these undertakings should be initiated by the institutions, and that the parties that work in them are the only entities capable of leading and promoting such processes. The experiences of egalitarian democracy

should, above all, try to incorporate those who are not normally present in conventional political life. This demands changes in the ways that we understand participation and politics, and searching for forms that (re)connect projects, individuals and collectives, working with policies that incorporate those without a voice, learning to be citizens in everyday life, and participating in effecting real transformations to living conditions.

Finally, I want to draw attention to some other aspects that are, to my mind, important. The tradition to which left wing movements in the west subscribe, has tended to connect processes of social transformation to processes of change that essentially come from "above", and draw on the resources and knowledge of "those in the know"[7] Both these perspectives are clearly limiting, in the context of the egalitarian democracy we are now thinking about. The "state centric" model has dominated proposals for change for a long time. The problem to be solved was "who" was to occupy institutional power. This variable was the decisive one. If the party or political force at the head of the political institutions had a perspective geared towards political and social transformation, and had the support of the electorate, then change was inevitable. This change was conceived and defined by an illustrious vision that ensured sufficient "quality" in the alternatives being developed. This combination is, today, proving tremendously restrictive, and to a large extent it explains the critical distancing of a large part of the citizenry from a institutional-political game in which the only thing that seems to be at stake is who occupies power, and who is charged with administering the technical resources and know-how amassed by these institutions. What this suggests is that the complexity of today's social situations requires collective approaches to define the problems and find their solutions. What is relevant is not so much the design of good policies to resolve people's problems from a hierarchical position of power, knowledge and "expertise", as the involvement of the people in defining the problematic points in the development of alternatives that may be found. There is a need to accept that knowledge is plural and that policies should be shared from the moment of their conception in order to be effective. It is therefore a question of recognising the plurality of the sources of social and political change, and overcoming the state centric view.

It is also a good idea to remember that there are many types of knowledge and wisdom. It is therefore important to recover "memories" of social change and transformation, to recover and value the tacit and implicit knowledge possessed by many social actors and many sectors of the population, who do not only aspire to be the centre of political attention and transforming concerns, but also to be political subjects with their own voice. The participatory and egalitarian democracy we are proposing should recover the voice, the presence and the wisdom of those who have kept out of the decision-making processes. It should also reinforce the educational capacity of participation, as this demands that we understand our own interests, and those of others. There are definitely many things left for us to do.

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[7] See H. Wainwright, *Reclaim the State. Experiments in Popular Democracy*, Verso, 2003

MODERNISING PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION FROM THE LEFT

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1. FROM THE TECHNOLOGICAL TO THE POLITICAL AND FROM SIMPLICITY TO COMPLEXITY

In recent years, much has been said about the crisis facing public bureaucracy and administration, and about the need to transform it through a series of modernising measures. This has been a central assumption of most government agendas, and at the same time, it has generated a prolific amount of literature on the subject. In this article we aim, on the one hand, to summarise the most meaningful aspects of the proposals for modernisation that have dominated the political stage in recent years, and, on the other hand, to make an evaluation that allows us to discover and propose new alternatives. These evaluations and alternatives are presented from an explicitly political point of view, giving ideological content to the discourse about modernising public administrations.

However, before approaching these two objectives, we want to make the starting point of our approach clear, by exposing two fallacies deeply rooted in the dominant discourse and perceptions of the topic.

> *1st fallacy: administration is technical, technical and, if anything, more technical*

Anyone with an ounce of common sense understands that administration ought to be a world of technicalities, neutrality and professionalism: a world into which political considerations and ideological disputes do not enter. The administration should concern itself with doing things in the best way possible, without embroiling itself in sterile debates about whether something is more left or right wing. Anyone with an ounce of common sense will confirm that these questions are simply an absurd waste of time. In which case I must have no sense, as I am convinced that reducing administration to a world of technicalities is a fallacy. I am not saying that it would be good or bad, simply that it is fallacious. That is to say that while it might ultimately be a good thing if that eminently sensible vision were right; the problem is that it is not. Administration is simply not a world of technicalities, neutrality and professionalism.

On the contrary, administration is a highly politicised world. That is a controversial statement, which questions the most deep-rooted visions, not only of administration, but of democracy itself (Brugué, 1996; Moore, 1998). On the one hand, this

politicisation contradicts the dominant Weberian vision according to which administration is nothing more than a rational body to carry out instructions. On the other hand, those instructions come from a political system that is the only democratically legitimate decision making system. As some analysts state, democracy must be the dictator over the administration. If not, it would be as though decision-making power were transferred to an illegitimate sphere (Fox and Miller, 1995). Politicising the administration therefore goes definitively against both rationality and democracy. We could not be off to a worse start.

Why then chose this starting point? In the first place, there are theoretical arguments to justify our position. We cannot dwell on them here, but we can recall the many learned people who have questioned the so-called Wilsonian dichotomy, which focuses on the distinction between the administrative world (of technicalities and neutrality) and the political world (of debates and decisions). Doubt has been cast on this separation for various reasons, such as the difficulty in drawing the dividing line between the two worlds (on which side do the general managers fall? And the civil servants?), the recognition of power relations produced in administrative spaces (don't administrators have their own opinions? Don't they try to defend them in the face of alternative visions?), the complexity of the relationship established between the two spheres (who defines what has to be done: he politician with little experience, or the technician who has worked all his life in the field?), or the recognition of the autonomy of the actors involved (it is not true that while the politician sets the scene, the administrator is left with plenty of room for manoeuvre?) (Wamsley and Wolf, 1996; Nelissen *et al*, 1999).

If we allow sense to reflect, and not say the first thing that comes into its head, it will perhaps realise its initial error and recognise that administration is not technical, technical and more technical. Starting this article by invoking the political and ideological content of public administration may seem an excessively conceptual beginning, of merely academic interest: a discussion by left-wing intellectuals, for left-wing intellectuals. That is not the case. In fact, it is easier to understand from the point of view of common sense and intuition than from that of great analytical contributions. While the complex intersections between politics and administration may be difficult to explain, they are very easy to identify in everyday life. We all see them continuously. We all know that civil servants are not simply the executors of policy, but that they also define and condition policymaking. We all know that any civil servant may turn received instructions around, and, in this way, detract from the politics that are theoretically being applied. We are all used to saying, "*everything is political*", but then we do not want to recognise it.

The men and women of sense may now say that I am right, but they will doubtless also be saying *what a pity that things are how they are, and not how they ought to be.* That is the second fallacy to which I referred in my introduction:

> *2nd fallacy: it is a pity that administration is invalidated by political criteria, which only distort its function.*

It saddens us to think of the politicisation of the administration, because we assume that such politicisation is synonymous with distortion. Politics distorts ways of operating that should only be conditioned by technical questions. That is the first reaction of sense, however, once again we would like to give sense a second chance to think. Thinking of politics as distorting is both a great lie, and entirely obvious. It is a lie because, in fact, the existence of a policy implies having direction and aims, without which it is difficult to drive any organisation. For example, in the private sector, the existence of clear and explicit business policy is recognised as the best guarantee of the good functioning of an organisation. In the public sector, however, it appears we are so masochistic that we think politics is a nuisance; something we should not even try to improve, but we must simply do away with. On the other hand, the fact that politics distorts can also be interpreted as obvious, since that is precisely what it is about. Politics must serve to shape administrative activity. This cannot be interpreted as distortion; it is a requirement of the process.

The political justification of the administration is nothing new. In fact, it is an opinion that those who defend the need to be *dictators* with the administration would share. Given that the aims are political, they would say, it is essential that these be determined by the appropriate people (the politicians), the administration should not figure in the process. The dominant slogan would be that each task should be dealt with by correct person or department: *each to their own*. However, this approach only works when the politicians are capable of identifying and clearly defining the aims that must guide the administration. Only in this way will the population consider them to be legitimate and the administration will be able to use them as a guide for its ultimately technical and neutral actions.

The problem is that things are not that simple. Indeed, every day they get more complex, and consequently, the most conventional approaches get weaker and more tremulous. It is not necessary to theorise too much about it, as that same common sense I have already invoked on a number of occasions will allow us to understand that politicians face many difficulties both in identifying their aims, and in defining them clearly. It is not a simple question of incompetence among the current political class, but of the growing complexity, flexibility, volatility and dynamism of our world. If the task in hand is to impart a lesson, cure an illness, build a road, or distribute unemployment benefit, it is clear that we can transfer our political will to the technician specialising in the matter at hand. The task can be dealt with by the corresponding person: *each to their own.* On the other hand, if we are concerned with immigration, sustainability, or the regeneration of a neighbourhood, to which technician should we turn? To whom does it correspond? It is clear that it does not correspond to any one specific person, but to many people. It is also clear that we are dealing with assumptions so complex that they escape the confines of the merely technical and situate themselves in an uncertain world of opinions, preferences and interests… in short, politics.

The great challenge of our institutions is that the conventional recipe of *each to their own* is no longer able to confront the complexities of today's world. Meanwhile the alternative of *we do it all together* has not yet been understood, going as it does against

the grain of long traditions of common sense and making the hair of any sensible person stand on end. These are serious difficulties, however, there is no other option: we *must* do it all together, combining our efforts, incorporating different points of view, and generating complicity. It is time for the learned to share their wisdom.

In terms of operation, from the point of view of the administration, that means that it is necessary to incorporate new elements into their essentially political operational dynamic; elements such as dialogue, negotiation, and pacts between the different points of view affected by the matter in hand. It will therefore be necessary to propose radical change and to move on from the traditional need to be a dictator with bureaucracy, to the challenge of democratising it. The modernisation of the traditional public administration (TPA) is one of those voyages that leaves its mark, and makes us change the ways we think and act. The TPA is that system which functions through a process of assigning tasks and responsibilities to the corresponding people, according to the technical competence required. Modernisation of this system paints us a new stage in which the challenge is giving form to interactions between the many actors who participate in the identification, design and putting into practice of policies. Put in a more intuitive way:

> *The challenge of administrative modernisation is not to improve fficiency, but to replace the logic of each to their own with the logic of we will do it all together*

The identification of this challenge as the central axis of administrative modernisation is not neutral. In fact, most specialists would probably disagree. The very choice of this as the challenge is to take a position that I understand to be coherent with the values of the political left. To take on board the complexities of today's world and to want to approach them through dialogue between all interested parties breaks with the 'efficientist' positions that have dominated neo-liberal discourse. It is stating that we should not be defending trenches, the slogan of modernisation should not be the three E's made popular by Thatcherism (economy, efficiency and effectiveness) but the satisfaction of the needs, demands and expectations of a community that engages in dialogue in order to face its collective problems. It may be that some say I am going to far, that I am no longer talking about administrative modernisation, that I have failed to resist the distorting influence of personal ideological positions. It is true that I have not resisted it. I would go even further; I hope to be able to *debate* it with a model for administrative modernisation that, although it hides it, is just as ideological as my own. I am not leaving the playing field; I am simply offering a reminder of what its dimensions are.

> *I want to express my arguments from the left, because it is on the left that we find a substantial concern for defining (democratically) what social well being is, and for participating (democratically) in attaining it.*

2. FROM INSTRUMENTAL EFFICIENCY TO SUBSTANTIVE INCLUSION

In the previous section, we have looked at the driving motor of modernisation. It seems everyone agrees that the profound social, economic, technological, cultural, and other kinds of changes that we have experienced in last few decades provide this driving force. However, we are not in such agreement when it comes to deciding what sort of fuel will make the motor run.

The Right Wing and the crisis of efficiency in the welfare state

From the dominant neo-liberal point of view, the fuel that will enable the motor of transformation to start is found in the crisis of the Keynesian welfare state, and, more specifically, in the costs and inefficiencies that it generates. We are therefore facing an instrumental difficulty, a problem of operation that therefore needs to be approached from a management perspective. The principal problem we must face in order to situate ourselves on the new globally transformed stage lies, according this point of view, in the failure of the state and administrative tools availale: the state is too big, while the administration is absurdly inefficient. The responses are immediate: reduce the state and modernise the administrative machinery (Metcalfe and Richards, 1987; Echebarría and Losada, 1992; Osborne and Plastrik, 1998).

If we focus on the second aspect, on the modernisation of the administrative apparatus, we can observe how the neo-liberal diagnosis of the nature of the crisis in the welfare state conditions the aims of the policies to be applied. The crisis in the welfare state is, from their point of view, the manifestation of a gargantuan and inefficient administration; a parasite that sucks the blood of the economy and society. The rosy cheeks of the administrative budgets have led to the anaemia and sunken haggard faces of civil society. This can all be resolved if we just dismantle the monster. It is not a question of criticising what it does, so much as the costly and inefficient way in which it does it. It is not a debate about why the administration exists, so much as an operative discussion about how it should function. The aims of administrative modernisation must be instrumental, for what else could they be?

As I have already mentioned, the Thatcherite propaganda of the 1980s defines these aims with the slogan of the three E's: economy, efficiency and effectiveness. The first two aims are clearly instrumental (doing things with less resources and/or making better use of those available resources) while the third appears to be substantive (achieve what we had planned). In practice, the first two objectives have imposed themselves, while the will to be effective seems to have been made to depend on the same criteria as economy and efficiency. Achieving the desired aims (effectiveness) has come to mean reducing costs and increasing efficiency. These two instrumental criteria have also become the ultimate substantive aims. It is for this reason that I prefer to refer to the to neo-liberal aims with an adaptation of its best-known slogan: the two E's, or, as I alluded in the title of this section, instrumental efficiency. Neo-liberal modernisation, does not try to transform the administration, but to downsize it (economy) and rationalise it (efficiency). The monster is the same, but reduced and domesticated.

The instrumental aims of neo-liberal modernisation: The two E's (economy and efficiency)

These arguments have come to be so dominant that in the end, they seem too obvious to require explanation. People of sense may be perplexed by this apparently pointless exercise of establishing economy and efficiency as the aims of administrative modernisation. What other aims could possibly guide us? That is what we are now going to discuss.

The left and the crisis of inclusion in a complex society

The neo-liberals consider the welfare state to be the cause of the crisis, the fuel that starts the motor of transformation. However, that is a simple and superficial argument, against which it is easy to present an alternative reading of the situation: a reading that considers the crisis in the welfare state not as the cause, but as the consequence of a series of changes that have left it dislocated. The welfare state is not so much the monster as the victim. The welfare state is in crisis, but it did not provoke it, so much as suffer it. The fuel of change is not the crisis in the welfare state but a series of fundamental transformations that have effectively left the prevailing model of government and administration in a more than delicate situation.
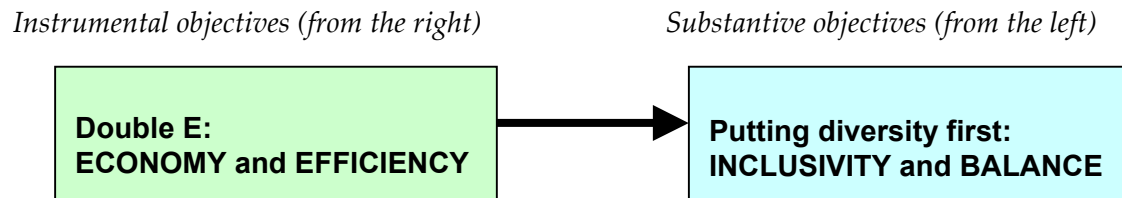
The aim should not be to improve the tools. It is not a question of downsizing and rationalising, but of inventing something different. The challenge is how to respond to the exigencies and substantive demands of a new social order. In this context, the two E's are meaningless; they are just an excuse to shift everything around, without actually changing anything. The most important thing is not to underline the high costs and ultimate inefficiencies in the administration of welfare, but to recognise the difficulties faced by the traditional public administration in responding to the demands of an increasingly complex, unstable and diverse society. The aim of administrative modernisation is precisely that: the capacity to respond to complexity and, in this way, to achieve social inclusion for the growing diversity that has recently come to characterise it. (Hajer and Wagenaar, 2003; Kooiman, 2003).

We have replaced the instrumental aims of the two E's with a substantive aim. It is not about improving the *how* of administrative functions, but of adapting the *why* to the new circumstances. Administrative modernisation no longer needs to concentrate on doing things better. It must look instead to improving the context in which it intervenes. The focus of the aim moves from inside the administration to outside it. What it finds on the outside is an increasingly fragmented and polarised society, a society that is explosively diverse and seems to have lost its capacity to balance itself. The public administration must prepare itself to act on this reality, profiting from the richness of diversity, whilst enabling everyone to feel part of the whole; included. It is about balancing a society that tends toward disequilibrium, not of improving the administrative machinery. (Figure 1). With that, we do not want to say that the machinery does not need adjustments and changes, but that we cannot make those adjustments and changes the overriding aim of our administrative modernisation. If

we were to do that, we would be turning administration into an end in itself, forgetting the substantive ends that justify its existence.

> *The substantive aims of modernisation from the point of view of the left: INCLUSION and BALANCE (in diversity)*

Figure 1. The alternative aims of administrative modernisation

Instrumental objectives (from the right)   *Substantive objectives (from the left)*

Double E: ECONOMY and EFFICIENCY	→	Putting diversity first: INCLUSIVITY and BALANCE

3. FROM THE 'NEW PUBLIC MANAGEMENT' TO THE 'DELIBERATIVE ADMINISTRATION'

Once we have evaluated the diverse aims that can be pursued by modernisation projects, the moment arrives to look at their content. Now, having clarified *why*, we can enter freely into a discussion of *how*.

The Right Wing and administrative reinvention

Guided by the most strictly instrumental concerns, processes of modernisation are proposed with a proliferation of labels, such as 'the reinvention of government' (Osborne and Gaebler, 1994), 'postbureaucracy' (Barzelay, 1992) or the 'new public management' (NPM) (Hood, 1994). Each of these labels represents a description and an interpretation of the principal lines of administrative modernisation. However, more importantly, each of these labels contains a discursive strategy, a message that – consciously or unconsciously – conditions the possibilities for understanding and thinking about aspects of administration.

As Pollitt recognises (1993), this discursive strategy has turned administrative modernisation (which he defines as *managerialism*) into an ideology. It has turned it into a collection of values and practices that assume that through improved management (an instrumental aim that becomes an end in itself) we will resolve other, more fundamental, economic and social problems (what should be an ultimate aim becomes and indirect consequence). In this way, the neo-liberal administrative reinvention becomes an ideology that assigns a kind of an apocalyptic role to management. Improving management is central, as its positive effects will spread into other areas. There is therefore no need to do much in these areas, apart from wait for the effects of managerial improvements to be felt. (Clarke and Newman, 1997).

This neo-liberal belief is articulated through a simple black and white discourse that opposes an undesirable past with a hopeful future. This discourse criticises the administration of the welfare state and offers us a happy alternative, but never once justifies its criticisms, or its alternatives, nor the strategies proposed for passing from the past to the future. The words themselves – both negative and hopeful – become the argument. Aznar's *with me or with my enemies* has its origins in this neo-liberal discourse of modernisation. Two of his gurus exemplify this:

Hammer and Champy's Reengineering (1993)	
From (undesirable past)	To (hopeful future)
Simple employment	Multidimensional employment
Controlling roles	Enabling roles
Values of protection	Productive values
Managers who supervise	Managers who lead
Hierarchical structures	Level structures
Emphasis on activity	Emphasis on results
Osborne and Gaebler's Reinvention (1994)	
From (undesirable past)	To (hopeful future)
Rowing	Steering
Serving	Enabling
Financing inputs	Financing outputs
Orientation towards bureaucracy	Orientation towards clients
Curing	Winning
Hierarchy	Teamwork

It is clear that this sort of reasoning suffers from simplification and a permanent confusion between description and prescription; between what is an (unjustified) explanation of reality, and an (also unjustified) affirmation of what we would like to see. However, it is also clear that this simplification is seen as decisiveness and that the lack of justification produces a clear and easy to transmit message. Essentially, neo-liberal modernisation supports itself on fragile columns of glass, but their splendour lifts our gaze.

What are these columns? What are the supporting concepts of neo-liberal modernisation, or, to use a term that has become popular, of the new public management (NPM)? To answer these questions what we must do is order and give coherence to the tangle of terms and concepts that make up the new vocabulary of modernisation. When we talk today about the NPM, we see motivated, multi-tasking workers, strategic plans, quality control programmes, framework contracts, clients, managers, result indexes, management by objectives, monitoring schemes, and fifty-thousand other seductive and promising things. One way of understanding this proliferation of novelties is to group them under the larger headings of the two pillars that support the NPM:

1. *A "macho" administration*. Under this heading, which I accept is of dubious political correctness, come all those initiatives that aim to dismantle an organisation made up of individuals who spend all day at lunch, talking about Sunday's game, and building a new organisation where the individuals are under pressure, and made to sweat. The idea is to kick out bureaucratic irresponsibility and replace it with the obligation to produce accounts that market and competition imposes. From this point of view, the principal defect of the TPA lies in its inability to reward and punish, the fact that it is impossible to ensure that actions, for better or worse, have consequences. Without these consequences, the TPA has descended into bedlam or, worse yet, a nest of useless fools. University professors, myself included, would be the best example. To counteract this situation and bring about the recovery of the "macho" spirit that characterises the market, the NPM proposes a series of modernising measures, such as the externalisation of services, the division of roles, increased managerialism, management by objectives, framework contracts, the creation of quasi-markets, etc. (Walsh, 1995; López Casanovas *et al*, 2003)

2. *An administration of "good vibes"*. It is not clear whether it complements or contradicts the first, since it postulates that improving the administration does not depend on the competence of the "machos" that inhabit it, but on its "good vibe", on collaboration between the people that constitute it. Now the problem of the TPA switches from lack of responsibility to segmentation. The principal bureaucratic evil is found in its rationalising and professionalising soul. This internal logic closes us into the famous Weberian iron cage and impedes communication and coordination. An administration made up of little kingdoms is a rigid administration, closed in on itself, without the ability to respond, without flexibility, and without creativity. In order to promote these virtues, the NPM proposes framework contracts, reforming human resources management, improvement teams, service charts, quality circles, strategic plans, participatory management models, processes of administrative decentralisation, etc. (Peters and Waterman, 1992; Pollitt *et al*, 1998; Sancho, 1999).

The ambivalent message of the NPM: to be simultaneously more competitive and more collaborative

Over the last two decades the NPM has been build on these two pillars. However, as I have already stated, they are pillars of glass, brilliant, but fragile. This fragility has been shown in many critical works, of which I will outline just a few here. (Aubert and de Gaulejac, 1993; Heckscher and Donnellon, 1994; Ritzer, 1996; Sennet, 1998). However, we are not so much concerned here with making a complete evaluation of the successes and failures of the NPM (Ferlie *et al*, 1996; Lane, 1997; Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2000) as with preparing the way for an alternative.

Therefore, in the first place, it is important to be aware that it is the initiatives inspired by what we have called the "macho" administration that have been most decisively deployed. In principle it does not seem inappropriate to think that people should take responsibility for what they do, just as it does not seem overly

inopportune to consider one way of forcing them to take that responsibility is to link the results of their activity to a determined system of incentives. That is what the market does apparently automatically: reward the best and kick out the worst. However, when we export that logic to the public sector, it seems that things are not that simple. In fact, certain conditions are required for the logic to work: knowing what the objectives that we want to achieve are, and being able to measure them. If we don't know what we want, or how to measure it, we cannot demands that people take responsibility for it.

In the private sector, these objectives are immediately obvious: we want to earn more and we measure it in monetary units. Unfortunately, in the public sector clear and simple goals become cumbersome complexities. What do we want from educational policy? What is the objective of the penitentiary system? How do we measure the quality of teaching? How do we calculate the care of the elderly? The problem is not that our politicians are useless and incapable of defining objectives, so much as that those objectives are very varied and contradictory. What is required is not to identify them, but to balance them, and, consequently, there is no hope of reproducing the clarity and precision of the business world. Furthermore, if it is difficult to know what we want, it gets a lot worse when we try to enter into the task of measuring it. This is an often sterile exercise that drives us to turn teaching quality into number of students passed (despite the fact that I know professors who pass students in order not to have to mark a second term). Care of the elderly is measured numbers of deaths (despite the fact that there are homes where no one dies because no one moves from their chairs). Police effectiveness is measured in the speed of telephone response time (something which in some cases has filled offices with police, leaving the streets empty). This obsession with objectives and the ability to measure and calculate them leads us towards neo-liberal modernisation. Faced with the difficulties in fixing final substantive aims, we content ourselves with instrumental ones. We don't really know what higher education is good for, but we reward those that make it cheaper and more efficient. We don't know what we want from penal policy, but we applaud those who reduce the economic burden of the prison population on the state.

> *Setting and measuring objectives enables us to introduce the "macho" logic, but they make instrumental efficiency the final aim of modernisation.*

Secondly, the emphasis on competition has led to the appearance of a *contractual administration*, where relations no longer depend on the subjective relationship between superior and subordinate, but on the objective relationship of a signed contract. Objectivity and clarity in the contractual relationship are what enables it to assign responsibility. It is possible to continue in this vein, but there is a considerable price to pay. Today this price seems unacceptable and has a widely deplored name: rigidity. The growing contractualisation of the administration generates rigidity in a world that proclaims to the four winds the need for flexibility. This may sound like the conclusion of an anti-market radical, of a useless academic who does not want to be submitted to the pressure of competition, but in fact, it is a common sense conclusion. What is the difference between a command relationship and a

contractual one? There is no need to invoke sophisticated theory to understand that in the first instance the instructions can be changed when it seems appropriate (flexibility) while in the second case the contractual clauses must be followed (rigidity).

It is true that floating a contract may stimulate candidates to make a more competitive proposal than that offered by those in steady jobs. However, it is also true that the proposal will be more competitive in terms of being cheaper and more efficient, not in terms of being more flexible (Donahue, 1991). In other words, the contractualisation of the public administration generated sufficient pressure to satisfy one of neo-liberalism's slogans: *do more with less.* However, that same pressure leaves us back where we were, with everyone occupying themselves only with the specific tasks that correspond to their skills, and which, furthermore, are specified in their job description. As before, the NPM brings us to a process of modernisation that does not base itself on what we want to achieve (for example, responding to complexity with flexibility), but which limits itself to reducing of costs. From our point of view, this is a valuable, but secondary aim.

> *A contracted administration is a cheaper administration, but also a less flexible one.*

The second column, that of "good vibes", is not only just as fragile as the first, it is also a lot subtler. We have far fewer experiences at our disposal, and many more failures linked to the quality-control programmes, transversal plans, or the management of human resources, than we have in relation to competition and contracts. This disequilibrium is no coincidence. It comes from the difficulties faced when putting improvements into practice that everyone can see are no more than cosmetic alterations, and which, furthermore, contradict the central, overused message of competition. We cannot promote the aggressive spirit, or, to be less tendentious, competitive resolve, and then demand that people share, that they cooperate with their companions, that they listen to those people who see things from another perspective, and that they waste time trying to reach understandings with others. Others only exist as competitors to motivate me, or is that not how we explain the function of the market?

A "good vibe" is difficult to create in this environment. If it were to be created, it would effectively represent a substantive change that would enable us to advance towards resolving the complex problems and coming to terms with diversity by combining points of view and complementary contributions. These expectations are, however, frustrated, because "good vibes" comes to mean something completely different, and what is demanded of teamwork or a mobile labour force is not more flexibility or dialogue, but, above all, precarity. Our management of human resources, (both public and private) gives out a message that is very difficult to come to terms with, according to which workers must be as flexible as possible (run around like a headless chicken if need be) and, at the same time, they must be fully committed to the company (feel that it is their own). (Sennett 1998). This is a magnificent illustration of the incoherence of the demands: flexibility weakens

commitment, and identity can only be forged through stability. To understand this, once again, requires nothing more than common sense. How can we ask people to work as though the company were theirs, when we do not even want to employ them? How can we expect civil servants to feel responsible for what they do when we are constantly telling them that they are opportunists, and constantly threaten to leave them without a job when the smallest crack appears? What kind of human resources policy is it that defines the personnel as the principal organisational burden?

> *Excellence requires flexibility and commitment, What we have done is turn flexibility into instability and commitment into a lie.*

The NMP has failed. It has not transformed the TPA; it has simply covered it with new labels. Rigidity and lack of dialogue (internal or external) remain distinctive elements of the function of the NPM, and it therefore remains faithful to the TPA's techno-bureaucratic soul.   Although it has improved it's appearance, the rationalising and efficientist essence remains. It continues to proclaim *each to their own*, at the same time as misunderstanding the social impact of a process of downsizing the state and it's administrative apparatus, through the proclamations in favour of the two E's. This is helpfully presented as something technical, something that does not require political discussion, as though it did not have social effects and is limited to administrative improvements. The critiques that explain and justify this failure of the NPM could be a simple academic diversion if it were not for the fact that their impact goes beyond the administrative sphere and becomes an inability to respond to people's problems. My modest attempt to think of alternatives in the following section is not something I understand as an intellectual exercise, it is rather an urgent social need. The oppressive grip of the NPM discourse allows us to improve the economy and efficiency of a tool, but it means we do cannot concern ourselves with that tools' capacity to meet its too often forgotten end: resolving conflicts and creating social well being.

The left and the discovery of deliberative administration

An alternative to neo-liberal modernisation must begin by remembering that the aim of public administration is found outside it, in the society into which it wishes to intervene. As I have already pointed out, we must start with a recognition of the growing complexity and diversity of this outside arena. Once we have established this, modernisation consists of preparing an administration capable of resolving complex problems and to balancing the diverse perspectives that make up today's society. Thus, the aims of this alternative modernisation are not instrumental. They are geared towards guaranteeing both the richness and creativity of their own responses and a commitment to balance in complexity that enables many diverse elements to feel themselves part of a collective whole. It is therefore necessary to think about how we build an administration that is creative and inclusive in its responses to the challenges of an increasingly complex and diverse society.

> *The challenge is not how to make a more efficient administration, but how to make a sufficiently creative and inclusive administration to respond to the collective problems of an increasingly complex and diverse society.*

The creativity and inclusivity of an administration will not be improved by re-rationalisation, as is being proposed by the NPM. The NPM may enable us do things better, but it will not enable us to do them differently. Where then do we find the key to moving the practice towards aims of creativity and inclusivity? I believe, as do other authors, that this key can only come through dialogue, through facilitating the exchange of perspectives and resources between different parts of the administration, and between the administration and its surroundings (Habermas, 1981; Fisher and Forester, 1993; Fox and Miller, 1996; Hajer and Wagennar, 2003). When such dialogue is authentic, responses to complexity are enriched by diverse sensibilities, and, in this way, creativity is stimulated. It is necessary point out that the administration's responses may not now be *technically better* (if such a thing exists), but they are responses that represent a point of equilibrium, a compromise between diverse interpretations of the same problem. If the problem that we want to deal with is *clear and Catalan,* it is possible that a technical response will do; but when, as is more and more frequently the case, the problem is a complex one, then it would be more appropriate to give a dialogued and balanced response.

The need to build a creative and inclusive administration means we must incorporate dialogue into the modernisation process: an administration that, following certain academic traditions, I have called 'deliberative' (Font, 2003). Once the alternative to the NPM has been identified, the next question is: how do we bring about this deliberative administration? How do we move from definition to practice? I don't have a definitive response to these questions; however, I do dare to suggest that the foundations of a deliberative administration must be built with a similar symmetry to before, with two fundamental pillars. This time we need two pillars of granite rock that will be very difficult to build but which, once standing, will allow us to visualise a new administration and not a simple reflex response of the old one. The labels I have given to each of these pillars – trust and mediation – represent strange terms for the TPA and, as such, already anticipate the fundamental changes proposed by a deliberative administration.

From authority to trust

It is evident that any organisation must be understood as the sum of its parts. The *raison d'etre* of organisations, depending on their type, is found in the need to break down tasks and distribute them among different agencies. At the same time, the organisation also serves to prevent the various parts from dispersing, to integrate them into a common project, and to coordinate specific efforts towards collective results. Any organisation, as visualised in an organigram, is a simultaneously a means of fragmentation and of integration. The fragmentation is the most visible aspect, as it is physically manifest in the existence of different buildings, offices and workspaces. Integration, on the other hand, is a more subtle assumption.

The TPA has approached integration through authority. Authority is the cement that keeps the parts together, and prevents fragmentation from becoming decomposition. Each part of the organisation is limited to carrying out the appropriate corresponding tasks, while the work of the authority is to control the tasks, according to plans, and to guarantee that each part can do its job in the best possible way. Authority is the organisational cement in the sense that it serves to put everyone in their place (fragmentation) and in the sense that it prevents them moving from these places (integration). Authority is therefore the attribute that characterises the relationship between the different parts of the organisation: it is authority that tells us what we have to do, what we can expect from others, what our place is, and what the places of others are. Authority is the reference point that enables all the parts to form a whole

However, it is clear that when authority is the organisational cement, then all possibility for dialogue disappears. The authority tells us all where we are and what we have to do: we are left with nothing to discuss. For it to be possible to build a deliberative administration, we must therefore retire authority and find a new organisational cement. We need an organisation where the parts are integrated through communication and dialogue (Innes and Booher, 2003). This is the essence of the deliberative administration we are proposing. To achieve this there are two basic requirements. Firstly, the parts must have room for manoeuvre (for if that is not the case, there is no real point in talking). Secondly the relationships established between the parts must be trusting ones (if that is not the case, they will end up not talking, or what talking they do will not go beyond small talk).

The first requirement refers back to well known themes such as autonomy and decentralisation. The second, trust in organisational relations, is more original. I will therefore attempt to, briefly, develop this second aspect. Despite the apparent novelty of the topic, a broad literature on it already exists (Child and Faulkner, 1998; Lane and Bachmann, 1998). Now is not the moment to review this literature, but it is important to recognise that through these works, trust has become, in recent years, an element of management. That is fundamental. It allows us to think in operational terms and to give our proposal for a deliberative administration content.

Trust is no longer an intangible thing; it has become an element of management. How then can we manage this element? How do we generate the trust that is indispensable to building a deliberative administration such as we are proposing? One way of approaching these questions is to consider the process of building trust as taking place in what some have described as its three stages: creation, implementation and consolidation.

-   At the beginning of the relationship, when dialogue between the parts is initiated, it is necessary stimulate trust through calculations. That is to say, through making sure all the parts know the costs and benefits, the interests that influence the relationship.

- Once this initial dialogue is established, the moment for implementation has arrived. In this second phase, comprehension between the different parts is crucial: trust will not develop if the parts do not understand each other's aims and ways of working.

- Finally, trust can be consolidated if there is not only understanding, but also identification between the parts; when they feel that they form part of the same project, that they have shared objectives, and that they share the same ways of doing things.

Adequately managing these three stages (that is to say, generating awareness of the potential benefits of the relationship, promoting meeting spaces that develop knowledge and mutual understanding, building shared projects, and resolving the problems that all this will generate) will lead to an organisation where the logic of *each to their own* gives way to the deliberative logic of *we do it all together*.

Perhaps more importantly, if we manage these three stages well, we will make the logic work: we *will* do it all together. I have somewhat merrily thrown this slogan about. In fact, it presents serious practical difficulties. I often summarise these difficulties with a third saying: *we will do it all together* becomes *so little done, so much to do...* That is to say, a deliberative administration has a strong tendency towards chaos, towards the blurring of responsibilities, and towards organisational paralysis. This tendency is particularly strong when we *formalise* deliberation, when we want to create dialogue through simply superimposing deliberative spaces (for example, transversal plans) over the traditional administrative structures. These spaces generate a lot of distortion in an organisation, as they are insufficient for creating inter-organisational dialogue. It is not enough to create spaces where people can talk (though these are clearly necessary); it is also necessary that the people *want* to use these spaces (that they have the necessary confidence in the process).

An example can illustrate what I am trying to explain. A deliberative administration is one in which the architect talks to the social worker, the economist, and the people living in the neighbourhood, before drawing up the plans for the next civic centre. Through the dialogue with these professionals and citizens, the architect will end up designing a better project, capable of responding to the diverse uses to which the building will be put, and meeting the criteria for technical and financial viability. If, on the other hand, the architect limits herself to sitting at her drawing board and designing whatever is most technically appropriate, problems will probably emerge later. It is our daily bread. The question is: how do we create that multi-band dialogue? The immediate response is limited to using the already established tools; that is to say, drawing a new line, this time horizontal, on the organigram. We will create a space or a circuit, where the architects, social workers, economists and neighbours are *obliged* to talk. What often happens is that these spaces oblige people to meet, but they do not talk, they understand each other even less, and they almost never to take each other seriously or act on what is said. You can make the architect got to a meeting, but if she is not interested what they tell her, she will return to the

drawing board and find a thousand technical reasons to continue doing what she wants to do. What we are interested in, therefore, and herein lies the importance of trust, is not the space to talk, but the desire to do so. What we are interested in is not getting the architect to go to a meeting, but that when she picks up her pencil she thinks… *I need to know what the end user of this building wants…* If she thinks that, there are already plenty of meeting spaces; it is enough that we have the desire to meet.

> *What is needed to make a deliberative administration work is not new organigrams, but new attitudes. Working with a concept like trust is taking a step in that direction*

From management to mediation

In terms of their organic structures, organisations have management. This management is always charged, as though couldn't be any other way, with distributing tasks and responsibilities, at the same time it must provide to the parts of the organisation with adequate resources to do the job, it has to supervise activities and to control the results. It is therefore a hierarchical management, which is deployed from the top down. Nothing very new there.

Unfortunately, this management serves to tell people what they must do, and make sure that they do it, but not to create dialogue between the parts. A deliberative administration does not need to be directed; instead, it demands articulation and mediation. Again, these are relatively strange concepts in the world of management, but they are in line with what I have summarised as the need to replace management (from above) with mediation (from the middle). This means, as some authors propose, favouring a leadership that is less unidirectional and more bidirectional; it is a leadership where dialogue and negotiation replace instructions and control (Kooiman, 1993; Kickert *et al*, 1997; Heifetz, 1997).

Making this leadership through mediation effective is vital for the practical development of a deliberative administration. The danger already mentioned of *so little done, so much to do* means that leadership must exist; leadership that is non-authoritarian, but still powerful. In the reticular structures that characterise a deliberative administration the presence of a 'brain' is often missed, a nervous system to ensure the momentum and continuity of the process is vital. We must build this nervous system. We need a leadership based on mediation, exercised from the centre of a network rather than from the top of a pyramid structure, but nevertheless, very definitely exercised.

The mediator must be responsible for generating trust, for conducting deliberations and ensuring that they produce results. The profile of the mediator should therefore not be defined using traditional, technocratic criteria, since what is required is, above all, good interpersonal skills. The mediator is different from what we think of when we refer to a manager, in that the mediator does not know how to do things, but how to promote, articulate and make the most of dialogue. The mediator does not work with results, but with relationships. The network of relationships needs a mediator who keeps it activated (selecting and circulating information, committing the

different parts, etc.), who promotes relationships so they reach the required intensity (regulating possible conflicts, establishing the contractual frameworks for interaction, etc.), who plays the role of intermediary (a kind of broker who creates consensus, facilitates dialogue, promotes collective images, organises meeting spaces, etc.) and who generates shared perceptions and values (information campaigns, publicity strategies, elaboration of discourses, etc.). These skills, plus the already popular knowledge of human relations, negotiation and citizens' participation, make up the mediator's basic kit.

Traditional management is guided by principles of efficiency and defined by way of a highly competent profile and the ability to build a competitively functioning organisation. The mediator, on the other hand, resolves problems by creating collaboration between everyone with something to contribute. Many terms have been used to describe the distinctive characteristics of these mediators, such as communicative, facilitating, enabling. Without wanting to introduce more labels into a debate that already contains too many, I would like to propose two more adjectives. As well as being precise and conceptually useful, these attempt to recover what are, to my mind, the two basic ingredients of a good mediator (Vallès and Brugué, 2003):

- The mediator that I propose must, in the first instance, be *seductive*: someone who is capable of using a common project to seduce the parts. Someone who is capable of encouraging, involving and, finally of making sure that it is all produced in a climate of trust and collaboration. The mediator's seduction may be a personal attribute, but it is also a factor that can be built alongside the construction of attractive collective projects.

- In the second instance, the mediator must be an *animator*, someone with the capacity to build a seductive project out of the contributions of the different parts. The mediator must stimulate participation, listen to it very carefully, and use it. The skills of the animator have a strong personal element, but they can also be developed through a range of techniques and tools.

It is difficult to give examples of the contrast between management and mediation, as we would have to use personal examples that are difficult to share. Nevertheless, we can think of the stereotype of a manager, which has, in fact, been used as a means of importing the styles and attitudes of the private sector into the public sector. This manager is accustomed to presenting a resolute profile and having an agenda crammed with commitments. He is aggressive, under pressure, and does not waste time. He is technically capable and, obviously, leaves any (if there is any) sensitivity, for the weekends, when it cannot interfere with the demands of his difficult job. We all know someone who manages in this way or, at least, we all know someone who wishes to adopt this style. The stereotype of the mediator would be the antithesis of this behaviour model. Someone who forms relationships, and therefore has time and sensitivity to put into forming relationships. After studying a number of local administration directors in Great Britain, Broussin and Fox (2002) refer to the traditional *hard* skills (resource management, legal knowledge, etc.) and the new *soft*

skills (capacity to motivate, to generate consensus, etc.). These authors also agree that the challenge of modernisation is reward the development of this new *soft* form of leadership.

The step from hard leadership to soft lies in the difference between management and mediation

4. CHANGING THE MINDSET: DELIBERATIVE ADMINISTRATION, PATIENCE AND FEMINISATION

In the previous pages, I have attempted to present a diagnosis of the current situation and to propose some alternatives for the future. In terms of the diagnosis, I have suggested, while recognising that most of the extant literature would dispute the assertion, that the NPM does not represent the radical paradigm shift it proclaims, but rather cosmetic changes to the old TPA, that do not really offer anything new. The continuity between the TPA and the NPM is manifest in a series of fundamental coincidences: they share the principle of instrumental efficiency, they share the same rationalising vocation, they share the same segmentation and organisational specialisations, and they share the same lack of flexibility and internal and external communication. It is true that the NPM does incorporate some relevant changes. While the TPA is presented as a basically *protectionist* administration, the NPM invokes *competition*, in my view it is a case of two very different presentations of what is, when you look behind the different coloured curtains, essentially a very similar vision.

 I have presented the proposal for the future in its most general terms, under the heading of deliberative administration. This is an alternative under construction and under discussion, which means that the considerations expressed above must remain in a state of what some scornfully call 'speculation'. I prefer to think of them as being at the proposal stage, where it is necessary to take some risks in order to break out of language and perspectives that condemn us to always see things in the same way. Deliberative administration aims to approach to the world of modernisation, without the prejudices of the dominant discourse.

Viewing administration from these risky positions has allowed me a certain freedoms that are probably unacceptable to those with more orthodox points of view. Allow me to record the three that I consider most important:

- Firstly, I have avoided speaking about competence and I have introduced the term collaboration. This distinction is crucial from the more instrumental point of view, since competence has been the operational guide of both the TPA (the Weberian aim can be summarised as the will to promote a competent administration made up of competent people) and the NPM (which has made competition, with all the attendant business overtones, the flag of its apparent revolution). Deliberative administration, on the other hand, comes from making collaboration a reality (Agranoff and McGuire, 2003). The ideal is, therefore, no

longer a competent administration made up of competent people, but a sensitive and communicative one.

- Secondly, and more substantively, I have proposed breaking with the 'efficientist' objectives of both the TPA and the NPM in order to embrace the new communicative aims of the deliberative administration. To state that the administration must be less concerned with efficiency and more concerned with *talking* may seem strange, but it is a vital break if we want an administration orientated towards resolving the problems of an increasingly complex and diverse society (Hajer and Wagenaar, 2003).

- Thirdly, and connected to the previous point, I want to separate myself from the in breeding that has characterised more orthodox administrative studies. When we study administration, the most important thing is not to look inside the administration, but outside it. The most relevant concern is not the internal functioning of the administration, but how useful it is to the outside world. In short, the most important aspect of public administration is not the fact that it is an *administration*, but the fact that it is *public*. With that significant change of emphasis we can offer a new view of public administration; a view that is above all fixed on the capacity of that administration to influence its surroundings, to satisfy the aim of responding to the demands and conflicts of the community (Kettl, 2002). Or is that not why we have a public administration?

These new points of view require new forms of administration. I have sketched, perhaps too roughly, some of these forms. However, above all, what is required is a change of mindset: developing attitudes and mentalities that break with the dominant orthodox ideas of administration. Without this changed mindset, the introduction of new ways of working, however interesting they are, is destined to failure. It is for that reason that, before finishing this text, I would like to look at two concepts that may throw some light on the extent of the mindset change required. All those who, one way or another, work with or for the public administration need re-programming, in order to insert new mindsets of patience and femininity. The meaning of these two concepts is, perhaps clear, but let us look at them in more detail.

Firstly, we must be aware that a deliberative administration takes time. There is no point rhetorically invoking the need for inter-departmental communication, for citizens to be consulted, or for agreements to be collectively reached, if, when it comes to pass, and we start to work, everything must be done in a rush, as we all have a thousand urgent things to do. The practical reality of dialogue is too often perceived as a distraction, and a waste of time. A deliberative administration is one that resolves complex conflicts, not one that moves fast. I know that these things are not necessarily mutually exclusive, and that ultimately the ideal would be to combine them, but I want to underline the external factor (of resolving complex problems) as a way of compensating for the prevailing obsession with the internal efficiency and speed, which has hitherto characterised discussions about administrative modernisation.

Secondly, the very logic of efficiency and competition has favoured ways of working that are decisive, resolute, expeditious, and, ultimately, aggressive. Ways of working that we can associate with the more stereotypical view of the masculine role. In fact, one of the labels we gave to the supporting columns of the NPM was "macho" management; management that defends the values of competition, of going head to head, of not allowing oneself to fall, of winning the bread by force, of the dynamic of winner and loser. In the face of this cowboy logic, deliberative administration defends values such as collaboration, dialogue, compromise, giving time to relationships, a predisposisition to reach agreements, sensitivity towards others, the capacity to put yourself in the other person's position, taking pleasure in caring, etc. These values are part of the stereotypical feminine universe. That is why I consider the *feminisation* of public administration to be important.

A deliberative administration is like *mothers* waiting for their children to come out of school, talking amongst themselves. They are forming relationships, communicating, and building networks. Their attitude is in stark contrast to the majority of *fathers*, who great professionals and experts: *collectors* of children. The fathers, with a technocratic (TPA) and competitive (NPM) attitude, don't distract themselves speaking to anyone. They concentrate on doing their job with a maximum of speed and efficiency. The child is barely out of the door, but he has already picked it up, crossed the playground and got into the car. They are on the way home, with extraordinary economy and efficiency. This professionalism however, means that tomorrow this child is the only one without his tracksuit, as they have not picked up the information that they have changed tomorrows class to gymnastics. They are also forced, when for whatever reason they cannot pick the child up themselves, to externalise the job and pay another professional to carry out the service.

Meanwhile, the mothers continue to talk. It seems they are not in a hurry. Sometimes when the children come out of class they spend time hanging around playing together while the mothers continue, unruffled, to talk. If a father accompanies his spouse he appears to lose patience at the inefficiency of the mothers wasting time, getting distracted and not getting the job done. But they do do their job, and how well they do it! It is true that they are not as fast, but they know that tomorrow they must pack the tracksuit, they exchange information about out of school activities, they discuss the problems arising from excessive game boy use, they tell each other where to buy well priced clothes and they help each other when necessary. I repeat, they are technically less efficient, but their service is richer, more sophisticated, more complex and more complete … much better for the children. That is how I would like to build a public administration, in the service of its citizens.

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3.

THE MOVEMENT LINE OF INQUIRY

INTRODUCTION AND A FIRST MAP OF ISSUES

INTRODUCTION:

Movements and political organization

Marco Berlinguer

The line of search on the movements, interpreted as "constituent" forces, concentrates on the most recent cycle of mobilizations and social movements, as a necessary, if not privileged, ambit of exploration of the transformations that have happened in the field of the political action and organization.

Social movements act in a space and in a time marked by an "organic" crisis of the political systems. They generate concrete experiments revealing light elements, materials, innovations that allude to possible new shapes of political subjectivity.

To inquire into the autonomous organizational forms generated from the social movements, is also a way to understand some deep characteristics of this new cycle of social movements. It seems that this idea of exploring the innovations, the limits, the contradictions of these organizational shapes is also a practical demand of the movements as they mature in their many different contexts.

This line of search had a first moment of collective reflection in Bologna, in May this year. In this "Reader" you will find two texts that were circulated before that workshop. The first one is an attempt to organize a first introductory map of the innovations and the problems that have seemed to be emerged from a first - personal and partial - recognition of the accumulated experience in the so-called "movement of movements" and in the debate associated with it. The second is instead a dense theoretical text written by Joan Subirats on the concept of network, that is the metaphor that, at the state, seems mainly able to illustrate elements of the emerging political subjectivity. Finally, always in relationship with the encounter of Bologna, you will find in the "Reader" a short note written just after the meeting, that points out to the topics touched in that discussion.

These documents have been reproduced as they circulated in that time (but translated into English, where they were not already written in English.)

To these texts we add three articles of three friends of this search. These three texts are an example of resources that we would like we share and exchange in the course of this search. The three articles are:
- "Social Forums and their margins: Networking Logics and the Cultural Politics of Autonomous Space ", Jeffrey S. Juris;
- "Problemas de la politica autonoma: pensando el pasaje de lo social a lo politico", Ezequiel Adamovsky; (this will be available in English in the E-library)
- "Network, Swarming, Microstructure" of Brian Holmes.

They are diverse articles, coming from different directions. Interesting as they are, they can all enrich our understanding of the debate already intensely underway in many various contexts, on the problems that we want to explore further through this inquiry.

Finally, to remind you that after the Barcelona encounter,we will activate a web-bibliography dedicated to the project Networked Politics, we point you to other useful resources that are easily accessible online:
- "Nothing Is What Democracy Looks Like", Rodrigo Nunes, 2005. Archived at:
http://www.shutthemdown.org/Resources/Ch%2030.pdf
- "The Packet Gang", Jamie King, 2004. Archived at:
http://www.metamute.org/en/The-Packet-Gang
- "Notes on the State of Networking", Gert Lovink & Florian Schneider, 2004.
Archived at: http://www.makeworlds.org/node/100
- "Open Cultures and the Nature of Networks", Felix Stalder, 2006, Archived at:
http://www.kuda.org/?q=en/node/546
 - "Other Worlds Are (already) Possible: Cyber-Internationalism and Post-Capitalist Cultures ", Arthur Escobar, 2002. Archived at: htpp://www.cibersociedad.net
- *"The WSF: A User's Manual ", Boaventura Dos Santos, 2003, Archived at: htpp://www.ces.uc.pt/bss/documentos/fsm_eng.pdf*

A FIRST MAP OF ISSUES

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> A first exploration into innovations and impasses emerged in the experimentation of organizational practises in the Movement of Movements. An introductory text for the line of research about movements and new forms of political organization of the Networked Politics Project (www.networked-politics.info).

The most recent cycle of global social movements is an open, practical expression of the crisis of traditional forms of political organisation.

One of the main characteristics of such movements has in fact been the fact that they have almost inevitably led to experiments at the organisational level, and this has given rise to a unique, yet still rudimentary, process of the creation of a new subjectivity.

Up until now, such experiments have involved the blending of diverse organisational styles, in a practical fashion without any theoretical underpinning; this has proceeded in a trial-and-error manner, through a series of complex, conflicting processes of convergence, often with solutions emerging within the context of real circumstances and the coming together of a multiplicity of players.

Such processes have witnessed the blending, convergence and clashing of horizontal, network-based approaches and vertical, hierarchical approaches. By re-constructing these processes, we can analyse certain important aspects of the origins of the movement, such as its origins as an expression of the explosion of subjectivity that could no longer be contained in 20th-century forms of collective organisation, or its roots as a process of breakdown and reconstruction of social and political relations. Likewise, its origins as both a global and a local movement tells us that it is the first real cycle of post-national movements located within dimensions non-organised by traditional politics.

This collection of emerging organisational practices has led to the accumulation of a first set of experiences which have interested numerous scholars, and have led to the first attempts at the codification thereof.

A similar need for clarification has also emerged at the practical level within the same circuits of the movement, where there is a feeling of having reached an impasse resulting from the conclusion of the first cycle, from a series of internal conflicts, from the inability to organise the movement's potential in an effective manner, from the risk of being reabsorbed into traditional, ""heteronomous" forms of politics – which fill what would otherwise appear a void – and/or remaining marginal and uninfluential.

In the present work we would like to take part in this investigation of the limitations of this emerging networked politics, with the aim of contributing towards future attempts to overcome its present boundaries.

To this end, we intend to create a research "community" composed of interested parties from various different academic areas and political contexts and positions, and to organise the exchange of ideas within this community regarding these kinds of problem.

During this initial phase of work we are going to create a mailing list, a web-bibliography and a website in order to share writings and ideas and a wiki for group writing. The wiki will be used also to promote the production of a glossary of new terms about political organisation, and for organizing debates about "hot issues" emerging from practical experience and reflection.

The present paper aims to draw up an initial, albeit approximate, list of problematic issues that have arisen from experience of, and debate on, the new organisational forms emerging from the anti-globalisation movement. It is the result not only of a

reading of a preliminary collection of articles, which shall be made available in the web-bibliography, but also of my own personal experience of direct involvement in a number of organisational processes.

1. MULTIPLICITY, CONVERGENCE, UNIFICATION AND DIVERSITY.

The movement came out into the open in Seattle, with the unplanned convergence of various different groups, very vaguely connected, some even contradictory, but all united initially by a common target.

These convergent factors were characterised by an intrinsic multiplicity and the absence of any real "centre". In order to describe such temporary, manifold forms of convergence towards a common goal, the concept of "swarm" has been used[8]; while in accounting for these self-organisational processes devoid of any centralised system of command and control, the term "emergency" has been utilised[9].

In any case, the movement has proved to be a complex entity. This is one of the first things that activists have learnt. It is not a unique, pre-defined subject, but rather a complex "subjectivity" defined by joint action.

The non-hierarchical integration of diverse elements has been, and remains, a founding mechanism of the movement's subjectivity. Recognition of diversity immediately became a principle of reality and a necessary value. Thus the need to find solutions to the problem of how to organise a situation characterised by the convergence of a variety of different networks has been a fundamental requirement of the movement's organisational practices.

The exceeding diversity and the jealous defence of autonomy, together with the diffidence towards representative mechanisms, made organisational approaches based on the representation and centralisation of decisions no longer usable; hence the invention of new ways of organising differences/diversity. For example, the

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[8] This term was originally adopted by Arquila and Ronfeldt within the context of strategic studies of "net wars": "Swarming occurs when the dispersed units of a network of small (and perhaps some large) forces converge on a target from multiple directions. Swarm networks must be able to coalesce rapidly and stealthily on a target, then dissever and re-disperse, immediately ready to recombine for a new pulse". John Arquilla & David Ronfeldt. "The Advent of Netwar (Revisited)", RAND Publications, Archived at http://www.rand.org/publications/MR/MR1382/MR1382.ch1.pdf.

[9] This concept derives from the theory of complexity, and refers to behaviour – adopted when solving a complex problem - that emerges without the presence of any centralised system of command and control; behaviour that represents the complex result of a repeated form of interaction involving an exchange of information and feedback between elements (players) of a minor, local nature. No one element of the said system possesses full knowledge of everything. Knowledge, adaptation, behaviour, problem solving – at the higher level – is "self-organised": i.e. it "emerges". For the application of this concept to the context of the movement, see Arturo Escobar, "Other Worlds Are (already) Possible: Cyber-Internationalism and Post-Capitalist Cultures", Revista: TEXTOS de la CiberSociedad, 5, Tematica Variada. Archived at: htpp://www.cibersociedad.netsantoro; o anche Brian Holmes, "Network, Swarm, Microstructure", posted in <nettime> list, April 2006, and published at: http://multitudes.samizdat.net/Network-swarm-microstructure.html.

principle of "diversity of tactics", the Social Forums, the proliferation of network-based organisations, the self-organization and the galaxy formation of the convergence spaces.

These forms of (complex) convergence have not only constituted laboratories for the experimentation of a practice and a culture that are intrinsically anti-integralist, but they have also produced powerful, global processes of identification and empathy. They have forged a multiplicity of ties and connections; new forms of coordination and collective working among diverse, independent subjects. They have provided a training in the management of differences, and created reciprocal understanding, solidarity and trust. They have facilitated processes of transformation, of contamination and of the getting away from set identities and organisational restrictions. They have cultivated a feeling of non-self-sufficiency, an expansive, relational, interpersonal (interactive) ethic.

In other words, they have helped a new kind of "subjectivity" to emerge, a subjectivity that is very different from the simple juxtaposition and sums of the parts. And a "visible", recognizable subjectivity, endowed with an own "identifiability", distinct from the wider enviroment.
At the same time, unification in decision-making, action, external communication, expression and representation, as well as being constantly extremely problematic, has also been perceived as dangerous and negative in that it reduces (demolishes) diversities, impedes multiplicity, and so on.

1) Issue

In some way, the identification of a common objective and its configuration through a deliberative, expansive and inclusive process generated forms of manifold unification; while the affirmation of pre-defined and self-referential identities seem to obstacle it.

Diversity has become a value, an aim in itself, and has been identified as an instrument of efficacy[10].
So, the paradoxical nature of the unification experimented in these processes would seem to be characterised by a growth, rather than any reduction, in diversity.

2) Issue

The integration and re-combination of diversities – and thus their being made more complex – seem to have a constituent function in the movement's subjectivity (another example, in this way, is the history of Rome's *centri sociali*[11]).

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[10] When the multiplicity of action & communication strategies in collective mobilisation has worked, it has in fact facilitated the movement's expansion, creating various forms of access to mobilisation and participation, together with a kaleidoscope of identities which better reflects the complexity of the subjects in action and has enabled the development of the capacity to communicate with society: it has produced a multiplicity of actions aimed at the same target, and has hindered the control and repression of the movement.

The broadening, and thus the greater complexity, of differences/diversities, seems to be an objective in itself of the network approach[12].

In real terms, it has been a constant and explicit (albeit conflictual) organisational objective. E.g. WSF and ESF: "nomadic" approach; WSF articulation model; expansion committees; etc.

At the practical level, this strategy is also a way of integrating broader knowledge, so as to potentially integrate more subjects and forms of know-how by linking them up. Can this be seen as a strategy for countering the crisis in existing political systems: the crisis of the "representativeness" and "governance" of society?

3) Issue

At the practical level, given this degree of diversity, it may prove impossible to work together in one single space (see again in WSF: the crisis of plenary meetings – as sort of principle of representation – and the emergence of independent spaces). Internal articulation, as the counter image of the process of convergence, has thus been the almost natural outcome: at times as an autonomous impetus, and at others as a reaction against attempts at unification (e.g. in the emergence of different "blocks", autonomous spaces, networks, local work, in one case; or as reactions to the crisis of the mobilization model or to attempts to gain control over and direct movements, etc.).

This articulation is claimed to constitute a new, more effective way of coming, being and working together.

However, it goes against the principle of unification, especially when the latter is seen in traditional terms (see the different but in some way similar criticisms of the SWP, of Susan George or the Bamako's appeal).

It objectively impedes visibility, joint identity and convergence with regard actions in relation to a shared objective.

4) Question:

The limits of self-organisation. The interpretative models borrowed from the logics of self-organisation are interesting in the way that they constitute a break from our traditional way of thinking, and in their pertinent description of these new organisational worlds and phenomena.

One of the more useful regulatory principles is, for example, the impossibility and danger of thinking of one single subject and one unified, preconceived form of global action; or the importance of local contexts, knowledge and actions.

A certain perplexity arises when we discover that there is an underlying similarity with the most highly studied complex, decentralised cooperative mechanism - the market – including, at times, a certain romanticism similar to the "invisible hand".

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[11] Cfr. Giuliano Santoro, Scacco al re in 8 mosse, in *La Riva sinistra del Tevere*, Transform! Italia, 2004.

[12] Cfr. Jeffrey S. Juris, "Social Forums and their Margins: Networking Logics and the Cultural Politics of Autonomous Space", in *Hephemera*, 2005, Forums, volume 5(2): 253-272, www.ephemeraweb.org; and Joan Subirats, "About Networks", May 2006, http://www.networked-politics.info/library/

In some cases, there is also a conscious re-evaluation of the market, together with a criticism of the anti-market stance (Braudel's asymmetrical-monopolistic powers), and a eulogy of the concept of "small is beautiful" in that this is the only way any "authentic self-organisation" can be guaranteed, free of asymmetrical, manipulative powers.

What it fails to account for, however, is the pervasive nature of the said asymmetries – which appear only accidental and/or parasitical – and the persistence in all organisational forms, including those of the movement, of a complexity of logics and forms of power, including vertical, hierarchical logics, and hard, centralised, unified powers.

2. OPEN, SELF-ORGANISED SPACES

The concept of openness has become a benchmark for the organisational forms produced within the movement, and in the search for the movement's "identity".

The origins of the concept can maybe be found in the Free Software and Open Source movement. The open code provides an effective political metaphor when describing the growing desire to investigate and liberate the codes of democratic processes. The code is legible, transparent and open. It can also be modified: it is horizontal, not over-determined, separate, alienated. It expresses the movements' recovery and radicalisation of the democratic principles, of the struggle against all forms of transcendence of power in favour of the extension of individuals' autonomy, participation and control. Internet itself, when utilised to create an open, interactive informational sphere, is often presumed to be the technical prerequisite for new forms of radical democracy, of participative, open processes of legislation.

Openness has been a regulatory ideal – either explicit or implicit; a decisive factor in demonstrating the movement's transformational potential; a cause of continual conflict, indicative of the central ideological (not instrumental) role taken on by organisational forms.

Its popularity as an organisational principle has produced, and continues to produce, a multiplicity of experiences: of shared access to, and managment and production of, information and knowledge; of decision-making models characterised by "flat" hierarchies; of transparent, flexible internal working mechanisms, defined and re-defined by means of a continuous transformational, learning process.

The forums themselves are a special declination of this concept: they are defined as being open spaces, and a way of organising the temporary, horizontal coming together of networks.

Openness, as an ethical regulatory principle, also refers to reciprocal listening, communication, connectivity, inclusion/expansion and transformation. The can be no

doubt that the concept of openness worked at both the theoretical and practical levels. However, experience and critical reflection have thrown up a number of contradictions and critical points.

5) Issue

The first question that has emerged is: in reality how open and participatory, or instead <u>how directed, are organisational and decision-making processes in practice</u>?

The Forums, like all forms of convergence, are the result of a combination of diverse organisational styles; however, in all cases, some form (albeit new, limited and network-based) of centralisation and simplification of decisions has survived (e.g. the WSF's International Committee, the organisational committees, coordinating subjects, power asymmetries between different groups). This has led to the conclusion that "horizontality appears to have failed in practice".

One interesting experience is that of the model employed by Wikipedia. The internal mechanisms have been designed on the basis of open-space principles: openness, horizontality, participation and consensus as ways of resolving conflict. Wikipedia, and in fact the Social Forums, are concrete examples of the success of such organisational models. However, the statute of Wikipedia preserves an external power (in this case the founder) as a final decision-maker.

6) Issue

To be more precise, the concept of openness fails when faced with <u>pressures of scale,</u> that is, with the growth of the group. It can produce decisions in small groups, whereas larger groups mean that this potential is substantially limited or totally non-existent.

Indeed, it is no coincidence that a smaller scale is often favoured, as it facilitates horizontal, open, participatory praxes, the control and transparency of coordination, and the definition of specific, verifiable objectives; and it also reduces the need for delegation and representation.

However, in practice this model, adopted as an effective alternative to representation, is limited in that it apparently cannot be extended to the whole of society, or even to larger sized groups.

7) Issue

Another limitation that emerges is the temporary, unstable nature of those organisations set up on this basis. Such organisations easily fold, and not only because they are conceived as ad hoc organisations designed for a specific purpose. The truth is that they can easily collapse of their own accord.

"They resemble events. Networks are dense social structures constantly on the point of collapse, and it is doubtful whether there are sustainable models capable of freezing them".

Taking this self-criticism to the extreme, it has been said that "sometimes they seem the expression of the collapse of power", of "a rampant desire for no power", rather than a "remedy for the corruption, stupidity and commercialisation of traditional hierarchies"[13].

On the other hand, the precarity of the cooperation shapes also is interpreted like one quality. If the cooperation is useful and vital it is maintained, otherwise collapses. The collapse of a coordination shape is not necessarily seen like a loss. Above all in the new generation, the uncertainty is also one quality: a guarantee of vitality or of opening and escape towards more motivating and fertile situations. It is a shelter from the "artificiality" and the bureaucratization. An example of "happy self-dissolution" is that one of the Catalan MRG. In any case the absence of every "institutionalism" creates a weakness in the organizational continuity and a constant tension (sometimes creative, sometimes conflictive) generated from the "institutional" uncertainty. We can ask how much elitist - or infancy or even parasitic - this attitude of not "stabilizing" the relationships is. But in the social nets and in the micro-processes these dynamics are those which prevail, with unstable and very "loose" structures. And in these kind of nets, the movements exist, grow and are transformed, when they are not in phase of "swarming".

8) Issue

A further limitation of these forms of organising multiplicity is the <u>excess of information</u>: the crisis from "overloading". A multiplicity of suppliers of information does not necessarily facilitate communication. There are certain physiological limits to people's ability to pay attention to the information: these limits induce people to abandon the collective communications (often having had the feeling that no conclusions have been reached) or to hugely select inputs, links, communication, open connections. The same could be said of the multiplication of relations that tends to characterise network politics: these relations often go no further than the superficial "pedestrian exchange of information and the occasional sign of disagreement". The Forums themselves traditionally suffer from this excess of communication, leading to a strong feeling of frustration in those taking part.

9) Issue

Another critical point is the entity – always limited – of the openness.

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[13] Gert Lovink & Florian Schneider, "Notes on the State of Networking", written for Make World #4, February 2004, printed in 10,000 copies and distributed at the Neuro-Networking in Europe-festival in Munich. www.makeworlds.org/node/100

Processes of convergence are usually organised on the basis of principles, key words and trademarks that have two functions: one is that of acting as a container for multiplicity, while the other is that of defining it in as an independent, alternative antagonist way in relation to the wider surrounding environment. Therefore, the said processes of convergence also arise through other processes of exclusion.

There is clearly an intrinsic tension between the concepts of openness and exclusion, which calls for, but also renders problematic, a separation of <u>inside from outside</u>. In real terms, there is always the danger of network spaces being captured, controlled and suffocated by groups and coalitions of individuals and organisations.

10) Issue

A precondition of such organisational processes is the openness to listen to others; the being prepared to experience a certain degree of contamination, to go beyond organisational ties and a given identity; the feeling of belonging and responsibility towards a wider, more fluid movement; an ethics based on openness and mediation, negotiations based on the potential for exchanging reciprocal points of view.

Any self-referential form of behaviour, purely instrumental logics or extreme forms of political "narcissism" that deny the possibility of mediation thus compromise these organisational processes.

Vice-versa, organisational models based on the creation of open spaces (and the absence of any clear, shared system of codes, rules and sanctions) appear vulnerable to <u>opportunistic forms of behaviour</u>; they afford no protection, other than that of an ethical nature, against exploitation by groups or individuals who act according to self-centred agendas and logics devoid of all reciprocity.

In a certain sense, these organisational forms made available collectively-produced resources, and the lack of any protective system exposes them to parasitical appropriation. For example, during demonstrations, certain groups utilise the visibility and protection created by the movement in order to perform not-consensual actions; or the exploitation of the Forums by certain political groups.

This order of problems seems to have some analogy with those generated in the management of the "common goods" in the field of the intellectual property. Could the exploration of the project of the "creative commons" – of its forms of regulating the access and the use of these goods – stimulate suggestions?

11) Issue

The lack of a strong tie and the non-existence of any shared institutional system capable of protecting collective interests render the "system" vulnerable. On the other hand, the multiplicity, openness and informal nature of the "system", together with the cult of autonomy, the difficulty of defining stable, shared rules, the diffidence towards the creation of separate authorities, make traditional solutions

impossible. In more general terms, multiplicity does not guarantee the defence of the "general" point of view. No organisation, authority or resource is the direct expression of the general interest, which is the (imperfect and conflicting) product of manifold logics.

3. THE NETWORKS

The networks are emerging forms of organisation within the movements' practices and language. They represent dynamics and forms of convergence that are fluid, but more stable, than the "convergent spaces".

Power within networks is spread out, multi-centric. As organisational forms, they are based upon decentralisation and minimal central structures. They are not dependent on an hierarchical principle of authority. Generally speaking, they are lacking in specific forms of representation, and they often preserve a considerable degree of informality.

They resemble projects: the working plan is an essential ingredient. As far as regards their internal working, they resemble voluntary organisations. In this sense, the networks are organisations that need to be continually revitalised.

Their creation typically facilitates the overcoming of previously existing organisational restraints and ties, and is associated with the growth and greater complexity of political communication.
Their aim is the exchange of communication, information and knowledge, together with the coordination of actions. The latter aspect is traditionally the weakest and most problematical of all.
Beyond the exchange of information, the networks structurally imply the setting up of experiences of common, reciprocal learning.

Networks may be created ad hoc, or they may give rise to broader forms of alliance.
Often they are organised within a framework of objectives/principles which get updated at each meeting or at each important step.

Just like the movement's other organisational forms, the networks tend towards expansion: the greater number of subjects involved, the more knowledge is integrated and the greater number of opportunities arise for building on the respective capacities of the said subjects by re-mixing potential contributions.

The network is also a metaphor: it is an intrinsically relational, interpersonal concept, that implies acknowledgement that those resources on which you depend are external to yourself; and that the said resources are active and autonomous subjects. It trains people in the open, uncertain behavioural logics of complex-multicentricity, of multiple heterodependence.

It helps people get organised during a period of crisis in existing forms of organisation and collective action. It helps people to understand, perceive and render operative a series of "vague", "ambiguous", "grey", "informal" ambits: definitions that all depend on categories connected to the formal system of social organisation, which often fails to work.

Networks depend more on the management of interpersonal relations than formal organisations do, given the absence of any final authority and given the need to ensure the continuous involvement and active agreement of each subject. The metaphor of the network highlights, better than other traditional political categories, the importance of the role played by micro-politics and interpersonal communication.

12) Issue

The language of movement networks is also a form of <u>rhetoric</u>. It is used in a very vague fashion to describe very different forms of behaviour and organisation, some of which are highly traditional. It is also employed – more or less consciously - as a way of camouflaging and legitimising old and new forms of power, in the face of crises in the legitimacy of traditional organisational forms.

13) Issue

What appears increasingly clear is that a network structure does not always imply horizontality. Apart from the fact that there are many different kinds of network, networks (even the most horizontal varieties) are not completely devoid of hierarchies, but rather they are lacking in any set form of hierarchy.

More worrying still is the fact that a kind of <u>iron law of oligarchies</u> (Michels) appears to re-emerge. A number of recent studies conducted on the Web by physicists have led to the emergence of new ways of interpreting the networks in which asymmetries and hierarchies almost seem to constitute natural laws. In fact, in the new model, the nodes (the processing locations) of the network are not all the same, and the links are not distributed in a uniform manner, firstly because the "oldest" nodes have the advantage of having had more time to acquire links, and secondly because network connections are not made in a random fashion but tend to concentrate on certain nodes which take on the role of connectors or hubs[14].

Moreover, studies of networks have for long time underlined the crucially important role played by the "social mediator" in bringing different networks together, and the fact that this role can result in the social mediator benefiting from economic advantages, power and prestige. In political networks, such groups or individuals

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[14] Albert-Laszlo Barabasi, "Linked: The New Science of Networks", 2002. Trad. it. "Link. La scienza delle reti". Einaudi, 2004.

may be perceived as <u>supernodes</u> "not only routing more than their 'fair share' of traffic, but actively determining the 'content' that traverses them"[15].

A similar conclusion would seem to be the outcome of critical reflection within the movements themselves: almost all of these spaces-networks-projects "despite their open, horizontal configuration, are controlled by a small group".

4. THE DECISION-MAKING MECHANISMS: SOMEWHERE BETWEEN PARALYSIS AND INFORMALITY

One of the most difficult points is the decision-making system. Joint decision-making capacity is extremely limited. (The Forum was in fact created as a space where no decision was to be taken).

When decisions have to be taken, the only theoretically legitimate mechanism is the consensus method. The will to come to a shared decision underlies the propensity to listen to others, and the willingness to accept change.

It is interesting to note that this implies the transfer of organisations' and individuals' sovereignty: in other words, acknowledgement of a barycentre other than oneself: the broader movement and its fluid differences. Hence it implies the creation of an overdetermined "subjectivity", interest and logic.

However, it is also a controlled transfer of sovereignty, in theory by the power of veto, but in practice by the escaping out of the common commitment. There is no delegation of representation: possession of one's own "political" independence is maintained, whether you are an organisation or an individual. Thus the complex structure is preserved.

Besides the principle of consensus, there are no precise mechanisms or rules. In reality, decisions are made through ad hoc, highly informal practices.

15) Issue

If the model is that of "flexible groups that come together as a result of an open, horizontal process of networking, creating ad hoc forms of convergence", then this will encourage the continual development of new organisational models that may be adapted to constantly changing situations. However, it does not consent a linear form of accumulation, but implies a not eliminable element of <u>instability and informality</u>.

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[15] Jamie King, The Packet Gang: Openess and its Discontents. Mute Magazine, winter/spring 2004. Archived at:
http://www.metamute.com/look/article.tpl?IdLanguage=1&IdPublication=1&NrIssue=27&NrSection=10&NrArticle=962&ST_max=0

16) Issue

Given the changeability of the convergent subjects, and the temporary, limited nature of the organisational rationale, a great deal of time is spent each time defining the organisational framework, the identity, the rules and the external representation of the constituent body.
This renders <u>proceedings slow, selective and frustrating</u>.

17) Issue

The limited capacity to take decisions often generates a state of <u>paralysis</u>.

The decision-making mechanisms are in case extremely slow, and thus often useless (see "decision-ism" and "emergency" as growing practices in political systems). Furthermore, they are selective because they take up a great deal of time (and so who can take part?). These weaknesses often render movements uninfluential and facilitate a return to consolidated political structures.

18) Issue

Regardless of how open this process is claimed to be, the working rules governing the constructed territory are often incomprehensible, <u>esoteric</u> and complex to those who have not taken part directly, and their logic often appears scarcely transparent and indeed in contradiction to the declared principles (of horizontality, participation, openness, etc.)[16] .

5. LEADERSHIP AND ELITES

This brings us to the question of leadership. In principle, centralisation is reduced to a minimum in the movement's coordination. The figures who take on coordinating roles define themselves facilitators, coordinators; and coordinating committees tend to adopt a horizontal, open, non-hierarchical approach. They don't trust to any command logic, being based in their working on a logic of consensus and decentralisation, not only in their decisions mechanism, but in the implementation of

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[16] Furthermore, a closer investigation of the working mechanisms of these coordinating spaces reveals the decisive use of even more informal channels (e.g. when establishing agendas and making decisions). Given that the decision-making structures and rules have not been formalised, they are only known to the very few, and knowledge of the system of power is limited to those who are aware of the said rules. It is very difficult for "outsiders" to understand the working logics, and it is not easy to identify the organs involved in the decision-making process. Information itself circulates primarily among those connected to certain computer/social networks. There is a "soft" form of control of potential outsiders, exercised through the use of language and slang, and through the creation of a rather hostile atmosphere in meetings should the "tacit, basic consensus" created among the network's consolidated players be breached. The very role of the supposedly neutral "moderator" can be easily taken advantage of. The power of veto is in fact rarely used. Few people are capable of intervening in an effective manner. There are no systems for the joint verification of the effectiveness of the decisions taken. See Jamie King, The Packet Gang, op. cit.

the actions agreed. However, both theoreticians and activists, especially in the more radical networks, are beginning to question the ongoing experiments.

19) Issue

What emerges here is an awareness that openness, informality, the networks do not dissolve power and do not represent an immediate, sufficient alternative to the "bankruptcy of representative structures". One work that has begun to be widely circulated once again is the criticism of the laissez-faire ideal in the structuring of a group, a classical of the feminism of the 70s written by Jo Freeman[17]: a criticism of the absence of structures as a way of masking power.

The scarce establishment of rules, the high degree of informality, the refusal of any traditional voting/representation mechanisms, do not prevent, indeed they facilitate, the creation of de facto elites that are not clearly regulated (in terms of choice, functions, responsibilities, duration etc.): the so-called "crypto-hierarchies".

20) Issue

The same conditions that make network politics possible are absent in the lives of the majority of people: flexibility and availability of time; a high degree of mobility; knowledge of languages; computer literacy; access to means of communication, first and foremost Internet. The following are decisive, discriminatory factors: education, social opportunities, social connections, affiliation. As has been rightly observed, "the theoretically most open system imaginably perfectly reflects the inevitable inequalities of the wider context in which it is situated"[18]. The same analysis of the social composition of global movements would seem to confirm these characteristics[19].

21) Issue

These asymmetries in the conditions of participation are also reflected in the parallel presence of two logics within the movement's spaces: one characteristic of the inter-organisational networks and of the "hyper-activists", who often constitute the hard core of the organisation (e.g. the coordinating committees, "inter-groups", preparatory meetings, International Council of WSF, etc.); and one characteristic of broader, more open networks which are, nevertheless, more passive in terms of participation (e.g. during the swarming, the mobilisations, the Social forums themselves).

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[17] Freeman Jo, "The tyranny of structurelessness", 1971. Archived at
http://www.jofreeman.com/joreen/tyranny.htm
[18] Nunes Rodrigo, Nothing Is What Democracy Looks Like – Openess, Horizontality and the Movement of Movements, Archivied at: www.shutthemdown.org/Resources/Ch%2030.pdf

[19] E.G. All the surveys on the WSF participants confirm that the great majority (around 80%) of participants have a university study degree. See, for example, IBASE, "An X-Ray of participation in World Social Forum 2005", www.ibase.org.br

This dialectic has always existed. The former have facilitated the latter, but have also constantly constituted a danger of capture and suffocation of networks and spaces of confluence.

6. CREATING WORLDS: ETHICS, METAPHYSICS AND SELF-ORGANISATION

The movements appear to be involved in the constant work of breaking down and re-building, re-connecting ties, identities, belongings and praxes. It is interesting to observe the existence of many homologies between this "constituent" work of the movements on the one hand, and the systematic invention of new practices of "governance" in the global system – which is facing from long time a crisis of the systems of institutional regulation (that of the nation-state *in primis*) - on the other.

It is also interesting to remember that the crisis of vertical, bureaucratic forms of government based on a command logic and an external system of discipline, was also (albeit not only, obviuosly) brought on by that explosion of subjectivity inherent in the social movements of the 1960s and '70s. By remembering the original ambivalence, we may find it easier to understand the unsolved ambivalence still operating in the system.

Thus, for example, the structural difficulties encountered when building complex, stable institutions within the movements, are as much the result of objective conditions (e.g. the excess of diversity and complexity, and the intrinsically open, changing nature of connections) as they are of a way of being, of an anthropological change, of a subjective form of denial.

Tension is constantly being managed within the global system: on the one hand, ties are destroyed, society is atomised, and institutional restraints are weakened; on the other, interdependence and social cooperation are extended[20]. Of course the system, when managing this tension, constantly produces new, sophisticated institutional systems (e.g. in the practises of multi-level coordination or of the governance); and also traditional institutional powers remain of decisive importance, some of which being periodically expressed in their most archaic (e.g. terror) or contradictory (e.g the imposition of a unilateral arbitrary global sovereignty) form.

But what here is more interesting is that post-Fordism has also developed new, sophisticated systems of "soft" hegemony and control, which are widespread and interiorised, and which act on the following critical point: the organisation of cooperation in a non-institutional framework, where multiplicity, autonomy and change are too complex to be governed in a vertical, centralised way. It is also by acting upon this cognitive, ethical, aesthetic, affective dimension, that many players on the global stage have succeeded in incorporating, controlling and channelling the explosion of energy and potential chaos freed by the crisis of traditional institutions.

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[20] Ezequiel Adamovsky, Problemas de la politica autonoma – Pensando el pasaje de lo social a lo politico, Archivied at: http://argentina.indymedia.org/news/2006/03/382729.php

By using the media or marketing, for example, they have learnt how to activate (naturally also trying to manipulate) "spontaneous" mechanisms of identification and cooperation.

In an interesting recent study (sent to me by Bifo), Brian Holmes[21] suggests that the critical exploration of such dynamics – of identification and cooperation within a framework of dispersal, multiplicity, intense change and the weakening of institutional constraints - is of considerable pertinence to the case of the social movements, in which the rejection of "overstructured", "heteronomous" systems is particularly incisive, given in the movements the decidedly "self-motivated" nature of activism and participation, and the deeper lack of any institutional tie.

Holmes, inquiring what may help to understand the coherence of self-organised human activities, points to two fundamental factors. The first is the existence of a "shared horizon" – shared in ethical, aesthetic, metaphysical terms (and constructed in a patient, deliberative manner, thus enabling to reciprocally acknowledge each the other within the same reference universe: that which Escobar calls the "making of worlds")[22]. The second factor is the capacity of temporal coordination at a distance, thus enabling the sharing of experiences, the constant exchange of information and affection, the reinterpretation of situations and of keys of action; and the constant "ecological" evolution of this world (of worlds).

Holmes gives two practical examples of communities self-organized in this way: the free and open source software movement, and the no-globalisation movement. In fact, this is an excellent summary of the work that has been done, and is ongoing, in the networks and in a looser – more "ecological" – manner in the convergence spaces of the movements.

22) Issue

The question is: can these "spontaneous" – or in any case more open, horizontal – dynamics of identification and cooperation constitute the road to face in new ways the issue of the construction of forms of social organisation, codes, institutions? How would they work? How complex and sophisticated could they arrive to be?

Which brings us back to questions we have already encountered: is there a different – more democratic, open, horizontal – way of acting "efficaciously" and "conscientiously" within such dynamics? Could institutions and codes generated in this manner ever eliminate the need for "hard" powers – that is, powers that are in no way open and horizontal – which yet seem ever present in the networks?
Perhaps we could stop at this point (having achieved the extinction of the state)!

The original, Italian version of this is available in the e-library

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[21] Brian Holmes, Op. Cit.
[22] Arturo Escobar, Op. cit.

REPORT OF BOLOGNA MEETING

Marco Berlinguer

May 2006

Report posted in the mailing <Networked Politics> e-list, May 2006.
Network@lists.euromovements.info
http://lists.euromovements.info/mailman/listinfo/network

Dear all,
A few notes subsequent to the Bologna meeting, both for those present and those who could not be there: any additional remarks/comments etc. would be welcome.

For those not present, there were at the meeting: Franco Berardi Bifo, Joan Subirats, Hilary Wainwright, Mayo Fuster, Sandro Mezzadra, Salvatore Buonamici, Marco Trotta, Achour Boukkaz Mehdi and Marco Berlinguer.

From an operational point of view, we decided to create a special website for the project, which we are going to utilise in order to create a series of shared resources (web-bibliography, interviews, case-study files, dossiers) and for the purpose of the cooperative writing of certain documents (e.g. "hot issues" and "dictionary").

As regards the part of the research about movements and political organization, as soon as I've reviewed the original document in the light of the ideas that have emerged, and as soon as it has been translated into English, we'll be opening the working community and inviting a group of new friends, from abroad Italy as well, to join the mailing list.

As far as concerns the section on institutions of the project, Joan Subirats and Sandro Mezzadra took the joint commitment to draft an initial document.

While Hilary Wainwright, for the section related to political parties and representation systems, is planning a small meeting in the Manchester - UK to be held either in July or September.
Finally, Mayo Fuster, together with a small group of hackers, is going to draw up an initial document pertaining the techno-political tools, interfaces, machineries section of the search.
The Barcelona meeting is probably going to be moved to the 7th-9th October 2006.

As regards the Bologna meeting, we mainly focused on the document concerning the movements, although a number of ideas also emerged pertaining to the area of research about institutions.

About movements, the most hotly debated topics have been:

- the mechanisms of "swarming" – e.g., the existence of a communicative infrastructure and its link with emergencies (a term used in both senses of the word: emergence and emergency); the necessary flowing back into multiplicity and micro-processes as a result of the impossible maintenance of continuity in the intensity implied in swarming and as a result of the absence of a shared horizon;
- the ambivalence of fluidity: e.g. it aids the phases of reflux and the overcoming of the lack of any conflict-arbitration system; it corresponds to practices involving the evasion of forms of macro-representation and mass-media communication, etc., but it also weakens the presence of an independent subjectivity at the level of hegemony in public debate and in relations with political systems;
- the importance of micro-politics and the need to create "new indicators" (such as for GDP): e.g. growth in the number of vegetarians, of small independent publishers, or of forms of alternative consumption;
- the relationship between the global movement and other movements, in the Italian case: influence/breakdown; creation of a space of possibilities and/or re-significance (e.g. without it the Scansano and Val di Susa movements would have probably been merely cases of "not in my garden" protests). Has there been any link at the level of organisational forms?;
- the logics implied by the existence of a shared communicative infrastructure: translation of languages and praxes; contamination (and vice-versa, see the recent return to "immune identities");
- the role of pre-existing organisations and the role played by "excess" in the generation of the movement; the impact of these two worlds in the leadership of movements and organisations. In general, two models are operating here: the network model and the model based on a hardcore. The two produce a series of contradictions;
- the opportunity to frame the movement of movements in an historical perspective: the action of breaking up and reconstruction in the crisis of political systems; and the special difficulties met by this second function. The movement exploits a political void, and then suffers the return of existing politics; it pays for the lack of its own autonomous "normativeness", both as a tool for defending its own independence and as capacity of impacting on the external environment;
- the unproductive or counterproductive character of a speeding up of the process designed to construe traditional political subjects; and the difficulty in producing forms of "normativeness" and "automatisms", beyond the punctual unifying moments;
- the need to re-define the "institutional" dimension. Can it be defined in terms of software? As a mechanism that make acting informational elements? As a connections facilitator? As an approximation to the issue: which mechanisms define multiplicity within the same field? Which actions are capable of generating a "re-polarisation of the automatisms"?
- the construction of a shared horizon as a central feature of the potential convergence of this new phase, going beyond criticism and negative as unifying elements which characterized the first phase. Salary (common

minimum salary), precarity and income, as possible transversal topics; the promotion of a common European horizon.

At the level of research into institutions, on the other hand, I would say that the following questions emerged:

- "the network" is, first of all, the form taken by capitalist dominion; it is the form of the exploitation; the system of "automatic" connection of "microstructures" ("fractals") that do not proceed via the subjective re-composition of the worker, generating "swarming" devoid of freedom. The question is how to reverse such mechanisms? Under what conditions is "the network" open to the re-composition-connection of microstructures according to a liberating logic;
- "the network" also has an institutional form and strength (it uses and subordinates institutions): this is one of its strengths;
- the new scenario is problematic, nevertheless, for everyone, not only for the movements. There is a new world and an old politics. This also means that the movements' will to influence politics is directed towards obsolete, ineffective institutions. However, there are certain homologies and ambivalences, and it is useful to investigate how the system deals with, and resolves, problems of this kind;
- we are faced with the breakdown of a certain constitutional tradition – there is a new, real form of institutionalism that is in tension with traditional institutions: an idea of institutions as software not only exists in the collective imagination of the movements, but also in the world of real governance;
- for example, in the mechanisms of legitimisation, which are of fundamental importance since they define the impossible independence of institutions (their being forced to search for consensus). On the one hand you can see the persistence of a model based on the logic of representation as a method of legitimisation which subsequently opens the way for action; on the other hand, there is a model based on the network, where legitimisation is pursued and given in the action itself. This second method opens the way to a diverse relationship between institutions and movements. A political system that blocks out the movements is incapable of influencing social processes, and is devoid of transformative strength.

Finally, we began to identify a number of small case studies related to networks and swarming.

NETWORKS

Peer-to-peer networks for the sharing of music.
An example of a decentralised, self-organised network, more social than political – or politics situated where we are not used to see it.

Babels

Decentralised, horizontal network of translators created around the WSF process. Also Babels is more a social than a political network. Another excellent example of the re-combination of skills and attitudes generated by the subversion of the network.

Local social forums – the Italian case
The proliferation and dissolution of local social forums in Italy. What produced them? Why have few survived while the majority have disappeared? A good opportunity to inquiry about the temporary nature of the movements' organisational logic.

Hemispheric continental social alliance
Broad, highly influential network on the American continent. It impacted with efficacy the political system in the American continent. It is composed of numerous organisations, many of which are traditional and/or mass-organisations (e.g. trade unions and MST). A good opportunity to investigate the logic of network organisation as a model of coalition among organisations.

MRG and Barcelona
The "happy" self-dissolution of the Catalan MRG. Logic and consequences. What is lost when there is no longer a permanent form of coordination?. What did it produce in terms of Catalan micro-politics?

The WSF
The network dynamics of the most important space of convergence and "institution" created by the global movement. Conflicts, contradictions and evolution..

The Lilliput Network
Influential Italian network active from Seattle to Genoa and until the first anti-war demonstrations. Subsequently entered a period of crisis. Composed of a multiplicity of organisations and individuals, it possesses a formal constitution based on the principles of open space and networking.

SWARMING

Topical cases could be:
-   the 15th February 2003;
-   the mobilisation in Spain subsequent to the bomb attacks in Madrid.

Good. That's plenty for now.
Hope to see you soon.

Marco Berlinguer. (May 2006)

The original, Italian version of this is available in the e-library

Problemas de la política autónoma: pensando el pasaje de lo social a lo político

Ezequiel Adamovsky

Primera parte: Dos hipótesis sobre una nueva estrategia para la política autónoma

Me propongo presentar aquí algunas hipótesis generales relativas a los problemas de estrategia de los movimientos emancipatorios anticapitalistas. Me interesa pensar las condiciones para dotarnos de una política emancipatoria efectiva, con capacidad para cambiar radicalmente la sociedad en que vivimos. Aunque no tendré espacio para analizar aquí casos concretos, estas reflexiones no son fruto de un ejercicio meramente "teórico", sino que parten de un intento por interpretar las tendencias propias de una serie de movimientos en los que he tenido ocasión de participar –el de asambleas populares en Argentina o algunos procesos del Foro Social Mundial y otras redes globales– o que he seguido de cerca en los últimos años –como el movimiento piquetero en Argentina o el zapatista en México.

Daré por sentados, sin discutirlos, tres principios que considero suficientemente demostrados, y que distinguen la política anticapitalista de la de la izquierda tradicional. Primero, que cualquier política emancipatoria debe partir de la idea de un sujeto múltiple que se articula y define en la acción común, antes que suponer un sujeto singular, pre-determinado, que liderará a los demás en el camino del cambio. Segundo, que la política emancipatoria necesita adquirir formas prefigurativas o anticipatorias, es decir, formas cuyo funcionamiento busque no producir efectos sociales contrarios a los que dice defenderse (por ejemplo, la concentración de poder en una minoría). Tercero, que de los dos principios anteriores se deriva la necesidad de cualquier proyecto emancipatorio de orientarse hacia el horizonte de una política autónoma. Es una 'política *autónoma*' aquella que apunta a la autonomía del todo cooperante, es decir, a la capacidad de vivir de acuerdo a reglas definidas colectivamente por y para el mismo cuerpo social que se verá afectado por ellas. Pero es una '*política* autónoma' porque supone que la multiplicidad de lo social requiere instancias políticas de negociación y gestión de diferencias, es decir, instancias que no surgen necesaria ni espontáneamente de cada grupo o individuo, sino que son fruto de acuerdos variables que cristalizan en prácticas e instituciones específicas.

Cuadro de situación: la debilidad de la política autónoma

Desde el punto de vista de la estrategia, los movimientos emancipatorios en la actualidad se encuentran, esquemáticamente, en dos situaciones. La primera es aquella en la que consiguen movilizar una energía social más o menos importante en favor de un proyecto de cambio social radical, pero lo hacen a costa de caer en las

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trampas de la política heterónoma. Por 'política heterónoma' refiero a los mecanismos políticos a traves de los cuales se canaliza aquella energía social de modo tal de favorecer los intereses de los poderosos, o al menos de minimizar el impacto de la movilización popular. Hay muchas variantes de este escenario:

-Por ejemplo el caso de Brasil, en el que un vasto movimiento social eligió construir un partido político, adoptó una estrategia electoral más o menos tradicional, logró hacer elegir a uno de los suyos como presidente, sólo para ver toda esa energía reconducida hacia una política que rápidamente olvidó sus aristas radicales y se acomodó como un factor de poder más dentro del juego de los poderosos.

-Otro ejemplo es el de algunos grupos y campañas con contenidos emancipatorios que, como algunas secciones del movimiento ambientalista, sindical, feminista, gay, de derechos humanos, por la justicia global, etc., se convierten en un reclamo singular, se organizan institucionalmente, y maximizan su capacidad de hacer *lobby* desligándose del movimiento emancipatorio más amplio y aceptando –si no en teoría, al menos en sus prácticas– los límites que marca la política heterónoma.

La segunda situación es la de aquellos colectivos y movimientos que adoptan un camino de rechazo estratégico de cualquier vínculo con la política heterónoma, pero encuentran grandes dificultades para movilizar voluntades sociales amplias o generar cambios concretos:

-Por ejemplo, los movimientos sociales autónomos que sostienen importantes luchas (incluso muy radicalizadas y hasta insurreccionales), pero que al no desarrollar modos de vincularse con la sociedad como un todo y/o resolver la cuestión del estado, terminan pereciendo víctimas de la represión o de su propio debilitamiento paulatino, o sobreviven como un pequeño grupo encapsulado y de poca capacidad subversiva.

-Otro ejemplo es el de algunas secciones del movimiento de resistencia global, con gran capacidad de hacer despliegues importantes de acción directa, pero que, al igual que el caso anterior, encuentran límites a su expansión en su poca capacidad de vincularse con la sociedad como un todo.

-Finalmente, existen colectivos radicales que pueden reivindicar diferentes ideologías (marxismo, anarquismo, autonomismo, etc.), pero que se encapsulan en una política puramente 'narcisista'; es decir, están más preocupados por mantener su propia imagen de radicalidad y 'pureza' que por generar un cambio social efectivo; funcionan muchas veces como pequeños grupos de pertenencia de escasa relevancia política.

Estas dos situaciones constituyen una distinción analítica que no debe hacernos perder de vista la cantidad de grises que hay entre ellas, los interesantísimos experimentos de nuevas formas políticas que hay por todos lados, y los logros importantes que muchos grupos pueden exhibir. A pesar de las observaciones críticas que he hecho, todos estas opciones estratégicas nos pertenecen: son parte del

repertorio de lucha del movimiento social como un todo, y expresan deseos y búsquedas emancipatorios que no podemos sino reconocer como propios.

Y sin embargo, es indudable que necesitamos nuevos caminos de desarrollo para que la política autónoma pueda salir del *impasse* estratégico en el que nos encontramos. Por todas partes existen colectivos que, en su pensamiento y en sus prácticas, intentan salir de este *impasse*. El viraje estratégico iniciado por los zapatistas recientemente con su Sexta Declaración es quizás el mejor ejemplo, pero de ningún modo el único. Lo que sigue es un intento por contribuir a esas búsquedas.

Hipótesis uno:
Sobre las dificultades de la izquierda a la hora de pensar el poder (o qué 'verdad' hay en el apoyo popular a la derecha)

Partamos de una pregunta incómoda: ¿por qué, si la izquierda representa la mejor opción para la humanidad, no sólo no consigue movilizar apoyos sustanciales de la población, sino que ésta incluso suele simpatizar con opciones políticas del sistema, en ocasiones claramente de derecha? Evitemos respuestas simplistas y paternalistas del tipo "la gente no entiende", "los medios de comunicación…", etc., que nos llevan a un lugar de superioridad que ni merecemos, ni nos es políticamente útil. Por supuesto, el sistema tiene un formidable poder de control de la cultura para contrarrestar cualquier política radical. Pero la respuesta a nuestra pregunta no puede buscarse sólo allí.

Más allá de cuestiones coyunturales, el atractivo perenne de la derecha es que se presenta como (y al menos en algún sentido realmente es) una fuerza de *orden*. ¿Pero por qué el orden habría de tener tal atractivo para quienes no pertenecen a la clase dominante? Vivimos en una sociedad que reproduce y amplía cada vez más una paradójica *tensión constitutiva*. Cada vez estamos más 'descolectivizados', es decir, más atomizados, crecientemente aislados, convertidos en individuos sin vínculos fuertes con el prójimo. Al mismo tiempo, nunca en la historia de la humanidad existió una interdependencia tan grande en la producción de lo social. La división social del trabajo ha alcanzado una profundidad tal, que a cada minuto, aunque no lo percibamos, nuestra vida social depende de la labor de millones de personas de todas partes del mundo. En la sociedad capitalista, las instituciones que permiten un grado de cooperación social de tan grande escala son, paradójicamente, aquellas que nos separan del prójimo y nos convierten en individuos aislados y sin ninguna responsabilidad frente a los otros: el mercado y el (su) estado. Ni al consumir, ni al votar un candidato tenemos que rendir cuentas frente a los demás: son actos de individuos aislados.

Tal interdependencia hace que la totalidad de lo social requiera, como nunca antes, que todos hagamos nuestra parte del trabajo en la sociedad. Si un número incluso pequeño de personas decidiera de alguna manera entorpecer el 'normal' desarrollo de la vida social, podría sin grandes dificultades causar un caos de amplias proporciones. Para poner un ejemplo, si un campesino decide que hoy no trabajará

su tierra, no pone en riesgo la labor o la vida de su vecino; pero si el operador de la sala de coordinación del sistema de subterráneos o de una central eléctrica decide que hoy no irá a su trabajo, o si el corredor de la bolsa de valores echa a correr un rumor infundado, su decisión afectaría las vidas y las labores de cientos de miles de personas. La paradoja es que justamente el creciente individualismo y la desaparición de toda noción de responsabilidad frente al prójimo incrementa como nunca las posibilidades de que, de hecho, haya quien haga cosas que afecten seriamente las vidas de los demás sin pensarlo dos veces. Nuestra interdependencia real en muchas areas vitales contrasta, paradójicamente, con nuestra subjetividad de individuos socialmente irresponsables.

Como individuos que vivimos sumidos en esta tensión, todos experimentamos en mayor o menos medida, consciente o inconscientemente, la *angustia por la continuidad del orden social* y de nuestras propias vidas, en vista de la vulnerabilidad de ambos. Sabemos que dependemos de que otros individuos, a quienes no conocemos ni tenemos cómo dirigirnos, se comporten de la manera esperada. Es la angustia que el cine pone en escena una y otra vez, en cientos de películas casi calcadas en las que un individuo o grupo pequeño –por maldad, afición al crimen, locura, etc.– amenaza seriamente la vida de otras personas hasta que alguna intervención enérgica –un padre decidido, un superhéroe, las fuerzas de seguridad, un vengador anónimo, etc.– vuelve a poner las cosas en su lugar. El espectador sale del cine con su angustia aplacada, aunque la tranquilidad le dure sólo un momento.

Como en el caso del cine, el atractivo político de los llamados al orden que lanza la derecha deriva de esa angustia por la posibilidad del *desorden catastrófico*. Y desde el punto de vista de un individuo aislado, da lo mismo si quien entorpece la vida social o personal es simplemente otro individuo que lo hace por motivos antojadizos, o un grupo social que lo hace para defender algún derecho. No importa si se trata de un delincuente, un loco, un sindicato en huelga, o un colectivo que realiza una acción directa: cuando cunde el temor a la disolución del orden social, prosperan los llamados al orden. Y la derecha siempre está allí para ofrecer su 'mano dura' (aunque sean sus propias recetas las que han producido y siguen profundizando el riesgo de la anomia).

De nada vale protestar contra esta situación: es constitutiva de las sociedades en las que vivimos. No se trata meramente de una cuestión de actitud, que pueda remediarse con mayor 'educación' política. No hay 'error' en el apoyo a la derecha: si se percibe un riesgo que amenaza la vida social, la opción por el 'orden' es perfectamente racional y comprensible *en ausencia de otras factibles y mejores*. En otras palabras, en el atractivo del orden hay una 'verdad' social que es necesario tener bien en cuenta. Seguramente los medios de comunicación y la cultura dominante ponen importantes obstáculos a la prédica emancipatoria. Pero creo que gran parte de nuestras dificultades a la hora de movilizar apoyos sociales tiene que ver con que raramente tenemos aquella 'verdad' en cuenta, por lo que las propuestas que hacemos de cara a la sociedad suelen no ser *ni factibles, ni mejores*.

Sostendré como hipótesis que la tradición de izquierda, por motivos que no tendré ocasión de explicar aquí, ha heredado una gran dificultad a la hora de pensar el orden social y, por ello, para relacionarse políticamente con la sociedad toda. La dificultad señalada se relaciona con la imposibilidad de *pensar la inmanencia del poder respecto de lo social*. En general, la izquierda ha pensado el poder como un ente pura y solamente parasitario, que coloniza *desde afuera* a una sociedad entendida como colectividad cooperante que existe previa e independientemente de ese ente *externo*. De allí la caracterización, en el marxismo clásico, del estado y del aparato jurídico como la 'superestructura' de una sociedad que se define fundamentalmente en el plano económico. También de allí deriva la actitud de buena parte del anarquismo, que tiende a considerar las reglas que no emanen de la voluntad individual como algo puramente externo y opresivo, y al estado como una realidad de la que fácilmente podría prescindirse sin costo para una sociedad que, se supone, ya funciona *completa* bajo el dominio estatal. Algo de esto hay también en algunas lecturas del autonomismo, que tienden a considerar la cooperación *actual* de la multitud como suficiente para una existencia autoorganizada, con sólo que el poder se quite de en medio. Es también lo que muchos de nosotros perdimos de vista al adoptar la distinción que hace John Holloway entre un *poder-sobre* (el poder entendido como capacidad de mando) y un *poder-hacer* (el poder entendido como capacidad de hacer) como si fueran dos 'bandos' enfrentados y claramente delimitados. Por el contrario, hoy sabemos que el hecho de que usemos *la misma palabra* para referir a ambos evidencia, precisamente, que, con frecuencia, ha sido el *poder-sobre* el que ha reorganizado los lazos sociales de modo de expandir el *poder-hacer* colectivo (en otras palabras, su papel no es meramente parasitario y exterior a la sociedad).

Lo que nos importa aquí es que, en los tres casos mencionados, se adopta, desde el punto de vista estratégico (y también en la 'cultura militante', en la forma de relacionarse con los demás, etc.) una actitud de pura hostilidad y rechazo del orden social, de las leyes y las instituciones; unos lo hacen en espera de un nuevo orden a instaurar luego de la Revolución, otros en la confianza en que lo social ya posee un 'orden' propio que hace de cualquier instancia política-legal-institucional algo innecesario.

Quizás en alguna época tuviera algún sentido estratégico pensar el cambio social de esta manera, como una obra fundamentalmente de *destrucción* de un orden social, de su legalidad y de sus instituciones, luego de la cual reinaría lo social directamente autoorganizado, o, en todo caso, se construiría un orden político diferente. En la Rusia de 1917, por ejemplo, podía pensarse en destruir los lazos organizados por el estado y el mercado, y esperar que algo parecido a una sociedad permaneciera todavía en pié. De cualquier forma, un 85% de la población todavía desarrollaba una economía de subsistencia en el campo, en gran medida en comunas campesinas, y se autoabastecía tanto en sus necesidades económicas, como en lo que refiere a las regulaciones 'políticas' que garantizaban la vida en común. En ese escenario, podía prescindirse con costos relativamente soportables tanto del estado como de las instituciones de mercado. (Pero aún así, debe decirse, la desarticulación de ambos durante el llamado 'comunismo de guerra' causó la muerte por inanición de decenas

de miles de personas y la aparición de prácticas de canibalismo, entre otras calamidades).

Hoy, sin embargo, el escenario ha cambiado completamente. No existe ya, salvo marginalmente, ninguna sociedad 'debajo' del estado y del mercado. Por supuesto que existen muchos vínculos sociales que suceden más allá de ambos. Pero los vínculos principales que producen la vida social hoy están *estructurados a través del mercado y del estado*. Ambos han penetrado transformando de tal manera la vida social, que no hay ya 'sociedad' fuera de ellos. Si por arte de magia pudiéramos hacer que ambos dejaran de funcionar súbitamente, lo que quedaría no sería una humanidad liberada, sino el caos catastrófico: agrupamientos más o menos débiles de individuos descolectivizados aquí y allá, y el fin de la vida social. (La 'multitud cooperante' teorizada por el autonomismo no debe entenderse, en este sentido, como una 'sociedad' que ya existe allí *por fuera* del estado-mercado, sino como una presencia *primera* de lo social que, en su resistencia al poder, construye las condiciones de posibilidad para una vida emancipada).

De esto se deriva que plantear una estrategia política de cambio radical en exterioridad total al mercado y al estado es plantearla en exterioridad total a la sociedad. Una política emancipatoria que, como programa explícito y/o como parte de su 'cultura militante' o su 'actitud', se presente como una fuerza *puramente destructiva* del orden social (o, lo que es lo mismo, como una fuerza que sólo realiza vagas promesas de reconstrucción de otro orden luego de la destrucción del actual), no contará nunca con el apoyo de grupos importantes de la sociedad. Y esto es así sencillamente porque los prójimos perciben (correctamente) que tal política pone seriamente en riesgo la vida social actual, con poco para ofrecer a cambio. En otras palabras, propone un salto al vacío para una sociedad que, por su complejidad, no puede asumir ese riesgo. Se comprende entonces la dificultad de la izquierda de articular vastas fuerzas sociales en pos de un proyecto de cambio radical: la gente no confía en nosotros, y tiene excelentes motivos para no hacerlo.

A la hora de repensar nuestra estrategia, en indispensable tener en cuenta esta verdad fundamental: el caracter *constitutivo e inmanente* de las normas e instituciones que, sí, permiten y organizan la opresión y la explotación, pero que también y al mismo tiempo estructuran la vida social toda. En vista de lo anterior, no es posible seguir presentando a la sociedad una opción que signifique meramente la destrucción del orden actual y un salto al vacío animado por vagas promesas. Necesitamos, por el contrario, presentar una estrategia (y una actitud o cultura militante acorde) que explicite el camino de *transición* que permita reemplazar al estado y el mercado por *otras formas de gestión de lo social*; formas con el suficiente grado de eficacia y en la escala necesaria como para garantizar la continuidad de la profunda división del trabajo que hoy caracteriza nuestra vida social (me refiero, por supuesto, a la división del trabajo que potencia la cooperación social, y no a la que funda las divisiones de clase). En otras palabras, es necesario pensar una estrategia política que apunte a reemplazar el estado y el mercado por *instituciones de nuevo tipo* capaces de gestionar el cuerpo social. Me refiero a *instituciones políticas* que

garanticen la realización de las tareas sociales que, por su complejidad y escala, el cuerpo social espontáneamente no está en condiciones de resolver.

La conclusión de lo anterior es que ninguna política emancipatoria que pretenda ser efectiva puede plantear su estrategia, explícita o implícitamente, *en exterioridad* al problema de la *gestión* alternativa (pero actual y concreta) de lo social. No existe política autónoma ni autonomía sin asumir responsabilidad por la gestión global de la sociedad realmente existente. Dicho de otro modo, no hay futuro para una estrategia (o una actitud) puramente destructiva que se niegue a pensar la *construcción* de alternativas de gestión *aquí y ahora*, o que resuelva ese problema o bien ofreciendo una vía autoritaria y por ello inaceptable (como lo hace la izquierda tradicional), o bien con meros escapes a la utopía y al pensamiento mágico (como el 'primitivismo', la confianza en el llamado a 'asambleas' cada vez que deba tomarse cualquier decisión, o en 'hombres nuevos' altruistas que espontáneamente actuarán siempre en bien de los demás, etc.). Para evitar confusiones: no estoy sugiriendo que los anticapitalistas debamos ocuparnos de gestionar el capitalismo actual de manera un poco menos opresiva (como supone la opción 'progresista'). Lo que intento argumentar es que que necesitamos presentar opciones estratégicas que se hagan cargo de la necesidad de tener dispositivos políticos *propios*, capaces de gestionar globalmente la sociedad *actual* y de evitar así la disolución catastrófica de todo orden, mientras caminamos hacia la instauración de un mundo sin capitalismo.

Hipótesis dos:
Sobre la necesidad de una 'interfase' que permita pasar de lo social a lo político

Sostendré como segunda hipótesis que la formulación de un nuevo camino estratégico que se haga cargo del problema recién expuesto –es decir, que no sea puramente destructivo, sino también *creativo*– requiere pensar, explorar, y diseñar colectivamente una 'interfase' autónoma que ligue a nuestros movimientos *sociales* con el plano *político* de la gestión global de la sociedad. No está implícito en esta afirmación el prejuicio típico de la izquierda tradicional, que piensa que la autoorganización social 'está bien', pero que la política 'de verdad' pasa por el plano partidario-estatal. No hay en la idea de la necesidad de un 'pasaje de lo social a lo político' ninguna valoración de este plano como más importante que aquél. Por el contrario, intento argumentar que una política autónoma debe estar fírmemente anclada en procesos de autoorganización social, pero necesita expandirse hasta 'colonizar' el plano político-institucional. Permítanme explicar qué es eso de la 'interfase'.

En la sociedad capitalista, el poder se estructura en dos planos fundamentales: el plano social general (biopolítico), y el plano propiamente político (el estado). Llamo 'biopolítico' al plano social en general, siguiendo a Foucault, porque el poder ha penetrado allí, en nuestras vidas y relaciones cotidianas, de un modo tan profundo que ha transformado a ambas de acuerdo a su imagen y semejanza. Las relaciones mercantiles y de clase nos han ido moldeando como sujetos de modo tal, que

reproducimos *nosotros mismos* las relaciones de poder capitalistas. Cada uno de nosotros es agente productor de capitalismo. El poder ya no domina desde afuera, parasitariamente, sino *desde adentro* de la propia vida social.

Y sin embargo, en el capitalismo ese plano biopolítico no resulta suficiente para garantizar la reproducción del sistema: requiere también de un plano que llamaremos 'político' a secas: el del estado, las leyes, las instituciones, etc. Es este plano político el que garantiza que las relaciones biopolíticas en las que descansa el capitalismo funcionen aceitadamente: corrige desviaciones, castiga infracciones, decide cómo y hacia qué lugar direccionar la cooperación social, se ocupa de realizar tareas de gran escala que el sistema necesita, monitorea todo, y funciona como punta de lanza para que los vínculos biopolíticos capitalistas penetren cada vez más profundo. En otras palabras, el plano político se ocupa de la *gestión global de lo social*; bajo el capitalismo lo hace asumiendo una forma estatal.

En el capitalismo actual, el plano social (biopolítico) y el estatal (político) cuentan con una 'interfase' que los conecta: las instituciones representativas, los partidos, las elecciones, etc. A través de estos mecanismos (lo que suele llamarse 'la democracia') el sistema garantiza un mínimo de legitimidad para que la gestión global de lo social pueda realizarse. En otras palabras, es la interfase 'eleccionaria' la que asegura que la sociedad en general acepte que haya un cuerpo especial de autoridades que decidan sobre los demás. Pero se trata de una interfase *heterónoma*, porque crea esa legitimidad no en función del todo cooperante (la sociedad), sino en beneficio de sus clases dominantes. La interfase heterónoma canaliza la energía política de la sociedad de modo de impedir su auto-determinación.

Sostendré que la nueva generación de movimientos emancipatorios que está emergiendo desde hace algunos años viene haciendo formidables avances en el terreno *biopolítico*, pero encuentra dificultades para pasar de ese plano al *político*. Existen innumerables movimientos territoriales y colectivos de toda clase en todo el mundo que vienen poniendo en práctica formas de organización y de lucha que desafían los principios que rigen la vida social capitalista. La 'biopolítica' de estos movimientos *crea* –aunque sea en el ámbito local y hasta ahora en pequeña escala– relaciones humanas de nuevo tipo, horizontales, colectivistas, solidarias, no-mercantiles, autónomas, al mismo tiempo que lucha por *destruir* el capitalismo. Pero no hemos encontrado hasta ahora una estrategia política que nos permita trasladar estos valores y formas de vida al terreno de la gestión global de lo social, cosa indispensable para poder generar cambios más sólidos, profundos y permanentes en la sociedad toda. En otras palabras, nos falta desarrollar una interfase de nuevo tipo, una interfase autónoma que nos permita articular formas de cooperación política de gran escala, y que conecte nuestros movimientos, nuestros colectivos y nuestras luchas con el plano de la gestión global de lo social. Hemos rechazado correctamente la interfase que nos proponía la izquierda tradicional –los partidos (sean electorales o de vanguardia) y los líderes iluminados–, por comprender que se trataba de una interfase *heterónoma*. Para decirlo de otro modo, era una interfase que, en lugar de colonizar el plano político con *nuestros* valores y formas de vida emancipatorios, funcionaba colonizándonos a nosotros con aquellos de las élites y de la clase

dominante. Pero nos falta todavía pensar, explorar y diseñar una interfase autónoma: sin resolver esta cuestión, temo que nuestros movimientos no lograrán establecer lazos más amplios con la sociedad toda y permanecerán en estado de permanente vunerabilidad frente al poder. La estrategia de la Sexta Declaración zapatista lleva la promesa de avances importantes en este sentido.

SEGUNDA PARTE: LA INTERFASE AUTÓNOMA COMO INSTITUCIÓN DE NUEVO TIPO

¿En qué consistiría una interfase *autónoma*? ¿Qué nueva forma de organización política, diferente de los partidos, nos permitiría articular a gran escala la cooperación de vastos sectores del movimiento emancipatorio? ¿Cómo hacer para que tenga la efectividad necesaria como para hacerse cargo de la gestión global de lo social y, así, pueda convertirse en un instrumento estratégico para la superación del Estado y del mercado? Son éstas preguntas que el propio movimiento social ya se está haciendo intuitivamente, y que sólo él podrá resolver. Lo que sigue son algunas ideas para pensar colectivamente la cuestión. Comencemos con algunos principios generales.

Tesis 1:
Sobre la necesidad de una ética de la igualdad

Ya que no pueden pensarse normas e instituciones para seres abstractos, sin tener en cuenta sus costumbres y valores (es decir, su cultura específica), comencemos con una tesis sobre la nueva cultura emancipatoria.

Una de las grandes tragedias de la tradición de izquierda fue (y sigue siendo) su rechazo a pensar la dimensión ética de las luchas emancipatorias. En general, tanto en sus teorías como implícitamente en sus prácticas, la actitud típicamente de izquierda reduce el problema de la ética –es decir, la cuestión de los principios que deben orientar las buenas acciones, distinguiéndolas de las malas– a un problema meramente epistemológico. En otras palabras, las acciones políticas se consideran implícitamente 'buenas' si se corresponden con lo que indica una 'verdad' conocida previamente. Lo éticamente bueno/malo se reduce así a la 'línea' correcta/incorrecta. Así, la cultura de izquierda rechaza implícitamente toda ética de cuidado del otro (me refiero al otro *concreto,* el prójimo), reemplazándola por el compromiso con una verdad derivada de una ideología que afirma defender a un otro *abstracto* (la humanidad). Los efectos de esta ausencia de ética se observan constantemente en las prácticas: militantes abnegados y de buen corazón con frecuencia se permiten, en nombre de su 'verdad', acciones manipulativas y faltas de respeto que resultan inaceptables para cualquier persona común (que, como consecuencia, prefiere mantenerse lo más lejos posible de aquellos militantes). Implícitamente, se trata de una postura elitista que dificulta la cooperación entre iguales. Alguien que se reclame poseedor de la verdad no malgastará su tiempo en escuchar a los demás ni estará dispuesto a negociar consensos. Una política emancipatoria, en consecuencia, debe estar firmemente asentada en una ética radical de la igualdad y de

responsabilidad frente al (y cuidado del) otro *concreto*. En este plano, para crear, difundir y hacer carne una ética emancipatoria, queda una enorme tarea por hacer. Muchos movimientos, sin embargo, ya están recorriendo ese camino: una inversión de la relación entre ética y verdad similar a la que aquí proponemos es la que expresa el eslogan zapatista "caminar al paso del más lento".

Tesis 2:
La horizontalidad requiere instituciones

Un problema fundamental que bloquea el desarrollo de nuevas formas organizativas reside en dos creencias erróneas: 1) que las estructuras organizativas y las normas más o menos firmes de algún modo atentan contra la horizontalidad y el caracter 'abierto' de las organizaciones, y 2) que cualquier división del trabajo, especialización y delegación de funciones atenta contra la horizontalidad y/o la autonomía. Los movimientos con vocación horizontal en Argentina y en otros sitios ya hace tiempo se cuestionan tales creencias.

Cualquiera que haya participado en alguna organización de tipo horizontal, incluso pequeña, sabe que, en ausencia de mecanismos que protejan la pluralidad y fomenten la participación en pié de igualdad, la 'horizontalidad' pronto se convierte en un terreno en el que predominan los más fuertes o mejor preparados. También sabe lo frustrantes y de alcances limitados que pueden ser las estructuras asamblearias en las que *todos* están forzados a tomar siempre *todas* las decisiones – desde la estrategia más general, hasta el cambio de un enchufe. La 'tiranía de la falta de estructura', como la llamó hace tiempo una feminista norteamericana, desgasta nuestras organizaciones, subvierte sus principios, y las hace ineficaces.

Este problema se hace evidente toda vez que un colectivo o movimiento adquiere una escala mayor. Mientras lo integren pocas personas –digamos, menos de 200 o 300– el problema de la división de tareas y la asignación de roles que implican algún grado de 'representación' se resuelve por mecanismos personales e informales. Alguna gente comienza espontáneamente a desempeñar esas funciones, y el colectivo lo alienta y permite tácitamente porque es necesario. Como esa asignación de tareas no es electiva ni explícitamente acordada, con frecuencia el colectivo encuentra difícil controlar a quienes las desempeñan, y asegurar que no acumulen experiencia, contactos, credibilidad, en suma, *poder*, a costa de los demás. Las tensiones que de ello derivan suelen aparecer como cuestiones personales que, sin embargo, entorpecen, debilitan y con frecuencia destruyen el colectivo. Por otra parte, cuando el tamaño del grupo supera la escala del contacto cara a cara y del conocimiento personal entre todos los miembros, la ausencia de reglas impersonales de funcionamiento, de formas acordadas (y controladas) de delegación y de división de tareas, limita seriamente el trabajo colectivo.

A diferencia de lo que suele pensarse, las organizaciones horizontales y autónomas necesitan *mucho más* de las 'instituciones' que las organizaciones jerárquicas. Éstas siempre pueden contar, en última instancia, con la voluntad del líder para resolver

conflictos, asignar tareas, etc. Por ello, y para pasar del plano biopolítico al político, los movimientos y colectivos autónomos necesitan desarrollar *instituciones de nuevo tipo*. Por 'instituciones' no refiero a jerarquías burocráticas, sino simplemente a un conjunto de acuerdos respecto a pautas de funcionamiento, formulados como reglas explícitas, y dotados de las estructuras organizacionales que garanticen su efectivo funcionamiento. Esto incluye:

a) Una división del trabajo razonable, indispensable para potenciar la escala de la cooperación. Si todos son responsables de todo al mismo tiempo, nadie resulta responsable de nada. La división de tareas también lleva implícita una división clara entre tipos de decisiones que tomarán individuos o grupos de trabajo (aunque siempre 'fiscalizables' por los demás), y otras que tomará el colectivo en su conjunto. Esta división del trabajo, sin embargo, debe estar fundada en los valores del movimiento: las tareas y responsabilidades deben repartirse de modo tal que no resulte –como sucede en los partidos políticos– que algunos acumulen siempre las tareas calificadas y enriquecedoras (tomar decisiones, hablar en público, etc.), mientras que otros sólo desempeñan funciones tediosas y repetitivas (hacer pintadas o vender el periódico). Existen diversas formas para garantizar que esto no suceda, desde esquemas de tareas rotativas, hasta la asignación de un balance de tareas para cada uno, de modo que todos siempre desempeñen al mismo tiempo un poco de tareas enriquecedoras y otro poco de rutinarias.

b) Formas atenuadas de representación y delegación. La crítica justa a los representantes que terminan 'sustituyendo' al representado nos ha llevado, en algunos casos, a rechazar la representación *toda* en favor de supuestas prácticas de democracia directa. Sin embargo, la creencia en que se pueda organizar cooperación y acción colectiva a gran escala sin apelar a *ninguna* forma de delegación no es otra cosa que pensamiento 'mágico'. No siempre es útil o posible que nadie en particular actúe como vocero del grupo, o que todos tomen una decisión de extrema urgencia, u ocupen un puesto en una mesa de negociaciones, etc. El problema de la representación no es que *haya* representantes, sino que éstos se conviertan en *un grupo especial* permanente, que se distinga y separe del colectivo. Una institución de nuevo tipo debe incluir acuerdos previos acerca de quiénes desempeñarán funciones de voceros, delegados o representantes en diversos ámbitos o situaciones, y a partir de qué mecanismos democráticos y transparentes serán designados. Pero también deben existir reglas claras que limiten las posibilidades de que los favorecidos en un momento se transformen en 'dirigentes profesionales', fijos, con una capacidad de afectar las decisiones del conjunto mayor que la de los demás. Nuevamente en este caso, existe una gama de recursos organizacionales para garantizar esta cuestión, desde los cargos rotativos o por sorteo, hasta la limitación temporal del desempeño de una función, etc. Por lo demás, debe desarrollarse al máximo la capacidad de organizar procesos colectivos de toma de decisión para los asuntos importantes. En este sentido, una institución de nuevo tipo debe avanzar hacia el reemplazo del modelo del líder o dirigente –típico de los partidos– al del 'facilitador', capaz

de utilizar sus saberes y habilidades no para tomar decisiones por los demás, sino para colaborar con la organización de procesos colectivos de deliberación.

c) Una demarcación clara de los derechos que corresponden a los individuos y a las minorías, de aquellos que corresponden al colectivo o a la mayoría. La creencia según la cual una organización colectiva debe absorber o negar la individualidad de sus miembros (o, dicho de otro modo, que cada persona debe 'disolverse' como individuo para entrar a un colectivo) es no sólo autoritaria, sino poco realista. En cualquier forma de cooperación social subsiste una tensión ineliminable entre los deseos y necesidades de la persona –o de un grupo minoritario de personas– y aquéllos del colectivo. Una organización de nuevo tipo no puede funcionar imaginando que esta tensión no existe, ni pretendiendo suprimirla. De lo que se trata es de acordar colectivamente qué espacios de derecho y atribuciones permanerán en la esfera individual o minoritaria (por ejemplo, poder expresar públicamente una disidencia sin temor a ser expulsado, o abstenerse de participar en una acción colectiva que genere conflictos éticos), y cuáles serán patrimonio exclusivo del colectivo.

d) Un procedimiento justo y transparente de manejo de conflictos. En cualquier organización surgen inevitablemente conflictos, tanto de intereses y opiniones políticas, como simplemente personales. Al no ser reconocidos como legítimos, el mal manejo de estos conflictos es una de los motivos que más afectan la continuidad de la cooperación entre los movimientos emancipatorios. Es fundamental que una organización de nuevo tipo cuente con reglas claras para garantizar un tratamiento lo más justo posible para las partes de cualquier conflicto. También aquí hay un largo acervo de experiencias que pueden aprovecharse: técnicas de mediación, formas de 'división de poderes' de modo tal que ninguna parte en conflicto sea 'juez y parte' al mismo tiempo, etc.

Tesis 3:
Una organización política que 'imite' las formas biopolíticas

Las formas políticas de organización, en el sentido en el que las hemos definido en este ensayo, suelen establecer una relación 'mimética' con las formas biopolíticas. En otras palabras, cristalizan mecanismos institucionales y normativos que copian o 'imitan' ciertas formas que son inmanentes a la auto-organización social. Esto, sin embargo, no significa que sean neutrales: por el contrario, su variable forma específica puede direccionar la cooperación social en un sentido que, o bien refuerza el las relaciones heterónomas (*poder-sobre*), o bien lo hace en favor de otras autónomas (un *poder-hacer* emancipado). El andamiaje político-institucional del capitalismo es un buen ejemplo de esto.

La estructura política de los inicios del Estado capitalista –la época de los Estados absolutistas– 'imitaba' casi perfectamente la forma piramidal típica de las relaciones puramente heterónomas: una relación vertical de mando-obediencia. No casualmente, la estructura piramidal de los Estados (y luego también la de las escuelas, hospitales, empresas, etc.) 'copiaba' la jerarquía piramidal de mando de los ejércitos, que a su vez había solidificado en una jerarquía de 'grados' militares un diferencial primordial de poder entre los antiguos guerreros del medioevo. Así, el poder de mando estaba centralizado y concentrado en la cima de la pirámide –el rey–, que comandaba una estructura piramidal de funcionarios que paulatinamente dejaron de ser de origen noble. En ocasiones, sin embargo, el rey seguía compartiendo alguna atribución política con el consejo o 'parlamento' que representaba a su clase dominante, la aristocracia terrateniente/mercantil/guerrera.

Por motivos que no podemos explicar aquí –pero que tienen que ver tanto con las propias necesidades del capitalismo como con la presión de las clases subalternas– esa estructura estatal primera fue evolucionando hasta adquirir la forma institucional que hoy conocemos. Así, la estructura piramidal básica fue incorporando otros dispositivos institucionales que 'imitaban', al menos parcialmente, *otras* formas de cooperación no-jerárquicas presentes en el cuerpo social. Los parlamentos, ahora 'democráticos', permitieron así incorporar una mayor pluralidad de voces e intereses políticos en un dispositivo deliberativo que, si bien 'imitaba' las formas asamblearias propias de la democracia verdadera, estaba cuidadosamente controlado por un marco institucional que limitaba sus alcances. Otro ejemplo: el sistema de selección de los funcionarios a través de elecciones competitivas 'democráticas' entre partidos permitió canalizar los impulsos de auto-organización política y el natural agrupamiento de afinidades en una nueva estructura jerárquica que los conectaba así con la pirámide estatal primordial. Más recientemente, para recuperar legitimidad, algunos Estados han incluso establecido mecanismos a través de los cuales se abre parcialmente la toma de decisiones políticas –siempre de poca importancia– a colectivos auto-organizados que *no pertenecen* al aparato estatal, incluso si son de tipo horizontal (asociaciones vecinales, cooperativas, ONGs, movimientos sociales, etc.). Los experimentos de presupuesto participativo son un buen ejemplo. Lo que importa para nuestros propósitos es que todo el andamiaje institucional del Estado capitalista combina formas jerárquicas (piramidales) y formas no-jerárquicas (deliberativas u horizontales) de modo tal de poner la energía de cooperación social en un marco jerárquico y heterónomo. Así, incluso bajo el capitalismo las formas no-jerárquicas y autónomas resultan indispensables para organizar la energía social; sin embargo, rodeadas por un marco institucional piramidal y sobredeterminadas por el poder, son utilizadas para canalizar esa energía en favor de una política heterónoma. Tras toda la parafernalia pseudo-participativa, el Estado sigue siendo ante todo aquella vieja pirámide de la época absolutista.

La sociedad emancipada del futuro seguramente invertirá la relacion actual entre formas jerárquicas y horizontales, de modo tal que aquéllas, de ser necesarias, estarán incluidas en un diseño político-institucional que las ponga al servicio de éstas. Existen autores que vienen desarrollando un importante trabajo de imaginación de instituciones de nuevo tipo tanto para reemplazar al Estado (por

ejemplo Stephen Shalom, en www.zmag.org/shalompol.htm) como al mercado (por ejemplo Michael Albert, en su libro *Parecon* y en www.lavaca.org/notas/nota379.shtml, www.parecon.org). Lo que me interesa aquí es pensar, en función de *una estrategia para el presente*, cómo crear una nueva forma de organización política que pueda funcionar como 'interfase autónoma' en el sentido explicado más arriba.

La hipótesis principal en este punto es que un diseño institucional de nuevo tipo podría desarrollarse 'imitando' las formas biopolíticas que nuestros movimientos *ya vienen* explorando. En otras palabras, el trabajo colectivo de diseño institucional –que seguramente llevará muchos años de ensayo y error– puede orientarse identificando aquéllas encrucijadas en las que la auto-organización autónoma florece y se expande, y aquéllas otras en las que cae víctima de sus propias tendencias jerárquicas y heterónomas, para instituir dispositivos políticos que se apoyen en (y potencien a) aquéllas, a la vez que sorteen, limiten o eliminen a éstas. Se trata de pensar un dispositivo organizacional que, en lugar de contener, parasitar o reprimir al movimiento social, se ocupe de facilitarlo, de protegerlo, y de dotarlo de herramientas más efectivas a la hora de organizar la cooperación entre iguales a gran escala. Se trata, asimismo, de pensar una organización de nuevo tipo que pueda hacerse cargo de la gestión global de lo social.

Nuestras nuevas organizaciones políticas podrían pensarse como una 'imitación' del funcionamiento de las redes biopolíticas cooperantes (es decir, de la forma primordial que se opone a la de la pirámide del poder). Permítanme expicarme. Desde hace algunos años, científicos del campo de las ciencias naturales y de las ciencias de la información vienen desarrollando las llamadas 'Teorías de la complejidad', que, entre otras cosas, permiten entender un fenómeno llamado 'emergencia'. Emergencia refiere a un conjunto de acciones autónomas de múltiples agentes en el plano local que generan una pauta de comportamiento global o general que nadie planea ni dirige, y que sin embargo es perfectamente racional y efectiva. Cada agente local sigue sus propias reglas, pero en la interacción con otros agentes locales, con los que se contacta en red, emergen patrones de acción colectiva que pueden aprender, evolucionar y adaptarse efectivamente al medio sin que nadie las controle o dirija, y de formas inesperadas. Las redes 'hacen cosas' colectivamente, sin que nadie esté allí gritando órdenes. Procesos de 'emergencia' se observan en una variedad de fenómenos naturales, desde el comportamiento de algunos tipos de hongos hasta el vuelo de las bandadas de pájaros. También se han observado en la vida social, desde los patrones de crecimiento de las ciudades, hasta el ejemplo de los ejemplos: Internet.

El ejemplo de las redes y el fenómeno de emergencia fue inmediatamente utilizado como analogía para pensar la acción política de aspiraciones no jerárquicas. Muchos tendimos a considerar las estructuras en red y sus comportamientos en el nivel biopolítico como un 'modelo' suficiente para pensar y organizar una nueva estrategia emancipatoria. Las redes parecían ofrecer un modelo no-jerárquico ni centralizado, flexible, de cooperación no-competitiva. Como parte de los debates dentro del movimiento emancipatorio, muchos apostamos a la idea de las 'redes laxas', y nos

opusimos a cualquier intento de reencauzar las redes dentro de formas jerárquicas. La esperanza entonces era que la propia vida de la red, librada a su desarrollo espontáneo, instituiría un mundo emancipado (o, al menos, zonas de autonomía más o menos extensas).

La experiencia acumulada en los últimos tiempos parece indicar que, en esa esperanza, pecábamos de ingenuidad. Quisiera argumentar que las estructuras en red efectivamente proveen un 'modelo' indispensable para describir la 'vida cotidiana' –si se me permite la imagen– del movimiento en su plano social general (biopolítico). Pero el pasaje al plano político, sobre cuya irreductibilidad argumentábamos más arriba, requiere pensar y desarrollar *instituciones de nuevo tipo* que potencien y protejan los fenómenos de emergencia y auto-organización. Son tales instituciones las que pueden pensarse según la hipótesis de la 'imitación' de la forma red.

Para intentar clarificar este concepto, tomemos el ejemplo de Internet. El marco técnico y la estructura reticular de Internet han ofrecido inesperadas oportunidades para la expansión de la cooperación social espontánea en escalas nunca antes alcanzadas. La existencia de extensas 'comunidades inteligentes' de desarrollo espontáneo, no jerárquico ni centralizado, en las que se borran las distinciones entre emisores y receptores, ha sido ampliamente documentada en la red de redes. Y sin embargo, el propio funcionamiento de Internet genera también tendencias hacia la concentración de la información y los intercambios. No me refiero aquí a las varias formas en que los Estados y las corporaciones todavía controlan aspectos importantes del funcionamiento técnico de la red, sino a fenómenos de surgimiento de 'lugares de poder' que son inmanentes al propio ciberespacio. En el esquema de red abierta, cualquier punto de la red puede conectarse libre e inmediatamente con cualquier otro. Y sin embargo, casi todos nosotros utilizamos portales y motores de búsqueda como Google, que a la vez facilitan la conectividad –y con ello expanden las posibilidades de cooperación y el *poder-hacer*– y centralizan los flujos. Portales como Google tienen así un papel ambivalente: si bien, en cierto sentido, 'parasitan' la red, son también parte fundamental de la arquitectura de Internet. Por ahora, los efectos de esta concentración de flujos en el sentido de un ejercicio de *poder-sobre* por parte de Google son poco perceptibles. Aunque corporativo, el servicio tiene pocas restricciones y es gratuito. Pero potencialmente esa concentración fácilmente puede traducirse –y ya se está traduciendo– en una jerarquización de los contactos en la red. Valgan como ejemplo los recientes acuerdos de Google y Yahoo con el gobierno Chino para controlar y censurar los accesos de los cibernautas de ese país. Por otro lado, desde hace tiempo es posible pagar a Google para aparecer en lugares prominentes en las búsquedas, cosa que restringe la conectividad con nodos que no puedan o quieran pagar.

¿Qué hacer con una institucion como Google (y Yahoo, etc.)? Nos sirven para hallarnos entre nosotros, pero el propio uso que nosotros le damos pone en manos corporativas resortes de poder que se vuelven en nuestra contra. ¿Qué hacer? Respondo con una humorada. La estrategia de la izquierda tradicional indicaría que el Partido debe 'tomar Google': desplazar a sus dueños, eliminar Yahoo y cualquier

otra competencia corporativa, y 'poner Google al servicio de la clase obrera'. Pero las consecuencias autoritarias y la ineficacia de esta estrategia son bien conocidas. Por otro lado, una estrategia libertaria ingenua podría ser destruir Google, Yahoo, etc. e impedir luego el surgimiento de cualquier nodo que concentrara (incluso en pequeña escala) los flujos de información. Pero el resultado de esto sería el virtual derrumbamiento de Internet y de las experiencias de cooperación que la red permite. Todos podríamos *en teoría* comunicarnos con todos, pero en la práctica sería enormemente difícil hallarnos entre nosotros. En ausencia de opciones mejores, y ante el colapso de la cooperación social, todos terminaríamos arrojándonos en brazos del primer proto-empresario que nos ofreciera un nuevo Google…

¿Cómo operaría en este ejemplo (confesadamente tonto) la estrategia de una política autónoma como la que venimos persiguiendo? Lo haría identificando las encrucijadas de la red de cooperación que Internet articula, y los lugares de poder y de centralización que (como Google) esa misma red produce. Identificadas las tendencias inmanentes que pudieran dar lugar al surgimiento de formas de *poder-sobre*, la estrategia de una política autónoma sería la de generar una alternativa organizativa que permita realizar eficazmente las funciones que Google desempeña en favor del *poder-hacer*, poniendo cualquier concentración de flujos que fuere necesaria dentro de un marco institucional que garantice que esa concentración no subvierta los valores emancipatorios que la 'vida cotidiana' (biopolítica) de la red de redes promete. Se trata de pensar y desarrollar un diseño político-institucional (que por ello trasciende las posibilidades espontáneas o 'biopolíticas' de los nodos de la propia red) que proteja la red de las tendencias centralizadoras/jerarquizantes. Pero una estrategia autónoma no protege a la red de esas tendencias negándolas, sino reconociéndolas y asignándoles un lugar subordinado dentro de un andamiaje institucional 'inteligente', de modo que podamos mantenerlas bajo control. La tesis de la 'imitación' de la forma biopolítica reticular refiere precisamente a tal forma de operación institucional 'inteligente'.

IMAGINANDO UN MODELO ORGANIZATIVO DE NUEVO TIPO

Cambiando lo que haya que cambiar, el ejemplo de los problemas de Internet puede trasladarse al del movimiento emancipatorio en su conjunto. Existe hoy, aunque incipiente, una red laxa de movimientos sociales conectada a nivel global. También existen dentro de esta red, como parte de su funcionamiento inmanente, lugares de centralización y de poder que desempeñan un papel ambivalente, comparable al de Google. El Foro Social Mundial, las iniciativas 'Intergalactikas' de los zapatistas, algunas ONGs, e incluso algún gobierno nacional han colaborado para expandir la conectividad de la red y, con ella, las posibilidades de ampliar su capacidad cooperante. Pero, por su propia concentración de los flujos, estos polos de atracción son también potencialmente peligrosos para la red, ya que pueden convertirse en la vía de ingreso de una política heterónoma.

¿Cómo plantear una estrategia de política autónoma en este contexto? ¿Quién lo haría, y cómo? La hipótesis de la 'interfase autónoma' es un intento de pensar las

condiciones generales que hagan posible responder esa pregunta. Va de suyo que cualquier estrategia debe desarrolarse en y para situaciones concretas. Lo que sigue no pretende ser una receta ni un modelo, sino sólo un ejercicio imaginativo destinado a expandir nuestros horizontes de búsqueda.

Hemos dicho que una organización de nuevo tipo que pueda convertirse en una interfase autónoma debería a la vez tener un diseño anticipatorio (es decir, estar de acuerdo con nuestros valores fudamentales) y poseer la capacidad de 'colonizar' las estructuras jerárquicas existentes para –según convenga– neutralizarlas, reemplazarlas por otras, o ponerlas a funcionar en un marco político-institucional nuevo, de modo que habilite un camino hacia la vida emancipada. En términos prácticos, ambos imperativos suponen que lo fundamental de una organización de nuevo tipo sería su capacidad de articular formas de cooperación social no-opresivas, sólidas y de gran escala.

Aunque pueda sonar novedoso, la tradición de luchas emancipatorias ha ensayado en el pasado la creación de formas similares a la interfase autónoma de la que venimos hablando. El ejemplo más desarrollado y famoso fue el de los soviets durante las revoluciones rusas de 1905 y 1917. Como creación autónoma de los trabajadores, los soviets surgieron en principio como órganos de coordinación de la lucha. En el curso de las revoluciones, y sin proponérselo de antemano, los soviets desempeñaron al mismo tiempo funciones de 'doble poder' o, para decirlo en los términos que hemos empleado en este ensayo, de 'gestión global de lo social'. Los soviets estaban conformados por 'diputados' enviados por cada grupo en lucha, en un número que variaba de acuerdo a su tamaño. Ofrecieron así un ámbito abierto y múltiple de encuentro y deliberación horizontal para diversos sectores sociales – soldados, campesinos, obreros, minorías nacionales–, y diversas posturas políticas; a diferencia de las organizaciones partidarias existentes entonces, que exigían a sus miembros pertenencia exclusiva y hacían política en competencia unas con otras, el soviet era un ámbito de cooperación abierto a todos. A la vez, los soviets se ocuparon de organizar cuestiones tales como el abastecimiento en las ciudades, el sistema de transportes, la defensa en la guerra, etc. Su prestigio derivaba de ambos aspectos: de su 'representatividad' de los múltiples sectores en lucha y su caracter prefigurativo, y de su capacidad de ofrecer una alternativa real de gestión.

La estrategia de la interfase soviética frente al poder estatal fue variando durante la revolución de 1917: durante la fase de 'colaboración' cooperaron críticamente con el Gobierno Provisional, presionándolo desde afuera; en la fase de 'coalición', los soviets decidieron designar ellos mismos algunos de los ministros de ese gobierno; en Octubre finalmente optaron por deshacerse directamente del Estado anterior y designar un gobierno 'de comisarios del pueblo' propio. Durante ese proceso la dinámica de auto-organización soviética había ido multiplicándose (de forma no competitiva, a diferencia de los partidos) con la creación de cientos de soviets en todo el país que confluían en el Congreso Panruso de los Soviets, órgano depositario de la mayor legitimidad revolucionaria.

Cierto, la experiencia de los soviets se vio muy pronto frustrada. El gobierno designado por ellos pronto terminó, paradójicamente, vaciando de contenido a los propios soviets e instaurando una dictadura de partido único. No es éste el lugar de examinar los motivos de ese fracaso. Valga sugerir, sin embargo, que además de la responsabilidad central de los bolcheviques por haber ahogado a sangre y fuego la democracia en los soviets, quizás haya sido la propia institucionalidad marcadamente 'delegativa' de éstos la que haya facilitado el proceso. En efecto, la particular estructura institucional soviética descansaba en representantes delegados que, a su vez, elegían un Comité Ejecutivo de menos miembros que, en la práctica, concentraba mucho del conocimiento y la autoridad para tomar las decisiones más importantes. Quizás haya sido a través de esa distancia respecto de sus representados que se coló una nueva forma de *poder-sobre*. Quizás haya colaborado también la ausencia de una ética de la igualdad.

Comoquiera que haya sido, lo que nos importa aquí es el ejemplo histórico de una interfase autónoma, capaz tanto de articular la cooperación entre movimientos en lucha, como de hacerse cargo de la gestión global de lo social; su itinerario puede indicarnos posibilidades y peligros para la política emancipatoria del presente. Enseñanzas similares podrían extraerse también de la experiencia de los zapatistas (en particular de su invención de Juntas del Buen Gobierno).

¿Cómo podríamos imaginar una interfase para los tiempos actuales? Imaginemos una organización diseñada, como el soviet, para ser un *espacio abierto*, es decir, que acepte a todos quienes quieran participar (dentro de ciertos criterios, por supuesto) y que su propósito sea el de proporcionar una arena deliberativa. En otras palabras, una organización que no defina de antemano qué hacer, sino que ofrezca a sus miembros el espacio donde decidirlo colectivamente. Imaginemos que esta organización surge definiéndose de manera amplia como un espacio de coordinación de luchas anticapitalistas, antirracistas, antipatriarcales y antisexistas; llamémosle 'Asamblea del Movimiento Social' (AMS).

La AMS está conformada por un vocero por cada colectivo aceptado como miembro (los individuos que quieran participar deberán agruparse previamente en colectivos). Tal como los soviets, es la propia Asamblea la que decide qué organizaciones acepta como miembros, buscando hacer lugar a la mayor multiplicidad posible de grupos sociales (obreros, mujeres, estudiantes, indígenas, gays, etc) y tipos de organización (colectivos, sindicatos, ONGs, partidos, movimientos, etc.). A diferencia del soviet, las organizaciones-miembro más grandes no gozarían de un número mayor de voceros, sino que se asignaría a cada organización una cantidad de 'votos' proporcional a su valor para la AMS. Por ejemplo, el vocero de un pequeño colectivo de arte político podría tener derecho a dos votos, mientras que el de un gran sindicato de obreros metalúrgicos podría tener derecho a 200. La asignación de 'capacidad de voto' estaría en función de una serie de criterios pre-establecidos, decididos colectivamente, que podría así reconocer las diferencias de tamaño, antigüedad, aporte a la lucha, valor estratégico, etc., de cada grupo, según una ecuación que también garantice que ningún grupo tenga una capacidad de votos tal que le permita condicionar unilateralmente las decisiones. La AMS intentaría trabajar

por consenso, o al menos estableciendo la necesidad de mayorías calificadas para tomar ciertas decisiones importantes. En el caso en que hubiera que votar alguna decisión en particular, cada organización-miembro podría decidir de qué manera utilizar su capacidad de voto. Así, el sindicato podría usar todos sus 200 votos en favor de la postura de, digamos, llamar a una acción directa contra el gobierno; pero también, en caso de estar internamente dividido, podría optar por representar la postura de su minoría, de modo que, por ejemplo, 120 votos podrían ir en favor de la acción directa, y 80 en contra. De esa manera, la forma de funcionamiento de la AMS no estaría estimulando la homogeneización forzada de las posturas y el divisionismo de cada organización-miembro.

Formalmente, las decisiones importantes dentro de la AMS permanecerían en manos de cada organización-miembro. Ellas mismas establecerían la modalidad de su relación con sus propios voceros –algunas preferirían delegarles su capacidad de decisión, otras no. En cualquier caso, la AMS pondría en funcionamiento mecanismos de toma de decisiones que permitan que cada organización tenga la oportunidad de debatir internamente los temas importantes y mandatar luego expresamente a sus voceros. También, mediante métodos electrónicos, existiría la posibilidad de expresar voz y votos a distancia para aquellas organizaciones que no puedan tener a sus voceros presentes por algún motivo, o para aquellas que lo tengan presente pero quieran, de todos modos, seguir las discusiones y definirse 'en tiempo real'.

Las decisiones que la AMS tomara no comprometerían la autonomía de cada organización-miembro, las que mantendrían su propia 'soberanía' a la hora de definir sus propias luchas y acciones. La AMS no pretendería tener la representación exclusiva del movimiento social, ni exigiría a sus miembros pertenencia exclusiva. Podría haber más de una organización del estilo de la AMS, y sus miembros podrían eventualmente superponerse sin que esto resultara un problema. Estaría en el interés de todos los miembros cooperar con cualquier otra organización que represente al movimiento social.

La AMS no tendría autoridades en el sentido fuerte, es decir, 'dirigentes'. Elegiría sí a varios equipos de 'facilitadores' para ocuparse de diversas funciones, por ejemplo:

1) recibir y evaluar peticiones de nuevas incorporaciones y recomendar a la AMS si aceptarlas o no, y con cuanto derecho a voto;
2) mantener debidamente fiscalizado y en funcionamiento el mecanismo de voto a distancia;
3) ocuparse de las finanzas;
4) desempeñarse como voceros de prensa;
5) visitar a otras organizaciones para invitarlas a ingresar a la AMS;
6) participar como voceros o representantes en tal o cual espacio político;
7) funcionar como moderadores y negociadores en caso de conflictos entre grupos-miembro;
8) gestionar los cursos de formación política que la AMS ofrece;
9) tomar decisiones tácticas o prácticas en casos de urgencia;

10) ejercer un poder parcial de veto para decisiones que contradigan seriamente los principios fundamentales de la AMS;

11) ocuparse de motorizar campañas específicas decididas por la AMS (por ejemplo, contra la guerra, contra la violencia contra las mujeres, etc.).

12) etc.

Los cargos de facilitador podrían tener una duración limitada, y rotar entre las diferentes organizaciones-miembro, para evitar acumulación de poder y las típicas peleas de protagonismo entre dirigentes.

¿Para qué serviría una organización de estas características? Dependiendo del contexto político, podría servir para varios fines. Supongamos un contexto en el que la AMS recién comienza a funcionar, es un grupo relativamente pequeño de organizaciones, con poco impacto social. En ese contexto la AMS podría funcionar como una especie de 'cooperativa política', en la que cada grupo aporta algo de sus recursos –contactos, experiencia, conocimientos, dinero, etc.– para fines en común: defenderse de la represión, organizar una manifestación, iniciar una campaña de esclarecimiento contra un tratado de libre comercio, etc. El trabajo en común, por otro lado, contribuiría a fortalecer los vínculos de la red más general de movimientos sociales.

Supongamos ahora un contexto un poco más favorable. Viendo que la AMS efectivamente funciona y permite articular formas de cooperación útiles para todos y en sintonía con los valores emancipatorios, muchas agrupaciones antes renuentes se han integrado. La AMS ha crecido y agrupa ya a un número importante de organizaciones de todo tipo; su voz, por otro lado, ya se ha hecho escuchar en la sociedad en general, y sus mensajes se siguen con cierto interés. En este contexto la 'cooperativa política' podría funcionar para movilizar influencia capaz de incidir *directamente* en la política estatal. La AMS podría, por ejemplo, amenazar al gobierno con huelgas y acciones callejeras si se firma el tratado de libre comercio. Podría también, si lo creyera conveniente, llamar a un boicot electoral en las próximas elecciones. O, alternativamente, podría decidir que es conveniente, estratégicamente hablando, participar en las elecciones legislativas presentando candidatos propios. Fiel a sus principios, esos candidatos serían sólo 'voceros' de la AMS, sin derecho a actuar por iniciativa individual, y sin derecho a ser reelectos luego de su período. En caso de resultar electos senadores o diputados, se limitarían a llevar la voz y el voto decididos por la AMS. En este caso, la 'cooperativa política' serviría para agrupar fuerzas con fines electorales, y para distribuir luego las 'ganancias' obtenidas (es decir, la incidencia en la política estatal) entre todas las organizaciones-miembro. Como los candidatos se presentaron a elecciones no como individuos sino como voceros del colectivo, la 'acumulación' política sería en favor de la AMS en su conjunto. Al ver la capacidad de cooperación así desplegada, y los controles que la AMS establece para que sus candidatos no se transformen en una casta de políticos profesionales, crecería el prestigio de la organización a ojos de la sociedad toda.

Supongamos un contexto todavía más favorable. La AMS ya tiene una larga experiencia de trabajo en común. Ha ampliado a varios miles el número de sus

organizaciones-miembro. Ha perfeccionado sus procedimientos de toma de decisiones, de negociación de consensos y de división de tareas. Ha contribuido a difundir una nueva ética militante. Tiene un aceitado mecanismo para resolver conflictos, y un eficaz sistema de controles para evitar que un individuo o grupo acumule poder a costa de todos. Sus discusiones y posturas políticas se escuchan con gran atención en la sociedad toda. La estrategia de boicot electoral ha dado sus frutos, y el gobierno y los partidos políticos pierden rápidamente credibilidad. O, alternativamente, la estrategia de 'colonizar' partes del estado con gente propia ha dado resultado, y vastas secciones del Poder Legislativo y algunas del Ejecutivo están bajo control de la AMS. En cualquier caso, los mecanismos del Estado han perdido legitimidad, y un poderoso movimiento social presiona por cambios radicales: por todas partes hay desobediencia, huelgas, acción directa. En este caso, la 'cooperativa política' podría servir para preparar el siguiente paso estratégico, proponiéndose como alternativa (por lo menos transicional) de gestión global de lo social. La estrategia a seguir puede variar: la AMS podría continuar 'colonizando' los mecanismos electorales que ofrece el sistema, y tomando paulatinamente en sus manos más y más resortes de gestión. O podría, alternativamente, promover una estrategia insurreccional. O una combinación de ambas.

Claro, esto se trata tan sólo de un ejercicio imaginativo destinado solamente a ejemplificar cómo podría funcionar una interfase autónoma. En en este caso hipotético, la AMS habría funcionado a la vez como institución capaz de organizar la cooperación de las voluntades emancipatorias, y como intitución capaz de hacerse cargo de la gestión global de lo social *aquí y ahora*. Su estrategia consistió, primero, en desarrollar una institucionalidad que 'imita' las formas múltiples en que se estructuran las redes cooperantes (un espacio abierto y múltiple, aunque políticamente reglado) y su caracter prefigurativo (un espacio horizontal y autónomo que expande el *poder-hacer* sin concentrar *poder-sobre*). En segundo lugar, desarrolló una estrategia 'inteligente' de lectura de la configuración de los lazos de cooperación presentes en la sociedad actual, identificando las encrucijadas en las que el *poder-sobre* desempeña un papel ambivalente (es decir, aquellas operaciones del Estado que estructuran vínculos en alguna medida útiles o necesarios) para poder así ofrecer una alternativa de gestión superadora (autónoma), y no meramente destructiva. A diferencia de los Partidos –incluyendo los leninistas–, que 'colonizan' al movimiento social con las formas de la política heterónoma, la organización de nuevo tipo que llamamos AMS entró en interfase con las estructuras estatales 'colonizándolas' con la lógica de la autonomía, 'drenando' su poder en otros casos, o simplemente destruyéndolas cuando hiciera falta.

Naturalmente, esto no pretende ni podría ser el modelo de un engranaje perfecto: la AMS no requiere, para su funcionamiento, estar integrada por seres 'angelicales'. Por supuesto que se filtrarían luchas de poder en su seno, y que habría conflictos de todo tipo. Por supuesto que una institución tal no resolvería, de una vez y para siempre, la tensión implícita en la distancia entre lo social y lo político. La política emancipatoria seguiría siendo, como lo es hoy, una apuesta trabajosa y sin garantías por intervenir en la ambivalencia intrínseca de la vida social para resolver cada situación en el sentido de la expansión de la autonomía. El beneficio de una institución de nuevo

tipo tal sería que esas luchas, conflictos y tensiones estarían a la vez reconocidos y reglados de modo tal de que no destruyan inevitablemente la cooperación. Lo que hicimos fue un mero ejercicio imaginativo, excesivamente simplificado. No se me escapan sus varios flancos débiles (por mencionar sólo uno, el planteamiento estratégico fue pensado sólo para el plano de la política a nivel del Estado-nación, ignorando los condicionantes y oportunidades del plano de la política global). Pero aunque no sea más que un ejercicio imaginativo, espero que pueda contribuir para expandir el horizonte de posibilidades que se abre a la hora de enfrentar la pregunta crucial de la estrategia emancipatoria: *qué hacer*.

Buenos Aires, marzo de 2006.

An English translation of this is available in the e-library.

ABOUT NETWORKS (AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS?)

Joan Subirats/IGOP-UAB[23]
May 2006

> NODE: Real space or substrate consisting of the confluence of some of the connections of other connections of other real or abstract spaces which share the same characteristics and which are in turn nodes. All these nodes are interrelated non-hierarchically and make up what in sociological or mathematical terms, is called a network

> Wikipedia

(The following text is only a limited and probably too abstract and theoretical approach to the network concept. It could be considered just a resource to the debate about how to develop the network metaphor in the analysis of social movements)

What are **networks?.** Let us take various definitions and descriptions:

- networks as a set of interrelations (nodes and links) that express an organisational or self-organising system in contexts of complexity,
- networks express relations of interdependence between nodes or nodules, linked by common objectives, imply degrees of flexibility and openness, and also a certain degree of horizontality in the relations that are established
- networks have properties linked to difussion, propagation or colonization (if we are referring to physical space)
- the connections or relations are supported, more or less stable and/ or institutionalised,
- the willingness to connect to networks is understood to express a certain autonomy in relation to institutional and/or administrative centres and their results would be the consequence of negotiated agreed actions

From a spatial perspective, networks allow us to rethink ideas on physical distance and the concept of continuity; from an economic perspective, the emphasis on networks comes from the advantages in competitiveness that are derived from more efficient processes of exchange between agents or nodes, and from a political perspective, networks allow us to introduce more flexible, open and complex visions when addressing/thinking about ways of governing apart from hierarchy and the formal delimitation of powers and competences.

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[23] These thoughts are based on and supported by work by María Herrero (Diba, Barcelona, April 2006)

At first, the idea of a network implied basically forms of organization or self-organization with a certain degree of stability in a context of complexity. Incorporating at the same time components of willingness and randomness that carried with them values like flexibility, horizontality and democratisation of relations. In this sense, studies on networks have emphasised connections, that is the formal properties of networks for communication and diffusion.

REGULAR NETWORKS, RANDOM NETWORKS AND FREE SCALE NETWORKS. SOME INTERPRETATIONS

Research[24] over recent years is based on Internet topology (world wide web) and its material support- but connects rapidly with other fields such as cellular biology and genetics, ecology, epidemiology or economics. Despite the fact that it is debateable whether we can call any of these concepts novel, the global vision may be useful.

In general the most consistent contributions insist on viewing networks as organisational or self-organising systems in contexts of complexity. And to this we can add the idea that the main properties of networks are connected with diffusion, communication and propagation.

If we refer to the debate on the form of networks, or their topology, we have seen much emphasis placed on features such as randomness, horizontality or regularity. But recently, these features which were central, have been losing ground in the face of evidence that shows that a good deal of networks are composed of nodes that are connected freely or randomly, but preferably with other nodes that already have many other connections. We infer that while a relative randomness can be seen at a micro level, its development ends up conferring a certain structure, certain organisational or institutionalising features. We could say that the most complex, densest networks (www, internet, the cell, the network of quotes in articles from an academic community, or the social network defined by e-mail communication) end up creating a map of networks in a pluri- arborescent form, in which some nodes are much more connected than others. And the set ends up having properties which are notably different from those predicted in a context of context of randomness or regularity.

The **visions** that emerge:

-Networks are complex systems: they are formed by non-identical components, each node can be different and so can the links. In fact each cell, each gene, city or individual is different and may develop a type of behaviour of its own. They do not follow strictly ordered guidelines, but neither can we classify the process as

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[24] "*Linked: How every thing is connected to every thing else and what it means for business, science and every day life'*" (Albert-László Barabási). Graph theory (Leonhard Euler). Random networks (Erdös & Réyi). Theory of the "small world" (*small world*, Stanley Milgram and Granovetter), *clusters* (Watts and Strogatz).

absolutely unordered. In fact they show what some authors call subtle but continuous forms of self-organization. <u>Networks emerge and develop but do not have a centre from which they develop their pattern of development, or think as a set.</u> Hence the mention of self-organization.

- There are <u>networks endowed with more internal regularity</u> (such as for example the connections between the atoms of a crystal); <u>random networks</u> but with a similar distribution of links per node, such as for example the motorway network; and <u>networks in which a central nodule tends to manage or control all the connections.</u> There are other types of networks, those in which a limited number of nodules concentrate most of the connections, in various proportions. To this model corresponds to networks such as the www, Internet, the trophic chain of an ecosystem, the functioning of a cell, the network of quotes in articles from an academic community, or the social network defined by e-mail communication. It would be possible to imagine that <u>the network of social movements</u> was similar to, or formed part of this group.

-Networks, in which certain nodes have more connections than others, develop following a process called *attachment*. Their growth process is by attaching new nodes randomly, but preferably especially well connected nodes, reinforcing the pre-eminence of those nodes. The number of connections of the nodes of these networks therefore shows a distribution that tends to be potential. These types of networks may be called <u>free-scale networks</u>. In the network of social movements we can find some especially well connected organisations or movements, and whose "visibility" reinforces precisely their attraction.

Within free scale networks, which can differ radically (such as for example the cell, the propagation of AIDS, the trophic chain of an ecosystem or the network of quotes in articles from an academic community) there may be common **organizational principles**.

- What we could call the <u>network diameter would</u> be determined by the number or average number of links or connections necessary for two network nodes to connect. Most networks would be of a reduced diameter (*small worlds*)

- the <u>degree of distribution of a network</u>, understood as the probability that a node has k links, is the measure that tells us about the form and the structure of a network. In a random context all the nodes would have a similar number of connections. In the context of free scale networks the degree of distribution tells us about the concentration of links per node.

- Networks are formed by <u>communities</u> –of nodes and links- or sub networks, <u>which are groups of nodes more connected to each other than with the rest</u>. Networks have in common <u>general maps</u> which are formed by a <u>nucleus or central core</u>, two great continents: <u>in</u> (the connections go towards the central nucleus) and <u>out</u> (in which the connections go from the central nucleus outwards). There are ways or channels of communication between the continents- and also other quite or totally isolated

communities which can hardly be perceived and which are called <u>tendrils or islands</u>. The map or design of these communities, nuclei, continents and islands may be very significant in any analysis examining the network (the networks) of social movements.

Properties:

- The collective behaviour of the nodes in free scale networks is radically different from the behaviour predicted in contexts of regular or random networks.

- The laws of power, the degree of distribution, imply that a few nodes concentrate most of the links, in contrast to more horizontal or random models. The degree of distribution of a network, allows us to evaluate the proportion of nodes that concentrate a certain proportion of connections or links. This property would, in part, bring the <u>visions that point to certain features of "automatic" democratisation of networks</u> into <u>crisis</u>, just for the fact of being so, as we could find a great centrality (authority) of one or more nodes, even if the properties of the network linked to flexibility persist. Even so, <u>the degree of distribution of the connections of a network is a significant measure from the perspective of an organization which fosters networks as a means of exchange and communication with other organizations</u>. Hence this would indicate that organizations concentrate a great proportion of connections with other networks and therefore the possibilities of access to these exchanges.

- the degree of distribution also allows us to detect and evaluate <u>the role of highly connected nodes, the so-called hubs.</u> Studies have shown the important role of hubs in the diffusion of innovation.

It is evident that the detection of these highly connected nodes may be interesting to design transmission tools and strategies in any process, also in the field of social movements.

- In fact hubs have such a significant role that in free scale networks, which are characterised by organizing themselves by extremely highly connected nodes, the threshold of propagation or diffusion of an innovation is considered almost zero. That is we are dealing with networks with a structure especially suitable for diffusion.

- Free scale networks are very resistant to random failure. Despite the number of connections which fail randomly, the network keeps working, as it is very difficult that this affects highly connected nodes. Even so these networks are extremely vulnerable to attacks on the central nodes which concentrate a great number of connections.

- In real networks, which are often free scale networks and therefore develop in a context of attachment, it is much more likely that nodes which are geographically close will connect, than in a context of a random universe. Logically this leads to

certain features to be considered regarding diffusion or transmission by means of networks.

Epilogue?

To end we should add that incorporating one way or another, totally or partially these perspectives is compatible with a case study approach, both of networks as of organizations to be studied. In most of the literature on networks the studies are notably partial, as one of the most common characteristics of these networks is that they develop rapidly and are therefore difficult to pin down or confine.

The study of networks is at a very open moment and all the authors point out that we need studies from various perspectives and disciplines. It is important both to advance in our knowledge of networks, network architecture (structure and form), and to do so in studies related to the nature of dynamic processes that are produced, which are without doubt specific.

In spite of this, these contributions offer us a framework of analysis: regular, random or free scale networks and their associated properties. This is a very rich framework of ideas and images. At the same time it provides us with possible criteria, indicators and measures to be able to, maybe, characterise, compare and extract conclusions.

NETWORKS, SWARMS, MICROSTRUCTURES

Brian Holmes[∗]

Let's consciously combine two meanings of a network : a map, a set of relations analyzed from ecological point of view and the kind of behaviour.... That is why I think of using the notion of swarm - its emergent behaviour cannot be described as unpredictable. We may find out some patterns in its behaviour and thus, learn something out of networks.

The static graph of the network map is what leads, via the dynamic figure of the swarm, to a certain kind of complexity theory as a possible way to understand emergent behavior in the real world.

On the one hand, the use of social network analysis tools is giving us pictures of very complicated interlinkages between individuals and groups. These pictures are quite simply fascinating, because they aggregate lots of data and allow one to glimpse patterns, or at least, the possibility of patterns, of regularities. But the maps are not enough. One needs an understanding of the quality of the links themselves, of what encourages a group to cooperate even when its membership is atomized and dispersed in space. Older sociological and anthropological studies tell a lot about how institutions organize a group (church, firm, disciplinary organization, etc) and they also tell a great deal about how family structures and status hierarchies organize people in stable localities. However, when the grip of institutions and of place-bound hierarchies declines, as is happening today, and when society largely becomes a matter of dispersions of mobile individuals in anonymous spaces - the big city ; the world ; the telecommunicational space - the only behavior that has really been understood very well is market behavior. We know A LOT (too much I would even say) about how price signals serve to structure the economic behavior of dispersed and mobile individuals, who are always portrayed as rationally calculating in order to maximalize their accumulation stategies (this is called "methodological individualism"). But is individual economic behavior the only kind that can be witnessed in the world today ? Obviously not ! Or let us say, rather, that within the space of very weakly determined social relations constituted by the market and price signals - the space of what the network sociologist Mark Granovetter famously called "weak ties" - other subsets or relational forms have started to appear.

This is where the questions asked by complexity theory become so interesting and timely. What gives form and pattern to emergent behavior ? How can we understand the internal consistency of self-organized groups and networks ? The first answer

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[∗] Originally published in Nettime mailing list, 17 Apr 2006, <u>www.nettime.org</u>. To see a selection of the intense debate it generated on the list go to the nettime webiste, and look for the subject: <nettime> Network, Swarm, Microstructure; or go to the Networked Politics E-Library, www.networked-politics.info/

seemed to be offered by the figure of the swarm. The word "swarming" describes a pattern of self-organization in real time, which seems to arise out of nowhere (or to be emergent) and yet which is recognizable, because it repeats in a more or less rhythmical way. Swarming is an initial image of self-organization. It is basically a pattern of attack, and here it's worth recalling the classic definition given by the military theorists Arquila and Ronfeldt in their book on "The Zapatista 'Social Netwar' in Mexico" : "Swarming occurs when the dispersed units of a network of small (and perhaps some large) forces converge on a target from multiple directions. The overall aim is sustainable pulsing—swarm networks must be able to coalesce rapidly and stealthily on a target, then dissever and redisperse, immediately ready to recombine for a new pulse."

What the observation and description of swarming has done is to give us a temporal image of emergent activity, decisively adding a dynamic aspect which was absent from the static network maps. This is very suggestive for anyone looking to understand the kinds of behavior that seem to be associated with networks, and indeed, with a "networked society." But does the dynamic image of swarming really tell us how self-organization occurs ? No, I don't think so. The proof is that the American and Israeli military theorists have made dynamic models of what they see as the swarm tactic, and they now claim to use it as what they call a doctrine (see, for this, the important and sobering text by Eyal Weizman, "Walking through Walls," published in the current issue of Radical Philosophy). However, I do not believe that the miliary can engage in anything approximating self-organization, where individuals spontaneously coordinate their actions with others. This is antithetical to its hierarchical structure of command. Again, the "picture" can be misleading, even when it is a dynamic one. What is interesting, and perhaps essential to understand, is the way individuals and small groups spontaneously coordinate their actions, without any orders. This is self-organization, this is emergent behavior. But from what "ecology" does it emerge - to use Albert's term ?

I am beginning to think that there are two fundamental factors that help to explain the consistency of self-organized human activity. The first is the existence of a shared horizon - aesthetic, ethical, philosophical, and/or metaphysical - which is patiently and deliberately built up over time, and which gives the members of a group the capacity to recognize each other as existing within the same referential universe, even when they are dispersed and mobile. You can think of this as "making worlds." The second is the capacity for temporal coordination at a distance : the exchange among a dispersed group of information, but also of affect, about unique events that are continuously unfolding in specific locations. This exchange of information and affect then becomes a set of constantly changing, constantly reinterpreted clues about how to act in the shared world. The flow aspect of the exchange means that the group is constantly evolving, and it is in this sense that it is an "ecology," a set of complex and changing inter-relations ; but this dynamic ecology has consistency and durability, it becomes recognizable and distinctive within the larger evironment of the earth and its populations, because of the shared horizon that links the participants together in what appears as a world (or indeed as a cosmos, when metaphysical or religious beliefs are at work).

Maurizio Lazarrato set me off on this line of thinking, with an article that we published in issue 15 of Multitudes and for which I suggested this title (just excerpted from important phrases in his text) : "Creating Worlds : Contemporary capitalism and aesthetic 'wars.'" (Since then, all that work has been published in French under the title "Les revolutions du capitalisme," and bits have appeared in English all over the net.) Lazarrato pursues the Deleuzian concept of "modulation" to show how corporations strive to create worlds of aeesthetic perception and affect for their producers and consumers, in order to bind them together into some semblance of coordinated communities under the dispersed conditions of contemporary life. They do so via the media, which create aesthetic environments that are internalized within us in the form of recurring "refrains," or rhythmically recurring memories of a sounds, colors, words, etc. Lazzarato shows how these worlds, even in their difference and plurality (Coca-Cola, Nike, Microsoft, Macintosh...) conform to a "majority model" which is precisely that of capitalist production and consumption as structured by the bureaucratic state apparatuses and the transnational institutions that have formed between them. Nonetheless, the important thing to note is that in hyperindividualized societies, even these normalized forms of behavior are no longer directly shaped by institutional structures. Instead, there are multiple efforts and veritable aesthetic battle to create and maintain the referential universes within which choices are constantly made.

But this creation of worlds is not only done by corporations, and not only at the degree of simplicity and sterility that examples from the commercial realm inevitably suggest. To describe the specific contents out of which richer and vaster worlds of meaning are made, and to detail the effects of the specific tools and procedures that make it possible to continuously transform them and to coordinate actions within their horizons, are the tasks of a complexity theory which seeks to understand how groups organize their own behavior, when they are no longer decisively influenced by traditional institutions. Bateson pointed the way to this possibility of a cybernetic understanding, an understanding of feedback processes, with his "Steps to an Ecology of Mind." Guattari tried to create even more dynamic models of such human ecologies, particularly in his great and strange book "Cartographies schizoanalytiques." These are still probably the most important references for the art of composing mutable worlds, where the goal of the participants is to carry out continuous transformation of the very parameters and coordinates on which their interactions are based (this is also understood as 3rd-order cybernetics, where the system produces not just new information, but new categories of information). Today, however, it is the sociologist Karin Knorr Cetina (thanks, by the way, to the several people who sent me her recent article !) who has expressed all this most clearly and in the most mainstream language, which can't just be ignored or tossed off as the work of a kook. Her ideas bring us back to networks and their concrete operations, with the concept of "global microstructures." As she writes in "Complex Global Microstructures" :

"Modern, industrial society created 'complex' forms of organizations that managed uncertainty and task fulfillment through interiorized systems of control and

expertise. But complexity was institutional complexity ; it meant sophisticated multi-level mechanisms of coordination, authority and compensation that assured orderly functioning and performance. A global society leans towards a different form of complexity ; one emanating from more microstructural arrangements and the rise of mechanisms of coordination akin to those found in interaction systems.... The basic intuition that motivates the concept of a global microstructure is that genuinely global forms, by which I mean fields of practice that link up and stretch across all time zones (or have the potential to do so), need not imply further expansions of social institutional complexity. In fact, they may become feasible only if they avoid complex institutional structures. Global financial markets for example, where microstructures have been found, simply outrun the capacity of such structures. These markets are too fast, and change too quickly to be 'contained' by institutional orders. Global systems based on microstructural principles do not exhibit institutional complexity but rather the asymmetries, unpredictabilities and playfulness of complex (and dispersed) interaction patterns ; a complexity that results, in John Urry ?s terms, from a situation where order is not the outcome of purified social processes and is always intertwined with chaos. More concretely, these systems manifest an observational and temporal dynamics that is fundamental to their connectivity, auto-affective principles of self-motivation, forms of 'outsourcing', and principles of content that substitute for the principles and mechanisms of the modern, complex organization."

Knorr Cetina stresses the creation of shared horizons in much the way that I described it above, focusing for this particular article on the religious horizon of a shared orientation to "transcendent time" (eschatology). As in previous articles on the microstructures of global finance, she also shows how networked ITCs allow participants of the microstructure to see and recognize each other, and to achieve cohesion by coordinating with each other in time, observing and commenting on the same events, even though the microstructure is very dispersed and not all the participants or even a majority of them are necessarily living anywhere near the particular event in question at any given moment. Cetina very suggestively reinterprets the usual idea of networks as a system of pipes conveying contents, to insist instead on the visual or scopic aspect of contemporary ICTs : from "pipes" to "scopes." Information is important for coordinating action ; but it is the image that maintains the shared horizon and insists on the urgency of action within it (especially through what Barthes called the "punctum" : the part that sticks out from the general dull flatness of the image and affectively touches you).

To understand how all this works, one essential thing is to realize that it is different in each case : the "ecologies" are very different, depending on the coordinates or parameters that give rise to the particular microstructure. For one example, take the case of the open-source software movement. One the one hand you have a shared ethical horizon which is constituted by texts and examplary projects : Stallman's declarations and the example of the GNU project ; Torvald's work ; the General Public License itself and all the principles it is based on, particularly the indication of authorship (permitting recognition for one's efforts) and the openness of the resulting code (permitting widespread cooperation) ; as well as essays like The

Hacker Ethic ; projects like Creative Commons ; the relation of all that to older ideals of public science ; etc. Then on the other hand you have concrete modes of coordination via the Internet : Sourceforge and the innumerable forums devoted to each free software project (which I've been getting to know as I struggle with my Ubuntu distro, ha ha !). The whole thing has as little institutional complexity as possible (nobody is really compelled to do anything in any particular way), but instead is a situation full of self-motivation and auto-affection between dispersed members of a nonetheless very recognizable network, coordinated temporally around the development of specific projects, where order is obviously intertwined with chaos ! And clearly, this particular global microstructure is influential in the world.

Another great example, though more diffuse and complex, is the development of the counter-globalization movements. Again you can see the shared horizons of social justice, ecological awareness, resistance to hierarchical power (of the state and corporations), with reference to a constellation of texts and a number of great mythical moments of exemplary events (Seattle, Genoa, Cancun, etc). Then you see the coordinating systems, including Internet channels (indymedia, a myriad of web sites and mailing lists), but also forums and meetings (Zapatista encuentros ; PGA meetings ; counter-summits ; social forums ; activist campaigns). Even more clearly than the open-source projects, the counter-globalization movements are a universe of universes : the entire set of movements tries to distinguish itself from so-called "capitalist globalization", while a myriad of other, more specific horizons are established and maintained within that larger distinction.

Both the open-source software movements and the counter-globalization movements have been capable of swarming behaviors. Indeed, the very idea of swarming arose from the particular form of solidarity between international NGOs and the Zapatists. In terms of open-source, one can consider all the peer-to-peer projects that emerged after the illegalization of Napster as successive swarm attacks on the content-provider industries. There is that classic pattern of converging, striking (in this case by producing new content-sharing programs), then dissevering, only to converge again at a different point (a new program, perhaps for video-sharing like Bit Torrent, or a hack of a DRM system, etc). Of course, different individuals are involved each time, different groups, differences of philosophy and mode of action ; but a shared horizon makes all those differences also recognizable as somehow belonging together. This is the complexity of self-organization. You would again see such processes in action if you traced the history of the Mayday processes around flexible labor. But it is clear that by looking at these things in "ecological" terms you get a much richer picture, which is not limited to the visible dynamics of swarming.

Now, I think these tendencies toward the emergence of global microstructures in a weakened institutional environment have been going on for decades. But it is clear that a turning-point was reached when one microstructure with a particularly strong religious horizon and a particularly well-developed relational and operational toolkit
- Al Qaeda

- was able to strike at the centers of capital accumulation and military power in the US (WTC and Pentagon). Suddenly, the capacity of networks to operate globally, independently and unpredictably, began to appear as a crisis affecting the deep structures of social power. At that point, the figure of the swarm rushed to the forefront of all the military discussions ; and in a broader way, the question of whether complexity theory could really predict the emergent behavior of self-organizing networks became a kind of priority in social science. Knorr Cetina's article on microstructures is subtitled "The New Terrorist Societies," and it is about Al Qaeda (though her earlier work on microstructures is about currency-trading markets). But at the same time as the interest in swarming and complexity theory moved to the forefront of offical social science, one gradually became aware (I did anyway) that all over the world, serious attempts were underway to "overcode" and stabilize the dangerously mobile relational forms that had been unleashed by the generalization of the market and its weak ties.

On the one hand there is an attempt to enforce the rules of the neoliberal world market by military force, and thus to complete an Imperial project which has now shown itself to be clearly Anglo-American in origin and in aims. This attempt is most clear in the book "The Pentagon's New Map" by Thomas Barnett, where he explains that the goal of American military policy must be to identify the "gaps" in the world network of finance and trade, and to "close the gap," by force if necessary. The thesis (on which the Iraq invasion was partially based) is that only a continuous extension of the world market and of its deterritorializing technologies can bring peace and prosperity, rooting out the atavistic religious beliefs on which terrorism feeds, and in the process, rationalizing the access to the resources that the capitalist world system needs to go on producing "growth for everyone."

On the other hand, however, what we see in response to this extension of the world are market are regressions to sovereignist or neofascist forms of nationalism, and perhaps more significantly, attempts to configure great continental economic blocs where the instability and relative chaos of market relations could be submitted to some institutional control. These attempts can also be conceived as "counter-movements" in Karl Polanyi's sense : responses to the atomization of societies and the destruction of institutions brought about by the unfettered operations of a supposedly self-regulating market. They can be listed : NAFTA itself ; the European Union, which has created its own currency ; ASEAN+3, which represents East Asia's so-far abortive attempt to put together a stabilized monetary bloc offering protection from the financial crises continuously unleashed by neoliberalism ; the Venezuelan project of "ALBA," which is raising the issue of possible industrial cooperation programs for a left-leaning Latin America ; and of course, the "New Caliphate" in the Middle East, which is being proposed by Al-Qaeda and the other Salafi jihad movements. Perhaps people with more knowledge than I could talk about what is happening on this level in the Russian confederation, on the Indian subcontinent and in Africa.

I think that in years to come, everyone will increasingly have to take a position with respect both to the Imperial project of a world market, and to the regressive

nationalisms and the more complex processes of bloc formation. All these things are contradictory with each other and their contradictions are at the source of the conflicts in the world today. In this respect, Guattari's perception, at the close of the 1980s in "Cartographies schizoanalytiques," has proved prophetic :

"From time immemorial, and in all its historical guises, the capitalist drive has always combined two fundamental components : the first, which I call deterritorialization, has to do with the destruction of social territories, collective identities, and systems of traditional values ; the second, which I call the movement of reterritorialization, has to do with the recomposition, even by the most artificial means, of individuated frameworks of personhood, structures of power, and models of submission which are, if not formally similar to those the drive has destroyed, at least homothetical from a functional perspective. As the deterritorializing revolutions, tied to the development of science, technology, and the arts, sweep everything aside before them, a compulsion toward subjective reterritorialization also emerges. And this antagonism is heightened even more with the phenomenal growth of the communications and computer fields, to the point where the latter concentrate their deterritorializing effects on such human faculties as memory, perception, understanding, imagination, etc. In this way, a certain formula of anthropological functioning, a certain ancestral model of humanity, is expropriated at its very heart. And I think that it is as a result of an incapacity to adequately confront this phenomenal mutation that collective subjectivity has abandoned itself to the absurd wave of conservatism that we are presently witnessing."*

The question that complexity theory allows us to ask is this : How do we organize ourselves for a viable response to the double violence of capitalist deterritorialization and the nationalist or identitarian reterritorialization to which it inevitably gives rise ? It must be understood that this dilemna does not take the form of Christianity versus Islam, America versus the Middle East, Bush versus Bin Laden. Rather it arises at the "very heart" of the modern project, where human potential is "expropriated." Since September 11. the USA - and tendentially, the entire so-called "Western world" - has at once exacerbated the abstract, hyperindividualizing dynamics of capitalist globalization, and at the same time, has reinvented the most archaic figures of identitarian power (Guantanamo, fortress Europe, the dichotomy of sovereign majesty and bare life). Guattari speaks of a capitalist "drive" to deterritorialization, and of a "compulsion" to reterritorialization. What this means is that neither polarity is inherently positive or negative ; rather, both are twisted into the violent and oppressive forms that we now see developing at such a terrifying and depressing pace. The ultimate effect is to render the promise of a world without borders strange, cold and even murderous, while at the same time precipitating a crisis, decay and regression of national institutions, which appear increasingly incapable of contributing to equality or the respect for difference.

So the question that arises is whether one can consciously participate in the improvisational, assymetrical and partially chaotic force of global microstructures, making use of their relative autonomy from institutional norms as a way to influence a more positive reterritorialization, a more healthy and dynamic equilibrium, a better

coexistence with the movement of technological development and global unification ? The question is not farfetched, it is not a mere intellectual abstraction. Knorr Cetina's strong point is that global unification cannot occur through institutional process, because it is too complex to be managed in that way ; instead, the leading edge is taken by lighter, faster, less predictable microstructures. Clearly, nothing guarantees that these are going to be beneficent. The forms that they will take remain open, they depend on the people who invent them. In his recent book, Lazzarato writes :

"The activist is not someone who becomes the brains of the movement, who sums up its force, anticipates its choices, draws his or her legitimacy from a capacity to read and interepret the evolution of power, but instead, the activist is simply someone who introduces a discontinuity in what exists. She creates a bifurcation in the flow of words, of desires, of images, to put them at the service of the multiplicity's power of articulation ; she links the singular situations together, without placing herself at a superior and totalizing point of view. She is an experimenter."

The close of the book makes clear, however, that what should be sought is not just a joyous escape into the unpredictable. The point of this experimentation is to find articulations [agencements, which might also be translated as microstructures] that can oppose the literally death-dealing powers of the present society, and offer alternatives in their place. My guess is that in most cases, this can happen not at the local level of withdrawal (though that may be fertile), nor at the level of national institutions and debates (though these will be essential for holding off the worst), but most likely at the regional or continental level, particularly where the core economies overflow into their peripheries and vice-versa. This is the level where the most important policy is now being made, the level at which the major economic circuits are functioning and at which massive social injustice and ecological damage is happening all the time. What's really lacking are all kinds of border-crossing experiments, ways to subvert the macrostructures of inclusion/exclusion and to redraw the maps of coexistence. Ultimately, new kinds of institutions and new ways of relating to institutions will be needed, if there is to be any hope of stabilizing things and surviving the vast transition now underway. But we're not there yet, and it doesn't seem likely that any upcoming election will start the process. Instead it seems that much of the danger and the promise of the present moment can be found in the complex relations between network, swarm and microstructure.

Note *I've altered the (relatively poor) translation of Guattari's text "Du post-modernisme a l'ere post-media," which is on pp. 53-61 of Cartographies schizoanalytiques, and on pp. 109-13 of The Guattari reader, under the title "The Postmodern Impasse." The key phrase, "un certain modele ancestral d'humanite qui se trouve ainsi exproprie au coeur de lui-meme," becomes "is appropriated from the inside" ! The reverse of the original ! No wonder people think Guattari is so hard to read...
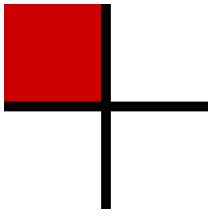
Social Forums and their Margins: Networking Logics and the Cultural Politics of Autonomous Space[*]

Jeffrey S. Juris

abstract   The World Social Forum (WSF) emerged in the wake of a global wave of protest against capitalism characterized, in part, by the expression of broader political ideals through network-based organizational forms. The WSF was thus conceived as an "open space" for exchanging ideas, resources, and information; promoting initiatives; and generating concrete alternatives. At the same time, many grassroots activists have criticized the forums for being organized in a top-down fashion, including political parties despite their formal prohibition, and favoring prominent intellectuals. Radicals thus face a continual dilemma: participate in the forums as a way to reach a broader public, or remain outside given their political differences? Based on my participation as activist and ethnographer with the (-ex) Movement for Global Resistance (MRG) in Barcelona and Peoples Global Action (PGA), this article explores the cultural politics of autonomous space at the margins of the world and regional social forums on three levels. Empirically, it provides an ethno-genealogy of the emergence, diffusion, and proliferation of the concept of autonomous space. Theoretically, it argues that the cultural politics of autonomous space express the broader networking logics and politics increasingly inscribed into emerging organizational architectures. Politically, it suggests that the proliferation of autonomous spaces represents a promising model for rethinking the Forum as an innovative network-based organizational form.

Introduction

> There were two different worlds in Porto Alegre, one slow moving, totally grassroots and self-managed, and another organized along completely different lines, two worlds coming together at different velocities. (Nuria, activist: Movement for Global Resistance)[1]

On the evening of October 17, 2004, the second day of the third European Social Forum (ESF) in London, 200 activists stormed the stage of an anti-Fascist plenary at London's Alexander Palace, where Mayor Ken Livingstone had been scheduled to speak. After a brief scuffle, organizers from several radical groups that helped produce a series of

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1   Personal Interview, conducted June 11, 2002.

autonomous spaces during the forum, including the Wombles, Indymedia, Yo Mango, and others, occupied the stage for roughly thirty minutes. Their intention was not to stop the plenary, but rather to publicly denounce what they perceived as the non-democratic, top-down way the Forum had been organized, including the exclusionary practices of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) and the Mayor's Socialist Action faction (e.g. see Emma Dowling's and Laura Sullivan's pieces in this issue). To that end, activists read a statement released by Babels translators earlier in the week, including the following, "Perhaps our most important principle is that of self-organization… However, many opportunities of experimentation and innovation have been missed… resulting in the exclusion of many people, organizations, networks, groups, and even countries".[2]

As protesters left the Palace several were beaten and arrested by the London police. More conflict occurred the following day when anti-capitalists were harassed prior to the mass march, and as police dragged away two radical activists when they tried to access the podium to speak out during the final rally. An intense debate ensued in the London Guardian and forum listserves, Members of the SWP and the Mayor's allies denounced their critics as illegitimate, non-democratic, and even racist, while radicals defended their right to make their voices heard.

By staging such a highly visible direct action, grassroots activists succeeded in provoking a heated public debate, and thus bringing two interrelated conflicts within and around the Forum into full view. On the one hand, their critique reflected the long simmering contest inside the London organizing process pitting the self-ascribed 'horizontals', who support more open and participatory forms of organization, against their more traditional institutional counterparts, who they dub the 'verticals'.[3] Although particularly pronounced in London, this tension has long characterized the forum process, corresponding to an ongoing conflict between what I refer to as 'networking' and 'command' logics within the broader anti-corporate globalization movements from which the forums emerged (see below; Juris, 2004a).[4] Despite popular conceptions among radicals, the forums cannot be dismissed as attempts by mainstream political parties, NGOs, and the older left to co-opt grassroots movements. These traditional formations are certainly present, in Porto Alegre and elsewhere, and arguably to a greater degree than during earlier mass direct actions, yet so too are newer network-based movements. Indeed, horizontal networking logics are inscribed into the

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2   The entire statement can be downloaded from www.indymedia.org.uk/en/2004/10/299292.html, retrieved on April 13, 2005.

3   For an insider analysis of this conflict, see Rodrigo Nunes 'Territory and Deterritory: Inside and Outside the ESF 2004', [http://info.interactivist.net/article.pl?sid=04/10/29/1410226&mode= nested&tid=14], accessed 13 April 13 2005.

4   This tension reflects traditional debates between socialists and anarchists over the nature of organization within movements of the radical left dating back to at least the First International and the conflict between Marx and Bakunin. However, the rise of new digital technologies and emergence of a broader networking logic have reinforced anarchist-inspired ideas and practices with respect to decentralized coordination and directly democratic decision-making. In this sense, horizontal forms of organization are diffusing rapidly, even among many forces of the traditional left. At the same time, contemporary activists would do well to avoid the rancorous sectarianism of the past. Indeed, the social forums may be emerging as an interesting hybrid form, involving both horizontal and vertical elements.

organizational architectures of the forums themselves, perhaps most clearly expressed in the concept of 'open space' (Sen, 2004). The main point is that the forums, and the organizing processes surrounding them, are highly uneven, contradictory, and contested terrains.

On the other hand, by staging direct action protest at the London Forum, activists also expressed and physically embodied the conflictual relationship between radical anti-capitalists and the broader social forum process. Belying facile inside-outside dichotomies, diverse radical networks have alternatively participated within the forums, boycotted them entirely, or created autonomous spaces straddling the porous boundaries separating official and alternative events. Indeed, the social forums have largely eclipsed mass protests as the primary vehicles where diverse movement networks converge across urban space to make themselves visible, generate affective attachments, and communicate alternatives and critiques. Many radicals thus implicitly recognize that complete disengagement from the forums means exclusion from the broader movement field. By creating autonomous spaces at the margins of the Forum, radicals generate their own horizontal practices, while staying connected to mainstream currents and pressuring official spaces to live up to their expressed ideals. Moreover, this cultural politics of autonomous space reflects a broader networking logic, and demonstrates how contemporary ideological struggles are increasingly waged through battles over organizational process and form.

This article explores the cultural politics of autonomous space along three distinct levels. Empirically, it provides an ethno-genealogy of the emergence, diffusion, and proliferation of the concept of autonomous space.[5] Theoretically, it argues that the cultural politics of autonomous space express the broader networking logics and politics that increasingly are inscribed within emerging organizational architectures. Finally, on a political level, it suggests the proliferation of autonomous spaces represents a promising model for rethinking the Forum as an innovative network-based organizational form. In this sense, the Forum is best viewed not as a singular open space, but rather as a congeries of shifting, overlapping networked spaces that converge across a particular urban terrain during a specific point in time.

I am both an activist and ethnographer who has participated actively within the world and regional social forum process, as well as activist networks in the United States and Catalonia, including the (ex-) Movement for Global Resistance (MRG) in Barcelona and Peoples Global Action (PGA).[6] The analysis for this paper was based on activism and research carried out in Barcelona from June 2001 to September 2002, and participation in subsequent forums.[7] I have taken part in the organization and

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5 I use genealogy in the Foucauldian sense as a specific, situated history of the present rather than an overarching view from above. The ethno- side of the equation refers to the fact that my analysis is based on thick description rooted in my own particular experience as activist and ethnographer.

6 MRG-Catalonia ultimately 'self-dissolved' in January 2003 due to declining participation and a broader political statement against reproducing rigid structures in response to an official invitation to participate within the World Social Forum International Council.

7 I have also taken part in numerous mass direct actions in cities such as Seattle, Los Angeles, Prague, Barcelona, Genoa, Brussels, Seville, and Geneva.

implementation of diverse autonomous spaces during several World and European Social Forums, as well as early discussions where the concept was first debated with respect to the Forum. My research is practically engaged, based on the refusal to separate observation from participation, constituting what I call a 'militant ethnography' (Juris, 2004b). I feel this is the best way to generate useful analyses and interpretations, designed to make interventions into ongoing political, tactical, and strategic debates. I situate myself within more radical grassroots movement sectors precisely because they most clearly express an emerging networking logic, which is among my primary analytical *and* political concerns.

Emerging Organizational Architectures

Facilitated by new information technologies, and inspired by earlier Zapatista solidarity activism and anti-Free Trade Campaigns, anti-corporate globalization movements have emerged through the rapid proliferation of decentralized network forms. New Social Movement (NSM) theorists have long argued that in contrast to the centralized, vertically integrated, working-class movements, newer feminist, ecological, and student movements are organized around flexible, dispersed, and horizontal networks (Cohen, 1984). Mario Diani (1995) defines social movements more generally as network formations. Similarly, borrowing terms used to describe kin networks and other elements of pre-modern social organization, anthropologists Gerlach and Hine (1970) argued years ago that social movements are decentralized, segmentary, and reticulate. However, by promoting peer-to-peer communication and allowing for communication across space in real time, new information technologies have significantly enhanced the most radically decentralized network configurations, facilitating transnational coordination and communication.

As I argue elsewhere (Juris, 2004a), contemporary social movement networks involve an emerging 'cultural logic of networking': entailing a series of broad guiding principles, shaped, perhaps counter-intuitively, by the logic of informational capitalism, that are internalized by activists, and generate concrete networking practices. These include; 1) forging horizontal ties and connections among diverse, autonomous elements; 2) the free and open circulation of information; 3) collaboration through decentralized coordination and consensus decision-making; and 4) self-directed networking.[8] Networking logics have given rise to what grassroots activists call a new way of doing politics. While the command-oriented logic of parties and unions is based on recruiting new members, building unified strategies, political representation, and the

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8 Manuel Castells identifies a "networking, decentred form of organization and intervention, characteristic of the new social movements, mirroring, and counteracting, the networking logic of domination in the information society" (1997: 362). My own work builds on this insight by further theorizing how networking logics shape, and are generated by, concrete networking practices. Indeed, contemporary anti-corporate globalization movements involve an increasing confluence among network technologies, organizational forms, and political norms, mediated by activist practice (Juris, 2004a). For an ethnographic account of how networking logics, practices, and politics play out in Barcelona and within transnational networks, such as PGA and the world and regional social forums, as well as how they are expressed via embodied action during mass protests, see Juris (2004b).

struggle for hegemony, network politics involve the creation of broad umbrella spaces, where diverse movements and collectives converge around common hallmarks, while preserving their autonomy and specificity. Rather than recruitment, the objective becomes horizontal expansion through articulating diverse movements within flexible structures that facilitate maximal coordination and communication.

At the same time, networking logics are never completely dominant, and always exist in dynamic tension with other competing logics, often giving rise to a complex 'cultural politics of networking' within particular spheres. This is precisely how we can best understand the conflict involving 'horizontals' and 'verticals' surrounding the London ESF, the former guided by an emerging networking logic and the latter more influenced by a traditional logic of command. This is not the first time such conflict has occurred. In fact, struggles between network-based movements and their traditional organizational counterparts are constitutive of the forum process itself, and the broader anti-corporate globalization movements from which the forums emerged. Indeed, similar dynamics were present during earlier mass mobilizations in Seattle or Genoa, and during Campaigns against the World Bank and European Union in Barcelona.

Horizontal networks should not be romanticized. Specific networks involve varying degrees of organizational hierarchy,[9] ranging from relatively horizontal relations within radical networks like PGA to more centralized processes, such as the world and regional social forums. Horizontal relations do not suggest the complete absence of hierarchy, but rather the lack of formal hierarchical designs. This does not necessarily prevent, and may even encourage, the formation of informal hierarchies (Freeman, 1973; cf. King, 2004). What activists increasingly call 'horizontalism' thus precisely involves an attempt to build collective processes while managing internal struggles through decentralized coordination, open participation, and organizational transparency rather than representative structures and centralized command. At the same time, the broadest convergence spaces (Routledge, 2004), including the social forums, involve a complex amalgam of diverse organizational forms.

Horizontalism is perhaps best understood as a guiding vision. Beyond social morphology, networks have more generally emerged as a broader cultural ideal, a model of and model for new forms of directly democratic politics at local, regional, and global scales. Moreover, such values are increasingly inscribed directly into emerging organizational architectures. Decentralized communication structures, such as PGA or the (ex-) MRG in Barcelona, may be more or less effective at coordinating grassroots struggles and initiatives, but even more importantly, they also physically manifest horizontal network ideals. Indeed, activists increasingly express utopian political imaginaries directly through concrete political, organizational, and technological practice. As Geert Lovink suggests, "Ideas that matter are hardwired into software and network architectures" (2002: 34). This is precisely why contemporary political and

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9 Specifically, diverse network formations include hierarchical 'circle' patterns, intermediate 'wheel' configurations, and the most decentralized 'all-channel' networks, which refer to those where every node is connected to every other (Kapferer, 1973). New digital technologies specifically enhance the latter.

ideological debates are so often coded as conflict over organizational process and form (cf. Juris, 2005).[10]

Social Forums as Contested Terrains

According to official accounts, the idea for the World Social Forum (WSF) as a space for reflection and debate about alternatives to neoliberal globalization originated with Oded Grajew, who, together with Brazilian compatriot Francisco Whitaker, presented the proposal to Bernard Cassen, President of ATTAC-France (Association for the Taxation of financial Transactions for the Aid of Citizens) and Director of the Le Monde Diplomatique, in February 2000. Cassen liked the idea and suggested the Forum be held in Porto Alegre, given its location in the Global South, renowned model of participatory budgets, and the organizational resources provided by the ruling Workers Party (PT). Although following on the heels of the recent mass anti-corporate mobilizations in places like Seattle, Washington, D.C., and Prague, the WSF would specifically provide an opportunity to generate concrete alternatives to neoliberal globalization, coinciding with the annual World Economic Forum in Davos. The WSF built on previous convergence processes, including Zapatista Encounters in Chiapas and Spain, global PGA gatherings, U.N. civil society forums, and NGO-led counter-summit conferences organized by networks such as San Francisco-based International Forum on Globalization. The Brazilian Organizing Committee (CO) was soon formed, involving the main Brazilian Labor Federation (CUT), Landless Workers Movement (MST), and six smaller organizations.[11] The International Committee (IC) was created after the first WSF to oversee the global expansion of the process.

Although to a certain extent the WSF provided an opportunity for the traditional left, including many reformists, Marxists and Trotskyists, to regain their protagonism within an emerging global wave of resistance, radical network-based movements from Europe, North, and South America, also participated from the beginning. Moreover, the Charter of Principles, drafted after the initial WSF to provide guidelines for a permanent

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10 The concept 'coding' refers to how activists communicate their broader political visions, ideologies, and values about the world through expressions of and debates over organizational structure and process. Organizational form thus operates as a synecdoche, pointing to wider models for (re-) organizing social relations more generally. I am arguing that ideology is increasingly expressed through organizational practice and design as opposed to discourse, which contradicts the view that network-based movements are 'ideologically thin' (Bennett, 2003). Osterweil (2004b) makes a related claim about the expressly 'political' nature of social movement practices among radical activists within and around the forums, which involve a 'cultural-political' approach. For more on the relationship between cultural politics and the WSF, see the special edition of the *International Social Science Journal* 182: 'Explorations in Open Space: the World Social Forum and Cultures of Politics', edited by C. Kheragel and J. Sen (2004). While I fully agree with this general claim, I am identifying a much more specific mechanism through which contrasting ideas and values are expressed through conflict over organizational architectures.

11 These included the Brazilian Association of Non-Governmental Organizations (ABONG), ATTAC-Brazil, Brazilian Justice & Peace Commission (CBJP), Brazilian Business Association for Citizenship (CIVES), the Brazilian Institute for Social and economic Studies (IBASE), and the Center for Global Justice (CJG).

process, reflected the network principles prevailing within the broader movement. The Forum is thus defined as "an open meeting place for reflective thinking, democratic debate of ideas, formulation of proposals, free exchange of experiences, and interlinking for effective action",[12] the Charter further states, "The meetings of the World Social Forum do not deliberate on behalf of the World Social Forum as a body... it does not constitute a locus of power to be disputed by the participants... nor does it constitute the only option for interrelation and action by the organizations and movements that participate in it". This should be taken more as an ideal than actuality (cf. Waterman, 2002: 4), and perhaps more importantly, as a reflection of a much broader horizontal networking ethic. Indeed, as Jai Sen has consistently maintained, the WSF should be viewed as an open space:

> The Forum... is not an organization or a movement, or a world federation, but a *space*- a non-directed space, from and within which movements and other civil initiatives of many kinds can meet, exchange views, and... take forward their work, locally, nationally, and globally.[13]

Again, this vision should be understood as a guiding ideal, not an empirical depiction, and is often contradicted in practice. For example, the hierarchical format of the main plenary sessions undermines a horizontal networking logic, while the prominent role of the organizing committees in determining program content belies the idea of non-directed space.[14] In addition, social movement assemblies at World and European Social Forums serve as de facto deliberative bodies (cf. Whitaker, 2004), while the Organizing and International Committees constitute arenas for power struggle. Furthermore the injunction against political parties is rendered meaningless by the close relationship between the forums and the Workers Party in Brazil, *Refundazione Comunista* in Italy, or the Labour Party in London. Still, the ideal of open space does represent the inscription of a broader network ideal within the Forums' organizational architecture. At the same time, differently situated actors hold contrasting views of the forum, often setting horizontal network movements against their traditional organizational counterparts. Indeed, the Forum is a 'hotly contested political space' (Ponniah and Fisher, 2003), and nowhere has this been more evident than within the International Committee (IC).

This was made abundantly clear at an IC meeting in Barcelona in April 2002. Numerous grassroots groups were invited to attend as guest observers, but MRG had received an invitation to become an official member, presumably based on its reputation as an exemplar of the new radicalism. Since its organizational principles precluded taking part in this kind of representative structure, MRG decided to offer its delegate status to an open assembly of grassroots movements in Barcelona. The assembly drafted a statement criticizing the IC for its lack of transparency, which, given my command of English, I

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12 Cited from http://www.forumsocialmundial.org.br/main.php?id_menu=4&cd_language=2, accessed 13 April 2005.

13 Cited from http://www.choike.org/PDFs/introduc.pdf, accessed 13 April 2005.

14 This appears to be changing, however, as the fifth edition of the WSF in Porto Alegre moved away from an emphasis on large plenaries in favour of more self-organized spaces and workshops. Moreover, organizers sponsored a consultation process allowing participants from diverse movements, networks, and groups to participate in the process of selecting the broad thematic areas (see Nunes, this issue).

was entrusted to record, translate, and read aloud on April 17, the second day of the meeting.[15] The text included the following charge:

> MRG is part of a new political culture involving network-based organizational forms, direct democracy, open participation, and direct action. A top-down process, involving a closed, non-transparent, non-democratic, and highly institutional central committee will never attract collectives and networks searching for a new way of doing politics.

The declaration was meant as a provocation, a kind of communicative direct action from within the heart of the IC. We expected a cold, if not downright hostile reception. Much to our surprise, however, many Council members were extremely supportive. A prominent European-based figure later suggested, "We have to figure out a way to include this new political culture despite their unique organizational form".[16] Moreover, beyond an attempt to co-opt our movements, others recognized the validity of our critique, expressing support for a process based on openness, transparency, and diversity, which reflected a broader networking logic. In fact, the IC was internally divided. Some wanted to change the Charter of Principles, allowing for the development of collective strategies through the political leadership of the IC. Others were steadfastly opposed to this view, as one member argued, "In response to the radicalization of the right, we have to radicalize our process of diversity and participation. We are not a central committee!" Much like the broader forum, the IC was a contested space, not in terms of formal quotas of power, but rather over the underlying vision of the Forum. As we have seen, the same has also been true within the European process. The main point here is that the conflict between networking and command logics does not so much position the forum against its external critics, as constitute the very process itself, involving heated debates over the Forum's organizational architecture among those espousing very different ideological perspectives.

The Intergalactika Laboratory of Disobedience

After the unexpected success of the first WSF in Porto Alegre in 2001, several hundred Barcelona-based activists made the trip across the ocean for the second edition of the Forum, including dozens, like myself, from grassroots networks such as MRG. Although many of us were critical of the Forum given the key role played by traditional parties, unions, and NGOs, we also recognized it had become a major pole of attraction among movements, networks, and groups opposed to neo-liberal globalization. Beyond simply providing a space for debating and constructing alternatives, the Forum is also an opportunity for diverse networks to physically converge, generate affective ties, communicate alternative messages, and physically represent themselves to each other and the public. More than an arena for rational discourse, the WSF is also, and perhaps

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15 For a traditional social scientist, this kind of participation would constitute an unacceptable breach of normative objectivity, which is itself a politically normative construct and ideal. However, as a militant ethnographer, it allowed me to gain valuable first-hand knowledge of the complex logic of social interaction and micro-level cultural politics within the IC.

16 Unless otherwise specified, direct quotations were recorded during public meetings by the author on the date indicated within the text. Names have been omitted or changed to maintain anonymity.

primarily, a collective ritual where alternative social movement networks become embodied. Indeed, the innumerable self-organized workshops, cultural events, and constant flow of networking activity within the corridors, plazas, streets, and cafes around the Catholic University generated a rush of stimulation, excitement, and bewilderment. As an MRG-based colleague suggested after the Forum, "I didn't learn anything new, but it was an amazing experience. You really felt part of a huge global movement (February 5, 2002)!" Indeed, since mass actions are increasingly difficult to organize given waning enthusiasm and growing repression, the Forum has become a key organizational platform for broader movement and identity building, which is why so many radicals feel obliged to engage the process.

Many of us from MRG helped organize and coordinate the *Intergalactika* Laboratory of Disobedience, which would become a prototypical model for future autonomous spaces at the forums, even if not originally conceived as such.[17] *Intergalactika* provided an informal, participatory forum of exchange among grassroots activists from Europe, South, and North America, many of whom felt ambivalent about participating in the larger institutional forum. Moreover, because it was situated in the International Youth Camp (see Nunes, this issue), many young Brazilian anarchists explicitly opposed to the official Forum could also take part. On the other hand, many of us moved fluidly between alternative and official spaces.

Intergalactika thus provided an arena for engaging in grassroots, participatory forms of political exchange, while also creatively and sometimes confrontationally intervening within the official Forum to make its contradictions visible. Indeed, the ideal of the Forum as open space was perhaps most fully expressed along the margins, particularly within the Youth Camp. Though relatively marginal, *Intergalactika* prefigured the strategy of organizing autonomous, yet connected spaces within the larger Forum, reflecting a networking strategy MRG had already employed in Barcelona, and would promote leading up to the European Social Forum. It was here where the broader movement's horizontal networking logic was most clearly apparent.

For example, on February 4, 2002, the penultimate day of the Forum, *Intergalactika* sponsored an excellent discussion of strategies and tactics, one of the few sessions in Porto Alegre to address direct action. A large crowd assembled in a circle around a well-known activist from London, not far from a photo exhibition displaying action images from Buenos Aires, London, Milan, and Barcelona. This was in explicit contrast to the massive lecture halls housing the official plenaries. The speaker gave an inspirational talk about decentralization, diversity, and interdependence, arguing at one point, "Our movements are like an ecosystem: very fluid, always changing, working toward their own survival". Reflecting the networking logic that had been muted, if not absent, within the larger Forum, he went on to enthusiastically exclaim, "I hate the slogan Another World is Possible – Many Other Worlds are Possible!"

Intergalactika also provided a space for planning and coordinating several creative direct actions targeting the official WSF. The idea was not to question the legitimacy of

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17 For an insightful description and analysis of the 2003 edition of the Intergalactika space at the Youth Camp in Porto Alegre, see Osterweil (2004a).

the Forum, but rather to criticize the perceived top-down manner in which it was organized. Indeed, the WSF represented an opportunity to reach masses of potential supporters, but its more institutional and reformist elements were viewed as undermining the self-organizing network logic within the broader movement. Immediately following the tactics and strategy discussion, dozens of us took the bus from the youth camp to the university for a 'guided tour' of the VIP room.[18] Soon after arriving, we joined the anarchist Samba band from Sao Paolo (dressed in black, rather than the usual pink we were accustomed to) and danced our way up to the second floor. We continued to march through crowds of surprised, yet delighted onlookers. When we burst into the VIP room, a heavy-set Brazilian with long Rastas jumped onto the counter, tossed plastic bottles of water to the crowd, and led us in an enthusiastic chant, "We are all VIPs! We are all VIPs!" We then gave ourselves, and a group of nervously amused NGO delegates, an impromptu bath. The Forum organizers were livid, and only the intervention of our well-connected allies spared us from a direct confrontation with the police. However, as a Brazilian OC member confided to us at the IC meeting in Barcelona later that spring, there would be no VIP room the following year.

One Foot In, One Foot Out

These experiences at the WSF in Porto Alegre in January-February 2002, and at the IC meeting that spring in Barcelona had been particularly instructive. On the one hand, we learned the Forum could bring together tens of thousands of people from diverse movement networks, thereby creating a unique space for encounter and exchange while generating powerful global identities and affective attachments. On the other hand, although the Charter of Principles expressed an open networking logic, there were serious contradictions in practice with respect to grassroots participation, open access, and horizontal organization. However, it was also clear that critically engaging the Forum from the margins not only proved useful in terms of bringing our own projects forward, it allowed for the promotion of constructive change from within. Indeed, confounding clear boundaries between inside and outside, we recognized we had important allies within the very heart of the organizing process. As preparations began for the first European Social Forum the following November in Florence, we began debating among our colleagues in Barcelona and elsewhere how best to engage the process. This led to the first proposals about creating an autonomous space in Florence.

The notion of building an autonomous space 'separate, yet connected' actually came quite naturally to many in Barcelona. The concept itself expressed a horizontal networking logic, and the previous fall we had negotiated similar dynamics surrounding the mobilization against the Spanish Presidency of the European Union in Barcelona. Tensions at the local level actually began in Spring 2001 during the Campaign against the World Bank, a broad convergence space involving grassroots networks like MRG or the Citizens Network to Abolish the Foreign Debt (XCADE), critical elements of

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18 A group of radical French activists also organized a pie-throwing action to denounce the presence of French parliamentarians during an official press conference organized by the Socialist Party of France.

ATTAC, leftist parties, and unions, as well as more institutional sectors. Although some anti-capitalists participated in the Campaign, many militants, including radical squatters, had formed their own autonomous platform.

The World Bank Campaign involved a great deal of conflict between radical grassroots networks and their institutional counterparts. Even when the latter decided to found their own organization following the June mobilization,[19] debates continued to rage between the traditional Marxists, who wanted the Campaign to continue, and many from XCADE and MRG who preferred to dissolve the Campaign, at least until the next mobilization against the EU. Given this ongoing struggle between networking and command logics, some within MRG proposed to forge a large autonomous space the next time together with radical militants and squatters, which could then coordinate with the broader Campaign against the EU.[20] An MRG-based colleague sent an e-mail to the Campaign listserve explaining the reasons for the proposal to create an autonomous space, which included the following:

> We can't force each other to integrate within organizational forms we don't share. The best thing would be to organize within different spaces according to our own traditions, but coordinate in order to complement one another in daily practice. Separating does not necessarily mean dividing. On the contrary, it means moving forward in order to take advantage of both the newer and older experiences and organizational ideas, learning from the errors of the past, toward a new form of understanding collective action. It's about separating in order to work more effectively together.[21]

When discussions began about whether to participate in the Florence ESF it was thus a relatively simple step to apply this networking logic to a proposal for building an autonomous space there. I am not suggesting MRG was the first or only group to formulate these ideas. In fact, they seemed to emerge simultaneously from many different directions. Rather, I want to illustrate how at least one version of the idea emerged, and further, how networking logics and politics at local, regional, and global scales are often mutually reinforcing.

The Strasbourg No Border Camp in July 2002 provided an initial opportunity to debate the various proposals for building an autonomous space at the ESF in Florence, leading to the now famous formulation: 'one foot in, one foot out'. The debate around the ESF on July 26, 2002 drew significant interest, as dozens of grassroots activists from the Italian *Disobedientes*, Cobas, and PGA-inspired activists around Europe came together to share ideas and experiences. An activist from Berlin began with a brief outline of the situation, "People say everything is open, but a small group makes all the decisions. There are mostly Trotskyists, trade unionists, political parties, and ATTAC, but very

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19   The institutional sectors created a more traditional membership organization, which they confusingly, and perhaps manipulatively, called the 'Barcelona Social Forum'.

20   Because the institutional sectors ultimately pulled out themselves, militant anti-capitalists and squatters decided to participate within the Campaign against the EU. Rather than create a separate space, different networks thus divided themselves up internally around distinct commissions and logistical tasks.

21   Cited from a document called, 'Opening the Debate after the Statewide Meeting in Zaragoza: Separating in order to Work Together More Effectively', posted on the bcn2001@yahoogroups.com listserve on December 4, 2001.

few from networks like PGA or the broader movement. How do we bring radical ideas and proposals without becoming part of the power structure?"

Several argued that we should participate, but organize things differently, highlighting a vision of self-managed social change from below. Many felt it would be better to stay outside, as one activist pointed out, "Participating is a way of legitimating their attempt to make the ESF *the* space of the anti-globalization movement!" Others thought it was more important to intervene, as the Berliner suggested, "In Porto Alegre many people never saw the youth camp; there was not enough interaction. We should have one foot outside, but also another inside". Her position was widely shared, as an Andalusia-based squatter added, "We should organize a different space, beyond, but not against the ESF, although we should also participate within". After a long discussion, the group ultimately decided to release the following statement:

> We agreed to launch the idea of constituting a concrete space for those of us who traditionally work with structures that are decentralized, horizontal, assembly-based, and anti-authoritarian; a space that would maintain its autonomy with respect to the "official" space of the ESF, but at the same time remain connected… This would mean… having one foot outside and another inside the ESF… This autonomous space should visibilize the diversity of the movement of movements, but also our irreconcilable differences with respect to models attempting to reform capitalism. The space should not only incorporate differences with the program of the ESF in terms of "contents," but also in terms of the organizational model and forms of political action.[22]

Indeed, ideological differences were largely coded as disagreement over organizational process and form.

The European PGA conference in Leiden provided an opportunity for further defining the autonomous space in Florence during a session on September 1, 2002. Some were still reticent about participating, but as one activist argued, "The ESF is a perfect moment of visibility. We are a ghetto here in Leiden; there is very little media coverage". At the same time, there was growing support for a space completely outside the forum. Specific groups could make their own decision about whether to take part within. Others were concerned about being integrated into a social democratic project, leading to consensus about the importance of clearly 'legible' actions to communicate the underlying political distinctions. Indeed, such complex networking politics would involve a delicate balance: "The challenge… consists of making sure, on the one hand, the initiatives are not co-opted; and, on the other hand, avoiding… isolation".[23] We ultimately decided to recast the autonomous space outside the forum, which would allow individual activists and groups to make their own decision about where to position their own feet with respect to the boundaries dividing official and autonomous spheres.

Specific actions and contents were also discussed, and this is where major disagreements emerged. For example, as someone from the *Disobedientes* suggested, "We should organize a series of actions around three issues: global war, labour, and new

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22 Cited from www.nadir.org/nadir/initiativ/agp/space/index.html, accessed 13 April 2005.

23 Cited from http://www.nadir.org/nadir/initiativ/agp/pgaeurope/leiden/autonomous_space.htm, accessed 13 April 2005.

social subjects". Reflecting an open networking logic, and subtle critique of the *Disobedientes*, an activist from Indymedia-Italy countered that process was equally important, arguing that, "An autonomous space should be defined by open access. We have to create spaces and tools that allow people to come together". Disagreements over whether spaces should be more or less open or directed are not only found within the official forum process; they are also present along its margins. What began as a single project thus ultimately broke down into parallel autonomous initiatives in Florence, including Cobas Thematic Squares, the *Disobedientes* 'No Work, No Shop' space, and Eur@ction Hub.

Proliferation of Autonomous Spaces

The official ESF in Florence surpassed all expectations, involving 60,000 activists from around Europe in debates and discussions, and drawing nearly 1 million to the demonstration against the war in Iraq on November 9, 2002. In addition, many more activists passed through the autonomous initiatives mentioned above, as well as a feminist space called Next Genderation (cf. Waterman, 2002). Although criticized for being relatively marginal, the Eur@action Hub, in particular, provided an open space for sharing skills, ideas, and resources; building new subjects; exploring issues related to information, migration, and self-management; and experimenting with new peer-to-peer communication technologies. The project thus manifested a particularly clear horizontal networking logic within its organizational architecture, emphasizing process and form over content. Above all, it was designed to facilitate interconnections, inside the Hub and between the Hub and other spaces around the Forum, as the flyer explained:

> Hub is… a connector. It is not a space already marked by pre-established content. Anyone can contribute proposals designed specifically for the Hub, but 'also connect' to this space others that might take place in other places or moments in Florence. Hub is also an interconnection tool: for bringing together proposals or ideas that have been dispersed or undeveloped until now, which might acquire greater complexity.[24]

After Florence, the autonomous space model caught on, becoming standard practice at subsequent events. For example, at the 2003 WSF in Porto Alegre, grassroots activists organized several overlapping parallel spaces, including a follow-up Hub project, the second edition of the *Intergalactika* project, and a forum organized by Z Magazine called 'Life After Capitalism'. In addition, Brazilian activists hosted a PGA-inspired gathering involving activists from Europe, South, and North America. Although emerging from distinct political contexts and histories, autonomous spaces at the 2004 WSF in Mumbai were even larger, particularly since grassroots movements in India were extremely critical of the institutional NGOs leading the process. These included: Mumbai Resistance (an initiative of Maoist and Ghandian peasant movements), the Peoples Movements Encounter II (led by the Federation of Agricultural Workers and

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24 See www.nadir.org/nadir/initiativ/agp/space/hubproject.htm, accessed 13 April 2005.

Marginal Farmers Unions), and the International Youth Camp.[25] PGA also held another parallel session, involving mostly Asian and European movements.[26] Finally, activists organized various parallel initiatives at the second ESF in Paris in November 2003, including an autonomous media center, Metallo medialab, and a highly successful direct action space called GLAD (Space Towards the Globalization of Disobedient Struggles and Actions).

At the same time, many anti-authoritarians have refused to take part in the forum process entirely. With respect to the ESF, Paul Treanor, a Dutch anti-authoritarian, has thus argued that, "The organizers want to establish themselves as 'the leaders of the European social movements'. They want to become a negotiating partner of the EU (2002)". As pointed out above, however, the forum process is much more complex, contradictory, and contested, involving anti-capitalists as well as reformers, libertarians as well as vanguardists. On the other hand, many grassroots anti-capitalists recognize the strategic importance of the social forums, as Pablo Ortellado, a Brazilian activist has argued, "The social forums are attracting a wide range of people, many of whom we really want to bring to our part of the movement. It's not enough to sit and criticize the Forum… We should somehow set our own events and attract those people (2003)". In a widely circulated essay, Linden Farrer thus comes out in support of a 'contamination' strategy:

> The best way of working with the ESF [is] being constructive in criticism, attempting to change the organization from inside and outside, preventing liberals from tending towards their self-destructive habits of strengthening existing structures of government. Rather than abolishing the ESF because it had a shaky- but ultimately successful- start, we should work to make the ESF a truly revolutionary force (2002).[27]

Many grassroots radicals would agree, and if the most recent ESF provides an indication, in ever increasing numbers. Indeed, the cultural politics of autonomous space

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25 The largest and most well known alternative space at the WSF in 2004 was Mumbai Resistance (MR), which involved a coalition of 300 political movements and organizations, including Lohiaites, Marxists, Leninists, Maoists, and Sarvodaya workers. MR, which criticized the main forum for its funding practices and its unwillingness to reject capitalism, was initiated at the International Thessaloniki Resistance Camp in June 2003. It took concrete form when the Coordinating Group of the International League of Peoples' Struggles decided in July 2003 to organize a parallel event during the 2004 WSF. The social composition and political visions characterizing such spaces in Mumbai differed from the largely young, middle class, and urban-based activists (with the exception of Cobas) behind previous alternative spaces at the forums. Previous spaces also were more inspired by a left libertarian vision and a commitment to the politics of autonomy in the strict ideological sense (I want to thank Michal Osterweil for reminding me of this point, personal correspondence). In other words, autonomy can refer to both a specific politics and a structural relationship. In this sense, while recognizing these important differences, I continue to use the term 'autonomous space' to characterize MR and other alternative initiatives in Mumbai to signal their structural relationship vis-à-vis the main forum, which captures a key aspect of the emerging networking logic explored here: decentralized coordination among diverse, (structurally) autonomous elements.

26 See Olivier de Marcellus, 'Divisions and Missed Opportunities in Bombay', posted to the pga@lists.riseup.net list on 12 February 2004.

27 For a subtle critique of the contamination strategy, and an argument in favor of anti-authoritarians developing their own grassroots networks, if not abandoning the Forums entirely, see Grubacic (2003).

perhaps reached their fullest expression at the European Social Forum in London in October 2004.

European Social Forum- London 2004

As conflict between horizontals and verticals around the London ESF process continued to escalate, numerous activists and groups, some against the forum process and others holding out hope for reform, decided to organize and coordinate a series of grassroots autonomous spaces. Despite important differences with respect to ideology and position vis-à-vis the official Forum, the various alternative projects were united in their commitment to horizontal, directly democratic processes and forms. As a Beyond ESF spokesperson explained during the opening plenary presenting the autonomous spaces at Middlesex University on October 13, 2004, "We have spent six months defining ourselves in opposition to the ESF, but our way of showing opposition is by organizing ourselves in a different way". Delegates from other spaces were not so much against the Forum itself, but the perceived heavy-handed tactics of the SWP and Socialist Action. As a main organizer of Life Despite Capitalism explained, "To fight the top-down, vertical culture we created the horizontals based on our own culture of openness". In many ways, the autonomous spaces represented an affirmation of the open space ideal expressed within the Forum charter, as their collective declaration clearly articulates:

> We want to create open spaces for networking, exchanges, celebration, thinking, and action. We believe our ways of organizing and acting should reflect our political visions, and are united in standing for grassroots self-organization, horizontality, for diversity and inclusion, for direct democracy, collective decision making based upon consensus.[28]

The autonomous spaces in London were ultimately more numerous, well attended, and perhaps more fruitful, in terms of generating synergies, cross-fertilization, and debate, than at any previous Forum. Thousands of grassroots activists engaged in a dizzying array of alternative projects, direct actions, and initiatives. Although it was impossible to be everywhere at once, particularly given the long distances between venues, I attended many of the alternative events and workshops, which included:

> 1. *Beyond ESF* – October 13 to 17, Middlesex University
>
> Beyond ESF was an alternative gathering of anti-authoritarian, anti-capitalist struggles, involving hundreds of workshops, discussions, and events organized around five themes: Autonomy and Struggle, No Borders, Repression and Social Control, Zapatismo, and Precarity/Casualization. In addition, activists also used the space to plan and coordinate ongoing activities within grassroots formations like PGA, No Border, or the Dissent Network, which organized a daylong workshop to prepare for the July actions against the G8 in Scotland. Perhaps even more important were the informal networking opportunities around the bar, canteen, vegan kitchen, and hallways.

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28 Cited from the free paper 'Autonomous Spaces' circulated around the London ESF. For additional information, see www.altspaces.net.

2. *Radical Theory Forum* – October 14, 491 Gallery

Radical Theory involved a series of workshops and discussions among activists and committed intellectuals exploring how theory can inform action. Specific themes included: feminism, post-Marxism, popular education, complexity theory, as well as the politics and organization of the European Social Forum, among many others. The conference was followed by a party with film, art, music, and spoken word.

3. *Indymedia Centre* – October 14 to 17, Camden Centre

The Indymedia Centre provided a space for independent reporting and multi-media production around the ESF and autonomous spaces, including numerous protests and creative interventions. It also housed a bar and public access computing facility, as well as evening cultural events. In addition, the Camden Centre also housed a four-day conference around communication rights and tactical media production.

4. *The Laboratory of Insurrectionary Imagination* – October 14 to 17, Rampart Creative Centre

The Laboratory provided a self-organized space for creative intervention and exchange, where participants shared ideas and tactics through a series of workshops, discussions, and direct action events throughout the city. Some of the specific actions included: Corporate Olympics, the 5th biannual March for Capitalism, Yomango collective shoplifts and Tube parties, and Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army recruitments and trainings.

5. *Mobile Carnival Forum* – October 14 to 17, Rampart and throughout the city

The Carnival Forum was housed in the London to Baghdad bio-diesel double-decker bus, which circulated from site to site around the Forum and other parts of the city. The project specifically used political theatre and music to generate discussions and workshops around various issues, including peace, democracy, and neo-liberalism.

6. *Solidarity Village* – October 13 to 17, Conway Hall and London School of Economics

The Solidarity Village involved a series of projects and initiatives that specifically focused on alternative economies. Concrete spaces included the Land Café, Well Being Space, Art Space for Kids, Local Social Forums Area, the Commons Internet Café, and SUSTAIN! which included presentations, leaflets and information stalls.

7. *Women's Open Day* – October 14, King's Cross Methodist Church

This one-day gathering involved speak-outs, food, video screenings, childcare, and information stalls focusing on the non-remunerated survival work carried

out by women around the world, including breastfeeding, subsistence farming, caring, volunteering, and fighting for justice.

8. *Life Despite Capitalism* – October 16 and 17, London School of Economics

Life Despite Capitalism was a two-day forum for collective debate and reflection around diverse issues and struggles involving the idea of the 'Commons'. The goal was to begin to generate a new discourse and analysis, including a critique of capitalism and the articulation of alternative values and practices that represent what we are fighting for. These alternatives do not lie in the distant future when capitalism has been abolished, but rather exist here and now. Two series of workshops explored the idea of the Commons in diverse spheres: cyberspace, the workplace, public services, free movement, and autonomous spaces, as well as several cross-cutting themes, including power, networks, democracies, creative excesses, and the commons more generally.

Throughout the London Forum I was thus able to move fluidly across the city's urban terrain from one space to another, and between the autonomous spaces and the official forum at Alexander Palace and Bloomsbury. Boundaries were diffuse, shifting, and permeable, as spaces literally flowed through and across one another. Indeed, the movement's broader networking logic was physically expressed through the division of urban space, allowing diverse forms of organization to converge in time, without imposing one form over another. This does not mean there was an absence of interaction and struggle, as illustrated, for example, by the highly public direct action against London Mayor Ken Livingstone. However, conflicts were largely localized in space and time, and were, in fact, productive: making underlying tensions visible, generating collective debate, and pressuring the Forum to abide by its expressed guidelines and ideals. The autonomous spaces thus allowed grassroots radicals to engage in their own alternative forms of political, social, and cultural production, while moving out from their radical ghettos to tactically intervene within the broader forum, and throughout the entire city as well.

Conclusion: From Open to Networked Space

At this point, I hope to have accomplished my first two objectives. On the one hand, I have traced the emergence, diffusion, and implementation of the autonomous space concept with respect to the social forums from my situated experience. I have thus considered complex local networking politics in Barcelona as well as my participation in *Intergalactika*, the IC, and the debates over the "one foot in, one foot out" principle. Finally, I discussed the proliferation of autonomous spaces at recent World and European Social Forums. On the other hand, this paper has also explored the cultural politics of autonomous space from a more theoretical perspective. In this sense, I have argued that building autonomous spaces reflects the underlying networking logic within anti-corporate globalization movements, involving the creation of horizontal ties and connections among distinct elements or nodes across diversity and difference. At the same time, as we have seen, networking logics are never completely dominant, and are

always challenged by competing logics, generating complex networking politics within specific spheres. Given that such political logics are increasingly inscribed directly into organizational architectures, it should come as no surprise that ideological debates have often been coded as struggles over process and form, particularly within and around the social forums. But what does this means politically? How does the preceding analysis generate a new vision for the social forum process?

If activists have learned anything over the past few years it is that our movements, networks, and groups are exceedingly diverse. Conflicts over political vision, ideology, and organizational form are simply unavoidable – within and between sectors. Indeed, they are constitutive of the broader convergence processes that characterize mass-based movements. At the same time, given such high levels of diversity, it may be impossible to work effectively together within a single space. This does not mean abandoning the Forum, as many radicals and anti-authoritarians would suggest. But neither does it imply a mere strategy of contamination. Rather, it suggests radicalizing our horizontal networking logic by not only continuing to build autonomous spaces within and around the forums, but also by working to inscribe the politics of autonomous space within the very organizational architecture of the Forum itself.

In this sense, the proliferation of autonomous spaces at the London ESF ought not to be viewed as an aberration due to the extremely bitter conflict between horizontals and verticals. Instead, the successful organization of so many interesting, diverse, and often disjunctive spaces represents a model for re-conceptualizing the Forums entirely. Interestingly, the most recent WSF in Porto Alegre in January/February 2005 moved in this direction by shifting from a central site at the Catholic University toward a networked terrain involving diverse thematic areas. Moreover, the youth camp and the various projects housed there, including a new instantiation of *Intergalactika* called the *Caracol*, were geographically situated at the centre of the Forum rather than along its margins. At the same time, however, there is also a danger this kind of shift may represent the cooptation of difference, as opposed to its full expression.

In this sense, rather than view of the Forum as a singular open space, even if networked internally, it should be conceived in the plural as a complex pattern of politically differentiated, yet interlocking networked spaces, open not only within, but also with respect to one another. Boundaries are always diffuse, mobile, and permeable. Despite the contradictions noted above, openness and horizontality are important ideals, but they should be extended outward, reflecting the often conflictual interactions among different spaces and the relationships between them. Indeed, radical networking logics explode any rigid divisions between inside and outside. Such a view recognizes that the Forum is always a work in progress, evolving as diverse networks and groups interact, alternatively connecting, disconnecting, and recombining.

By re-conceiving the Forum as a horizontal network of autonomous spaces that converge across an urban terrain at a given point in time, we would thus be reproducing the organizational logic that allowed activists to successfully organize mass direct actions against multilateral institutions in places like Prague, Quebec, and Genoa. In each of these cities, activists divided up the urban terrain to facilitate and coordinate among diverse forms of political expression. Indeed, diversity of tactics represents the

manifestation of a horizontal networking logic on the tactical plane.[29] What I am suggesting is that the forums provide a unique opportunity to implement a similar networking logic through the articulation of alternatives rather than simply protesting what we are against. Of course, much of this work will continue to happen within our own networks, but building mass movements requires periodic moments of broader convergence, interaction, and exchange, however complex and contradictory they may be. In this light, reconstituting the Forum as a multiplicity of horizontally networked spaces does not mean dividing, but rather working more effectively together, and thereby breathing new life into a process that desperately needs continual revitalization.

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29 I refer to diversity of tactics here with respect to the underlying organizational logic, not the merit of any particular tactic. This is not the place to recapitulate debates surrounding violence and non-violence.

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4.

THE POLITICAL PARTIES / REPRESENTATION LINE OF INQUIRY

Rethinking political parties in an era of movements and networks

Hilary Wainwright

Introduction

This paper asks whether and how political parties can be contribute to social transformation in an age of movements and networks; an age when the party's historic claim to a monopoly or a leadership over progressive social change has radically been broken .

By political parties I mean organisations that aim to be in government or to be in a strategic position in relation to government. Working to this end is not necessarily all that they do. Neither is it necessarily their immediate goal but it is a goal which guides their long term perspective and identity and makes them distinctive as a form of organisation. Historically and in the context of the nation state, the tasks of representation and government; programmatic development; propaganda for an alternative vision of society and the wider struggle for the hegemony of this vision have all been performed under the leadership of the political party. 'The party' thus tended to define people's political identity. A variety of developments - within capitalism, within political parties and within civil society -have broken up this concentration of political activities, and this single source of a political identity. I want to pursue this deconstruction of the political party conceptually and explore how the various activities are being transformed and recombined – or could be recombined - in a way which prefigures new kinds of political actors, including political parties?.

These are my starting points:

1. A recognition that political parties in general, including parties of the left, are in a state of crisis as to their democratic legitimacy and relevance to anyone except the professional politicians who hold office in or through them.

2. For the traditional parties of the left perhaps the most profound dimension of this crisis is the experience of social struggles and movements over the last thirty years or so, which have expressed the possibility, and indeed the necessity, of changing social relations independently of state and party institutions. The women's movement, particularly, but also the squatter's movement and other community based movements as well as militant workers' movements, and radical media and cultural movements/initiatives have all exposed, through their own emancipatory innovations, the limitations of the state and political parties as the dominant means of social transformation.

This does not imply that political representation and office have no role in the process of social change. But it does mean their importance has changed, becoming

very much more specific, limited and contingent on particular needs and circumstances than much of the left has understood it historically. Will representation and office will now tend to be more enabling and defensive – with autonomous movements and initiatives being the driving force of change? This development is further exacerbated by globalisation and the break up of the pivotal role of the nation state.

3. Experiences as far apart as Britain and Brazil demonstrate, the election of political parties of the left will not lead to any significant social transformation without the sustained and creative initiatives of autonomous democratic movements and networks, both as sources of transformative power in themselves and as a counter to the pressures of the global market. These movements do not see themselves as subordinate to the moment of government. They are themselves engaged in a process of change. What can left engagement within political institutions add to this process? How can such engagement play a distinct and also supportive role in the process of radical change?

4. If popular movements and the autonomous left do not intervene in some way in the crisis of political representation, we hand over one vital source of legitimacy to the right. The problem of democratic political representation is too important to leave to political parties to resolve - including too important to the processes of change taking place through autonomous movements, networks or struggles.

5. This fourth point must be understood alongside the fact that representation through electoral institutions is only one source of democratic legitimacy and it is an increasingly discredited one. Social movements and struggles have created other forms of democratic legitimacy with varying degrees of autonomy from the state. Currently these include participatory forms of public decision making – over budget and adminsitration in which an autonomous sphere of delegate democracy can effectively strengthen and sometimes recover the democracy of representative institutions; initiatives to create an alternative media and also in some ways subvert the mainstream media – initiatives hugely strengthened through the new technology; people to people forms of international action; efforts to create new economic relations – and expose the immorality and unsustainability of corporate capitalism – with collectve consumer action, the alternative economy, radical trade union campaigns for altrnatives to privatisation ..and so on.

INTERPRETING THE CRISIS

Over the past thirty years or so people imbued with many of the same values that these parties claim to stand for, have been carrying out some of the functions of parties in entirely new ways - making connections between social groups and issues; producing propaganda to put particular issues in a wider context; evolving new approaches to leadership, and being open to new approaches to the development of a collective memory, even a collective intellect. (There are problems too with all of

this; and, generally, an awareness of these problems. See the movement line of inquiry)

The figures on the decline of political parties are striking, although familiar: only 1-2% (or 600,000 individuals) of the UK population are (mainly passive) members of a political party, down from well over 5% in the 1960's (when total membership was pushing 4 million people). Compared to the 1.5 million who took part in the Stop the War demonstrations, the 1 million who joined the Make Poverty History campaign, or the half a million members of Friends of the Earth, these figures seem remarkably small. Germany's party membership has sunk from 4.7% in the 80's and early 90's to just 3% today. Similar figures are available from across multi-party political systems.

There are two problems with the way in which these figures are sometimes read. First, conventional political scientists tend to interpret them as indicating a decline in *politics*, the implication being that the extra-parliamentary, campaigning organisations that people are joining are 'just single issue' campaigns that are somehow apolitical. This perspective is already well criticised. The second problem is less recognised: it is that the statistics on decline are read superficially as signs of *a rejection of parties in principle,* as distinct from a rejection of the 'actually existing' political parties. This is difficult to test but there are some indications that the general decline in participation in political parties hides something more complex.

Take someone leaving the Labour Party quoted recently in the Guardian: "It (leaving the Labour Party) has left quite a big hole in my life," she says. "I go to [George Galloway's] Respect Coalition meetings now, but I'm not a member. I'm not sure they even have members. And I belong to groups such as Palestinian Solidarity, the anti-fascist people, stuff like that. But it's not really filling the gap. The only way you can really have an impact in politics is if you're in power. Pressure groups can have an effect, but it's not the same. There's nowhere for me to go." Statistically, this ex-member of the Labour Party would be logged as evidence of the decline of political parties, but in reality, far from expressing disengagement from politics and the idea of a political party, she was rejecting a Labour Party she found *not sufficiently or effectively* political as a party for change. She desires another 'home' which at present she imagines as something more than movements and campaigns, though she's not quite sure what it is. For her there is a political 'gap.'

Clearly, it would be wrong to build an argument on one quote but her statement is a warning against taking statistics on party decline at face value, or treating 'political parties' as if they can take only one immutable form.

A further caution against espousing the 'decline/end of the political party' diagnosis (as distinct from 'a crisis of political parties as we hve historically known them') is that the same period which saw the decline of parties also saw the initiation and uneven growth of new political parties (often with, significantly, a high turnover), committed to 'refoundation'. The 1980's saw the establishment of Green Parties as self-proclaimed 'parties of a new kind'. Parties also formed out splits to the left of Communist or Labour Parties were joined by significant numbers of social

movement activists or ex-members of radical left organisations - the Norwegian Left Party, Rifondazione and the Scottish Socialist Party are examples of this. Where such parties have become, close to social movements their membership has generally grown, not spectacularly, but certainly relative to mainstream socialist democratic parties.

There have also been moments of sudden engagement in electoral politics like Spain 2004 which followed extra-parliamentary mobilisations against a reactionary government. This indicates that the relation of radical activists to political parties is more complex than simply disengagement. Moreover, although people sense that their vote, so hard fought for by radical movements in the past, has been rendered almost useless, there is a determination to resist any further erosion of emocratic control. After all, many of the struggles of recent years, whether against the WTO or to refuse to allow the government to carry out a war in our name, or to halt the privatisation of public services, have in effect been about defending the last vestiges of democracy, and the political gains they entail (such as the redistribution of wealth and the provision of public services) possibly opening up a new more radical - because more international - democratic dynamic.

Paradoxically, representative democracy has had to be rescued by movements with little or no representation within the political system. This has brought these movements into wary alliances with a minority of radical elected representatives or radical political parties working for representation within the political system. Such engagement is on specific issues and on the basis of the autonomy of the movements, but it is engagement nonetheless.

The anti-war movement marked a new phase in thinking about electoral politics. The experience of being a majority and yet in the UK, Spain and Italy failing to stop governments which claimed to rule in their name, reinforced people's sense of the corrupt and distant nature of political institutions or for some, awoke them to this fact. It also led to a greater concern with the nature of political institutions : in the UK the creation of a new electoral alliance, in Italy the creation of a more organised co-ordination between movements and parliamentarians, in Spain, and also in the US, movement support – on an autonomous basis - for an electoral campaign.

Experiences in Latin America - a laboratory of different relations between movements, political parties and electoral representation – have proved a generally more positive stimulus to new thinking about political representation. Between them, Brazil, Argentina, Venezuela and Bolivia have illustrated a wide range of problems and possibilities. In Brazil a radical movement-shaped party (the PT) was partially corrupted by going for electoral success at all costs. In Argentina, popular movements faced an impasse unless they could find political allies open to negotiating a relationship in which movements would not lose their autonomy. In Venezuela, political parties became so discredited that grass roots movements with a sense of their own power felt their only connection with government was through a direct relation (or the hope of a direct relation) with their president, with all the obvious problems that entails. Finally in Bolivia, a movement seems to have built its

own political power to a point where it can set the terms of electoral competition and win. Given Latin America's importance at the forefront of social change, these experiences are stimulating new thinking about political parties, or at least political representation, amongst across the world

At the same time as the left in Latin America struggles to politicise – as a necessary condition for democratising - fundamental questions of state administration and economic policy, social democratic converts to neo-liberalism in Europe are leading a reverse process. The UK provides the paradigm. Here, New Labour is pushing a concerted and sophisticated project (with Europe-wide ambitions) to turn politics into a matter of administration, business and public relations. New Labour is pursuing a strategy of marketisation which is emptying representative democracy (including the Labour Party itself) of any meaningful content. The process of stealthy marketisation has successfully created many 'politics free zones', in which government and local government have bought off or incorporated community and other social or trade movement organisations.

However, this process has also goaded the struggle for social justice to a deeper level, leading to a new – often temporary and ad hoc – network style political configuration of trade unions, communities, social movements and political parties who are coming together to invent whatever organisations are necessary to defend public goods such as health, housing and water. While many well-meaning politicians of the traditional left continue to focus on electoral politics as if that was still the real battleground, a different kind of politicisation is taking place amongst a minority of trade union and social movements activists who are now alert to looking for the political where it is most fervently denied and most furtively hidden (for example in the procurement processes by which public service contract out work to the private sector). In this way, even as the ground, i.e. public services, is being pulled from beneath the feet of elected politicians and national institutions of representative democracy, many of those at the forefront of defending the public services are also experimenting with new kinds of political organisation.

These are just some of the developments which lie behind what I would argue is no simple disengagement with political parties, but rather a process of experimentation with new political forms. This experimentation might and sometimes does include a new role for new kinds of political parties and alliances.

SEVEN PROPOSITIONS FROM EXPERIENCE SO FAR

To help reflect on this experimentation, I'll sum up several (obvious) propositions that could be said to have been established through the experience of struggle, disillusion and experimentation so far:

1. *Political parties do not exhaust the political*; indeed some parties, like New Labour, could be said to be sucking the political out of politics. On the other hand, several generations now have been engaged in non-party activity that they see as profoundly political in it's challenge to mainstream political

parties. An important distinction has been made in practice between the political and political parties. Being involved in a political party isn't a necessary or sufficient condition for being political.

2. A distinction needs to be made, from the standpoint of social transformation, between the *electoral* and the *political*. The need for this distinction has become particularly acute in the light of the last thirty years of experience of social democracy. On the positive side, all kinds of experiences - ranging from the impact of feminism (still partial and incomplete), through to the success of the movement to withdraw Cruise Missiles in the 1980s, to the victory of the movement against the CPE - illustrate the possibilities for winning significant change without standing for election and often in the face of the hostility of the leadership of social democratic parties.

3. From the standpoint of social transformation, a fundamental problem with electoral politics – under most electoral systems - is the breadth of the coalition and the degree of discipline and subordination needed to win elections in present circumstances. This makes electoral politics increasingly in tension with movements for social transformation. It is only where these movements – with the help of objective circumstances, and sometimes, an electoral system allows for a directly proportionate represenation of public opinion - have autonomously changed popular consciousness, that it is possible, significantly to raise the level of radicality at which a coalition can be made, as in Spain in 2004, Norway in 2005 or, much more dramatically, in Bolivia earlier this year.

4. Another distinction probably has to be made, between *electoral activity* and *seeking election as a government*. It is possible for movements or parties to engage in electoral activity in order to change consciousness, shift the balance of power in society, and achieve representation that will enable them to reach a wider public with greater legitimacy and make them a more forceful, strategic, challenge,   rather than making, at particular moment, the compromises required to aim for government.

5. As far as Leninist parties are concerned, the development of a self-confident sphere of   autonomous political activity involving the discovery, interconnecting and building strategically on a plurality of sources of power, has meant most activists in these movements are not interested in Leninist parties, indeed are positive hostile. The autonomous politics which has been developing unevenly, and through defeat as well as advances, clashes with these parties' presumptions of leadership, their single line of advance, and their instrumental approach to change which is contemptuous of all efforts to pre-figure in the present the goals of a future society. In spite of thirty years of mass disaffection with capitalism and with the existing political system and political parties, few Leninist parties have grown in a sustained way beyond a peak in the early 70's . Where parties with these origins have grown, it is closely related to the fact that they have turned their back on the

Leninist notion of the vanguard party and presented themselves as one actor amongst many.

6. The new sphere of autonomous political activity has roots, traces, signs, and memories in many parts of society. It has become a rich and complex political phenomenon. It has de facto taken over many of the functions historically performed by left political parties in their heyday - political education, culture, agitation, propaganda. It has developed its own means of interconnectedness, co-ordination and continuity, though these can be precarious and easily interrupted by defeats and setbacks. It is also constantly developing fora and infrastructures through which to develop shared policies, strategies, even programmes and manifesto's of various kinds, though these initiatives face problems of collective memory and accumulative power.

    Within this politically self-conscious autonomous sphere there is also a constant experimentation with alternative ways of living, producing and creating at the same time as resisting and protesting. There has been a process of discovery of new sources of power and knowledge in relation to change – and the invention of new forms of organisation to release, express and develop them. It suffers perhaps from a certain invisibility, appearing more as a sub-culture and underground influence than a political force, though it has the capacity to erupt and break through in unexpected forms. (See the movement line of the inquiry).

7. The uneven growth of this sphere of political activity, autonomous from political parties, doesn't necessarily imply separation from political parties and electoral activities. Rather, its autonomy opens up possibilities for a huge range of possible relationships. This can be contrasted with the historical relationship between social movements, especially the trade union movement, and classical parties of the left. During most of the 20th century the British trade union movement, for example delegated responsibility for what it saw as politics to the Labour Party, explicitly denying the unions'own autonomous politics and abiding by a strict division of labour between 'the political' and 'the industrial'. This division was built into the institutions of the Labour Party and the division of labour took an extreme form. In other countries it was more de facto and in France and Italy, with powerful Communist Parties and a politically divided trade union, it was different again, but still the movements generally lacked an autonomous politics. Part of the emergence of this autonomous political sphere has involved developing appropriate tactics for dealing with parties, becoming more self-conscious about the nature of its own politics and the importance of .

All this seems to me to add up to a de facto deconstruction of political parties of the left as we have known them, and the existence of many different processes of reconstruction leading we don't know where. Is it leading to the political equivalent of the kind of scenario that Andre Gorz advocated for labour - a sphere of

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heteronomous   activity (waged labour in his model, electoral/party politics in a putative political equivalent) co-existing with a sphere of autonomous political activity? Or will we see a more dynamic interactive process in which fundamental changes in the nature of the political have led to a transformation of political activity within parties and movements? Will there emerge a variety of different interconnected or new political actors? Or, pessimistically, could we be seeing a process of the diffusion of politics to a point where it becomes impossible to talk in terms of political actors at all? To be honest at this point, I favour the interactive process leading to interconnected or new political actors, but I don't *know.*

In order to explore these questions further and to help map the process of reconstruction, I thought it would help to go through the following exercise – sorry if it is a little laborious: First, to identify the *assumptions behind* traditional parties of the left about what seem to me to be the conceptual foundations of political action and organisation; then to explore the assumptions on these same issues made by transformative movements and networks as they construct a politics independently of political parties.

The assumptions that found and shape the nature of politics concern:

1. The nature of the political
2. The nature of the *processes/mechanisms* of progressive social change
3. The nature of *power* to bring about social change (related to this: who are the actors in the process of social change?)
4. The nature of and *organisation of knowledge* as it relates to power and transformation

A) CLASSICAL PARTIES OF THE LEFT

1. The nature of the political

The assumption behind the main parties of the left was that 'the political' is *that which concerns the state and government*.

This applies both to Social Democratic and Communist parties in different ways. Within Communist parties influenced by the Gramscian tradition it was different again. For social democrats the key to bringing about social change was to be elected into government, then steer the state, within the framework of liberal democracy, towards interventions in the market and towards state provision that would meet the needs of the people. The political was thus sharply delineated from the social and the economic. The Communist parties also wanted to seize state power but – assuming we are talking about the post-war period – through winning influence and ultimately hegemony within society as a basis for gaining the power to take over and transform the capitalist state.(Though here I realise I am not giving credit to the ideas of Gramsci – which need a discussion of their own as a part of our inquiry) In the view of both traditions, unless a struggle or movement pertains to the state or can be led to do so, it is somehow sub-political and needs the party to make or sustain the link to

the state. This meant a somewhat paternalist relation to movements, which in the eyes of most of these party leaders were subordinate, sectoral and lacking any independent political valence. The legacy of this thinking is still potent; many party leaders, however 'pro-movement' their rhetoric, instinctively classify the movements of recent years, including the alter-globalisation movement, as 'single issue' or assume that only a party can make intellectual political links with wider society.

This state-centred thinking, in both the Communist and Social Democratic traditions, defined their identity. It is one factor explaining why both traditions faced a crisis with the implosion of the command economies and the dominance of the global market, suffered either a loss of direction (most common amongst ex Communist Parties) and identity and/or a tendency to go weak at the knees in the face of big private business.(e.g. Tony Blair and New Labour). Deep in the political unconscious of these parties is the notion that the choice is between the market, or the state under the control of parliamentary democracy led by a left government. So once the state has failed there is only the market. There has been a certain discovery of civil society, not as a source of power but as 'junior partners' who provide an apolitical camouflage and democratic window-dresing for the steady marketising of the state, or the conforming to the pressures of global capital.

2. The processes/mechanisms of progressive social change

"Parliament is the sword at the heart of private property," said Nye Bevan, an ex-militant in the coal mines of Wales and a leader of the left of the Labour Party in the 1950's when many social democratic parties across Europe still had some socialist fire in their bellies. The assumption behind this poetic summary of a parliamentary strategy for socialism was that the exercise of the vote to elect representatives of working people, leading to the left being in government, would be a process of change. Bevan's remark reveals huge confidence in the power of the vote based on the assumption that somehow the power of the people *was automatically carried through into parliament by the process of representation*. This illusion was often strengthened by the way the establishment and right wing media portrayed Bevan and left social democrats like him, as if they were a real threat to the interests of property.

 There are two meanings of 'representation'. One is 'making present'. The other is 'symbolising'. The idea that the representative 'makes present' within the legislative assembly the demands, knowledge and ideas of citizens implies an active relationship between the representative and the people who elected them, indicating principles of mandate, means of keeping the mandate alive like recallability, reporting back and so on. It also implies the thoroughgoing transparency of political institutions and also an electoral system which allows for as direct and undistorted expression of the movements and divisions in public consciousness as technically possible. All this in turn implies a notion of voters as citizens participating in public affairs – rather than the atomised process that it has become. It is undoubtedly this sense of representation that one of the most passionate advocates of representative

democracy, Tom Paine, had in mind when in a remarkable passage (which for me provides a good criterion for genuine democracy) he said: "It appears to general observation, that revolutions create genius and talent; but those events do no more than bring them forward. There is existing in man, a mass of sense lying in a dormant state, and which unless something excites it to action, will descend with him, in that condition, to the grave. As it is to the advantage of society that the whole of its facilities should be employed, the construction of government ought to be such as to bring forward, by quiet and regular operation, all that capacity which never fails to appear in revolution".

In reality, representation has come closer to the passive meaning of 'symbolisation': professional 'career' politicians competing for the prize of office - to 'symbolise' the people. In the UK, this emasculation of the idea of representation was most extreme. Thomas Paine's arch enemy Edmund Burke rationalised the separation of representatives from any direct organised connection with the people – 'the swinish[25] multitude' in his view – by arguing that elected representatives were individuals chosen for their good judgement and ability to stand above any organised popular pressure. In France, maybe, there remain remnants of the obligation on representatives to make present the active mandate of the people.

Let's look at the assumption of parties who organise in the name of Lenin. (And although in Europe at any rate, they are small, they have a disproportionate presence on the left because of their cohesion, discipline and relentless and instrumental activism in a milieu that is loose, experimental and seeking to make the means of change prefigure the aims.) Judging from the British scene, there are two models. One sees change coming about through mass revolt in which the party would (in the words Paul Foot who was probably the most credible spokesperson of the SWP) 'provide an alternative to the various formulas of hierarchical society, setting out a credible road to a much more representative and durable democracy than has ever been seen before'. What is imagined is a process of insurrection led by the party, pretty much by-passing parliamentary institutions, or dragging them behind.

Another contemporary `Leninist' model adapts representative democracy to a Jacobin arrangement (bizarre I realise but true and explicitly justified with a certain mechanical logic[26]) in which the state apparatus is used to drive through the policies of elected representatives. The process by which this done - use of a ruthless command method - is justified by reference to the election mandate. Everything is done in the name of the people but the people are not autonomously present in the process. This was/is the strategy of the Trotskyists who effectively ran the Mayor's office in London during the London ESF. It was a particular example of democratic

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[25] `Swine' is an old English words for `pigs' – a very low valued kind of animal!!
[26] Which has a certain applicability to dealings with `the enemy' – corporate capital, the Blair government – but even then tends to imply that only they , the political leadership of a state institution ,have legitimate and effective power to champion progressive change. Certainly, belief in party monopoly has been alive and well in London. (I don't know the very latest situation).

centralism applied to government. The election of Ken Livingstone as mayor was the democratic moment. This was followed by a ruthlessly centralist and anti-pluralist process of bending the institutions of state totally to the wishes of the Mayor.

3. Assumptions about the nature of the power to bring about social change (related to this: who are the actors in the process of social change?)

A focus on the state as the primary defining feature of the political, tends to be associated with a particular notion of power: one which conceptualises the power for social change as coming somehow from `outside.' The idea is of the neutral power of the state as an instrument for intervening in the economy and society. Such a view presumes the mass of people are powerless without a party through which to grasp this power. Within this framework, the party tends to presume a monopoly of political power. Everything, and everyone, must be subordinate to winning office. Once in office, the chief aim is to stay there.

There is little recognition within this approach of sources of transformative power *within* the economy and society or even within the state itself (the state being treated as a single almost reified instrument[27]). Party supporters, who in fact *do* have such power as producers, providers, administrators and community organisers are treated merely as part of an electoral machine, sources of funds and votes (the trade unions, for example), instruments of election campaigning (local parties, for example. In general these parties uncritically accepted the purely symbolic notion of popular sovereignty implicit in the existing flawed electoral and political system.

This logic of the subordination of everything to win elections in the conext of a highly monopolised media creates a viscious spiral towards squuezing out pluralismand creating an antipathy towards debate, the clash of argument and the importance of experiment and innovation. It devalues the search for truth and the importance of different sources of knowledge. It hollows out the political life of the party making it useless for building a wider hegemony – even if sections of the party wanted to do so.

As social democracy went into crisis under the pressures of the global market (and in some cases the welcoming of this pressure) this exclusive focus on state power begins, as we have seen, to break up. This leads to a superficially more pluralist notion of politics evident in the constant reference to 'partnership', 'empowerment' - even 'network' and `participation'- in the discourse of social democratic politicians. (See the instutitons line of the inquiry) Indeed there is a disconcerting appropriation of some the blander language of autonomous politics by the cleverer spokespeople of marketised social democracy. Clearly, however it does not indicate any shift towards genuinely understanding the diverse *sources* of transformative power. It is an

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[27] In my view some critics of any engagement with state institutions some times takeover this `non-relational' conception of the state from an opposite point view, blinding themselves to the struggles taking place within the state – often as a result of struggles/movements in wider society.

accommodation with the realities of the market; beneath the pluralist rhetoric and the gestures towards the direct participation of citizens, the only partners that matter are successful private businesses – mainly the big, international corporations at that. It a defensive move – a conservative response to the problems of the hierarchically managed public sector associated with their past - from 'the public professional knows best' to 'the corporate executive knows best'. This leads us to the last and perhaps most fundamental assumption.

4. Concerning the nature and organisation of the production and distribution of knowledge

Understandings of knowledge are key to conceptions of human agency and organisation. All forms of organisation and co-ordination are based, usually implicitly, on assumptions about the nature of knowledge, (and related to this, intelligence and creativity), whether it is social or individual, how it should be organised, and whose knowledge matters.

If the implicit understanding of knowledge is one which stems from a positivist epistemology in which knowledge is a matter of scientific laws, based on the empirically observable constant conjunctions of events or phenomena, and all other claims to knowledge are dismissed as derivative from scientific laws, mere instances of such laws, or simply gossip, emotion, or some other epistemologically valueless human behaviour, then the form of organisation arising from such a conception of knowledge is likely to be centralised. Scientific laws can be centrally codified and are generally only known by scientifically trained experts. If, on the other hand, the implicit understanding of knowledge is as tacit, experiential and individual (Hayek's theory of knowledge, unerpinning the classical justifcation of the free market) then a market model of the haphazard decisions of individuals pursuing their own individual interests come into equilibrium through a price mechanism, appear the only way to achieve an `order'- that is by definition unintended.

If, finally, knowledge is understood as differentiated: tacit and experiential as well as scientific and historical; and if experiential knowledge is understood not as immutably individual (Hayek's assumption) but on the contrary as social, sharable, the product of experiment and argument, then co-ordination is likely to be more horizontal, deliberative and flexible. There can never be a predictive, complete, relation between intention and effect but there can be a constant process of approximation which acknowledges the incompleteness of our knowledge and therefore the unavoidable uncertainty of the consequences of what we do. This makes processes of experiment and self-reflection – personal and collectve - fundamental to effective and democratic political organisation.

Traditional parties of the left have operated with the first conception of knowledge, based on the positivism which dominated understandings of knowledge in the first half of the 20th century. It is what underlies and helps to explain what Michels described as the 'iron law of oligarchy'. He describes how, 'In all the affairs of management for whose decision there is requisite specialized knowledge ... a

measure of despotism must be allowed and thereby a deviation from the principles of pure democracy. From the democratic point of view this is perhaps an evil, but it is a necessary evil. Socialism does not signify everything by the people but everything for the people'. Michels analysed how social democratic parties worked but he also shared their acceptance of the positivist orthodoxy of the time, which implied the absence of any relevant expertise among the mass membership, and gave the elite competing for leadership a special status (one reason why oligarchy was inevitable).

This view of knowledge helps to explain why the kinds of non-electoral activity involved in helping to build *throughout* society possible sources of hegemony for a socialist alternative would hardly enter the imagination of such parties. Belief in the possibility, as well as desirability, of a socially just alternative becoming hegemonic depends on the confidence in popular democratic government being created in every sphere of society and that in turn presumes subjects who are knowing agents of change. This implies an altogether different epistemology than the one which left parties have traditionally worked with. The understandings of change which underlie the Leninist tradition do presume the self-activity and organisation of the working class, so there is a more plural notion of knowledge at work there. But the theory of the vanguard party with its somewhat monistic idea of theory – the party line - again implies concentration in the hands of the leadership, of the overview, the interconnections, the knowledge and understanding of wider social trends. It also denies or downplays the value of *experiment* in the transformative or revolutionary process.

B) MOVEMENT POLITICS

Let's turn now to assumptions made about these key themes – drawn from debates within and around the sphere of autonomous social movements politics.

1. The nature of the political

Key words: antagonism; conflict; agonism; rule-governed conflict; the pervasiveness of the political; bio-politics.

From the women's movement with its slogan 'the personal is political' to Foucault's concept of 'bio-politics' the social movement left has *located* unjust power relations as pervasive and capable of transformation only through action which had strong roots in everyday personal life. But this awareness of the *location* of oppressive or exploitative power in every sphere of life, related and unrelated to the state, does not adequately define the *character* of the political. This becomes important when 'the personal is political' becomes almost a cliché at the same time as the political is drained of any 'bite' or antagonistic meaning.

I've turned initially to the work of Chantal Mouffe to provide theoretical tools for redefining *political* in a way which does not reduce it to the state and government. The following is a summary of her arguments:

a. *The political* is the 'antagonism' which is part of human society and *conflict* is permanent;

b. *Politics* is the practices and institutions through which order is achieved in the context of this antagonism - in many Western countries this includes suppressing conflict and creating an impression of the post-political e.g. in the use of 'community empowerment' etc. (This is relevant to the increasing tendency to present problems as not to do with social conflicts but as technical questions to be solved by experts (or by the imposition of order e.g. youth crime);

c. Liberalism - blinded by inherent individualism and rationalism - is unable to understand the nature of collective identities and the way they come into conflict;

d. The development of collective identities is rooted in the *non-rational* (desire, the unconscious) as well as the rational;

e. The *plural* nature of society is a given basis of democracy.

Mouffe is critical of both the traditional left, who assume that it is possible to arrive at a notion of the common good, and of liberals who assume it is possible to reach a consensus through a process of rational discussion. She sees politics as requiring the procedures of liberal democracy to turn the antagonism into an *agonism* - a process of rule-governed conflict. (I'd put this rather more broadly; people have the capacity to *reproduce* or to *transform* the social relations they are part of and therefore potentially to engage in the permanent effort of resolving the continuing conflicts endemic in society. This builds on the social nature of human beings to lay the foundations for a universal potential to participate in politics.)

Mouffe's particular concept of 'agonism' – rule-governed conflict – is based on the procedures of liberal democracy but she treats them uncritically, failing to take account of the weaknesses of actually existing representative democracy and the limits of political institutions tied in to nation states. She has a notion of participatory democracy in relation to specific social and economic institutions, but not in relation to the state. Her recognition of the darker or irrational side of conflict, however, and her insistence of the importance of open, transparent and democratic procedures can be applied to the regulation of the sphere of autonomous politics, which, as I will argue, is fundamental to reinventing – radicalising – political representation.

2 & 3. The *processes/mechanisms* of progressive social change & *sources* of transformative power

Key words: refusal; reproduction/transformation; direct action; personal responsibility; accountability; recallability; rotation. (this section clearly connects with the movement line of the inquiry)

There has been a strong sense in recent social movements of personal and individual responsibility for change. In part, this is a reaction against a degenerated representative politics where power is handed over to a political class by the atomised act of the vote.

It is also a sign of a significant, albeit initially implicit, development of social theory away from an almost exclusive focus on social structures towards an emphasis on the way that social structures and their endurance depends on relations between individuals. Structures were humanly created and reproduced, and they can be humanly transformed. So change becomes about, in part, about testing both the refusal to be complict in opressive relations and a search for alternatives and the conditions of their possibility. Sources of power are seen as including individuals' work in social groups, networks or movements. Such power assumes that activists are taking personal responsibility to keep searching for alternatives in precarious but constant struggle with the dominant institutions. Forms of action and awareness become more elaborate as activists organise in and against the connections between oppressive social structures. The counter or subversive connections are made increasingly on a global level, using whatever technologies of communication are available. The possibilities here are massively increased through the development of the web and the web offers its own direct tools for refusing market relations and effectively creating new relations of exchange and use (see techno-political tools line of the inquiry). With this emphasis on daily direct action, refusal and personal responsibility come cultural forms that awaken people to their social context and their choices between complicity and transformation, for example culture jamming and subvertising.

These changes in both practice and theories of the relation of the individual to social change clearly has significant consequences for the nature and role of political parties. The radicalisations and consciousness which produced the new autonomous sphere of politics arise from a multiplicity of contradictions *endemic to capitalist development* rather than in response to problems of 'externalities' and exclusions – the social democratic conception – or from one over-riding, class, divide – the Leninist version. As I summarised in the first section of this paper, traditional left parties saw change as coming from outside - as 'the state' intervening in society in the case of social democracy; as 'the party' intervening in the workers' movement in the case of Leninist parties.

But the movements and radicalisations of the last 30 years cannot be understood according to these categories of 'externality', 'exclusion' or remedy by 'intervention.' The contradictions that produce and reproduce it have been or are at the centre of capitalist development. For example, the student movement of the late 60's, was in part a product of the massive expansion of higher education (with all the raised expectations and self-confidence associated with that) which nevertheless continued

to funnel people into a labour market uninterested in expansion of autonomy or work satisfaction, and in the context of state institutions still run in a hierarchical, quasi-military manner. The feminist movement of the 70's was also in part a result of expansion of higher education on a universal basis, in the context of a labour market in which the gendered divisions of labour remained as entrenched as ever.

In the late 1990s and early 21st century the alter-globalisation movement has emerged from the contradiction between the democratic claims and cultural ethos of liberal politics and the utterly ruthless commercial authoritarianism of the private corporations able to use their global reach to overwhelm the precarious national institutions of parliamentary democracy. In the 21st century, (see papers on techno-political tools) the open software movement and radicalisation of information workers is developing in part from the contradiction between the expansion of creative co-operation made possible by new technologies, and the impositions of private ownership and private property. The growing networks around the social economy and ethical consumption have roots in the contradiction between corporate marketing around decentralisation, choice, variety and ethics and the reality of corporate chains' monopolisation of variety. The powerful involvement of military families in the movements against war and occupation stems from the hollowness of claims to be bringing democracy and justice to the Middle East in the face of the realities the soldiers in these families have faced of being implicated in repression and chaos. And so on, the dynamic continues.

At the risk of over-generalising (and over romanticising) the kind of radicalisation represented in the new autonomous political sphere, the autonomous movements are producing, with much trial and error en route, a way of organising which seeks to multiply *from within society* refusals of complicity with oppression, and injustice. They seek to create alternative ways of being and relating at the same time as resisting.

Take the women's movement, in some ways the first and most exemplary case of resistance 'within and against'both the market and the state. Such a movement would never have burgeoned in the extraordinary way it did if it ha simply been a matter of a party rallying women to champion the cause of women's liberation efined in terms of demands decided through the party. Rather it grew out of a mixture of, on the one hand, books and films and other forms of art which gave a language and a shape to previously hidden 'private' forms of subordination and secondariness, and on the other hand, all the occasions in which women found themselves together as women and naturally, by way of sociability, exchanged experiences. Their exchanges began to add up to a case for revolt and the belief that *another way of living was possible* and could be partially prefigured in the present as part of the process of creating the power for enduring, structural change.

There are endles more up to date examples but the point is clear. The mechanisms of change and sources of power are founded on mutually supporting and co-ordinating changes: millions of refusals that simultaneously involve efforts to create, test, support alternatives. A process applies to the social relations of both the state and the

market, involving a combination of autonomy and engagement: the creation of a base from which to be both 'in' and 'against'.

Implications for political representation

The problem of political representation is on the agenda of many social movement activists but as exactly that: a problem. Its nature and significance is radically transformed by the perspectives just described. On the traditional left model, representation is about the party - the single or prime agent of change - gaining a mandate to use its instrument of change, the state, on behalf of 'the people'. On the understandings of change that I've just summarised, representation, where it is considered at all, it is either mainly defensive or, more optimistically is about gaining support, legitimacy and where possible enabling legislation for struggles and dynamics of transformation *already taking place independently of and often in opposition to* existing political institutions.

Representation therefore is *not* about delegating responsibility and power to professional politicians; it is about transmitting the impact of transformative movements rooted in daily life to legislative assemblies to defend and extend social and political rights and redistribution of wealth, public provision, regulation, control and other measure which would help these struggles to be realised. The role of representatives becomes one of using their particular legitimacy and influence in alliance with movements that have other sources of power in their workplaces and communities or in society more generally. There are many and partial experiments in this form of representation: the radical municipal governments of the Brazilian workers party; the Scottish Socialist Party's presence in the Scottish parliament, Rifondazione Communista locally, regionally and now nationally.

The emerging lessons of all these experiences point to the importance not merely of the autonomy of the movements and movement related organisations but the importance of movements developing their own long term pespectives and strategies and avoiding the danger of being consumed by conflcit over the debates taking place within the political institutions. The autonomous movements could potentially have an influence on the contstraints under which left represenatives within the political institutions work. Moreover an important aspect of the activity of movements involves changes in everyday life, culture and ways of relating which cannot be adequately summed up or expressed by programmatic demands or electoral programmes, it might have implications, for example, for legislative action. For these and many other reasons, their role in the process of social change is different from the political party/representatives. It's also important that parties and political leaders recognise this and respect and support their distinct sources of power for change.

Obviously, this issue of representation is an area of contention because it involves an engagement with the state – albeit the elected institutions of the state. Some of those strongly advocating the importance of an autonomous sphere of politics would

argue that the state is so alien that to engage with it directly is doomed to divert energies and lead to the left/the movements becoming either marginalised or incorporated. They would argue that it is possible to change the world without taking power. It is possible to a point but such efforts invariably have to face up to problems that require action by the state – more public resources; redistribution; regulation; social, political and economic rights. The state in many contexts *is* alien, indeed positively hostile, as are many private economic institutions in which people work and struggle, but why should the state be seen as beyond internal struggle? In most contexts, its character is the product of such struggles. The task now seems to be to work on how to take these struggles a stage further in the context of i) the impact of globalisation on elected political institutions which historically have been national, and   ii) the emergence of a sustained and significant but not fully understood (including self-understood) sphere of political activity autonomous - but not entirely separate from - those institutions.

THE NATURE AND ORGANISATION OF KNOWLEDGE AS IT RELATES TO POWER AND TRANSFORMATION

Developments in social science, and the practice of the movements (sharing practical, experiential knowledge as well as drawing on historical and scientific knowledge) have led to an understanding of both the differentiated and the social character of knowledge.

The emphasis of the movements of the last thirty years, from the women's movement through the grass roots trade union movement to the alter-globalisation movement, is on horizontality and direct participation. A fundamental reason for this concerns the nature and organisation of knowledge: in different ways these movements developed and shared knowledge about problems not acknowledged by mainstream society, from perspectives and with alternatives just not on the main political agenda. Producing *new knowledge* – often in a new way - thus was essential to the life, rationale and impact of the movements.

Moreover, as we know, these movements were not and are not simply a movement of pressure or of protest but also of mutual support in a process of change, including self change, and such processes of change both constantly generate and need new knowledge. So sometimes instinctively, sometimes self-consciously the movements have organised in a way which enables both their practical and their theoretical knowledge to be expressed and shared. This is one of logics which has produced the network structure and made these movements sceptical of parties with their hierarchies and their narrow definitions of what constitutes knowledge. (connection here with movement line).

This participatory, horizontal (emphasising interconnectedness rather than 'wholeness'; stressing `connected' rather than always collective') and multi-identity methodology is reinforced by a limbo in current public debate about socialism. One reason why people don't identify with left parties – even some of the new movement-oriented ones like Rifondazione, the Scottish Socialist Party etc- is

because the basis for such a belief in a comprehensive, systemic alternative is no longer as clear as it has been in the past. People believe there's got to be a better way; they believe in fighting against war and militarism; for public goods and spaces and radically democratic control of these public resources; against the corporate market and the deepening inequalities that it produces….but without a notion of an alternative *system*.

In some way, a system was related to a single vehicle and instrument. i.e. the nation state. The emergence of an open system does not invalidate the underlying principles. There is a determined and creative search for practical alternatives to capitalism for organising production and trade, allocating economic resources, realsing the creative potential of all. And it is a search based on experiment and a sense of creating alternatives *in the course of* resistance and struggle as much as on programmatic debate. There is still an important – perhaps more important function - for programmatic debate, but it has a different character, drawing on very many different kinds of knowledge and therefore needing to be organised in ways that value practical knowledge as well as more easily codified forms, and which reflects the fact that many of the most creative innovative ideas for egalitarian, democratic, socialist changeare emerging entirely independently of political parties.

PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS:

Several principles and questions have emerged in the course of this preliminary exploration

1. **The importance of reclaiming the political beyond the state**. Unless the left does this, it is unarmed against those mainstream politicians that seek to be 'above' politics. Politicians influenced by ne-liberalism have recognised that the nation state is not an adequate mechanism for the management of capitalism.Though the nation state is still an instrument, it must in their view, be subordinate to international bodies like the WTO and all sorts of bi-lateral international negotiations and agreement. So increasingly you have national politicians of the right – Blair and Berlusconi being the most classic – effectively seeking to surpress politics, turn themselves into celebrity chief executives with a populist anti-political discourse.

   The left sometimes plays into this either by appearing as the defenders of the political in its obsolete form – the paternalist nation state – or to reinforce the rejection of politics. The alternative -implicit in much of the practice of many movements, network and movement-parties is one of understanding of the political in a way which encompasses every aspect of life, exposing the obstacles and antagonists to social justice and democracy that increasingly lie outside political institutions and therefore outside mainstream `debate.' This has meant that the process of politicisation can't be/won't be in terms of existing political parties and political instituions or through reconstructing them as they were but by processes coming from beneath the surface of these institution disturbing the calm which masks every day injustice,creating a

sense of agency and self-confidence to act amongst those on whom the existing order depends. It involves working on ways of organising and communicating which enable both the discontent and the creativity about alternatives to find expression.

2. **How can forms and institutions of political representation be transformed to `make present' the aspirations and struggles of citizens rather than simply `symbolise' the idea of the people?** This points to the importance of connections between the autonomous sphere and those public institutions that have some obligation, as a result of historic democratic or social struggles, however weakened, to respond. I'm thinking here of both elected legislative assemblies and also the legal framework of social and economic rights which can be claimed through direct action – as for example over housing and water in South Africa.

   There are huge problems, as we have seen, with representation within existing political institutions, at all levels. The problem is how to achieve representation without autonomous movements and initiatives for change being engulfed by the pressures of the establishment; in other words how – including when and under what conditions? - to achieve a presence within the elected political institutions on terms that support or protect rather than undermine the autonomous sphere of social change?

These questions need several answers. One of these must include taking seriiously issues of constitutional and institutional reforms and challenging those aspects of state institutions, including intergovernmental institutions, which turn representation into a merely symbolic process. This suggests a wide-ranging programme of institutional reform , starting from a proportionate electoral system (that does not simply hand over power to the parties), powerful legislation for maximum transparency , deeper, everyday forms of democratic control over public institutions and a real devolution of power to localities within a framework of national standards and rights.

A second kind of answer involves left parties conducting themselves within political instutions in a way which resists the conventions that separate representatives from citizens, putting representative in a position of privilege and superior status. This means, for example using election campaigns to involve citizens actively in politics, to raise expectations and to stimulate people to discover their own sources of power to realise these expectations. It means parliamentarians opening up all areas of secrecy, using every opportunity to hold open hearings and inquiries,openly engaging in extra-parliamentary campaigns and using parliamentary platforms to present alternative policies developed closely with social movements and civic organisations.

A third answer concerns the relations between parliamentarians and parties – the importance of the autonomy of the party, the avoidance of parliamentarians also having party posts, the importance of rotation of the parliamentary role, of resisting

the magnetic effect of parliament and government, that too often draws activists away from organising in society.

A fourth concerns the importance of not only strengthening and valuing the autonomy of progressive movements but also of making that autonomy the basis of movement strategies and perspective. Movements and parties have distinct sources of transformatve power.

3. **What features and principles of party organisation need to be rethought in the light of experiences and insights from the movements?** (some of which are not necessarily new but involve surprisingly many similar principles, applied in new ways, to the early days of the working class movement). Two related issues stand out here: first the problem of leaders, even the need for leaders, second the issue of network ways of connecting and integrating parts of an organisation.

   As far as the issue of leaders is concerned, it is striking that at the present time three leaders have almost destroyed the party they came to personify – Tony Blair, Lula and less well known in Scotland, Tommy Sheridan. A common factor underlying the very different crises associated with Blair, Lula and Sheridan has been (obviously to differing degrees and around very different politics) the elevation beyond the democratic control of an organisation of someone who appears to symbolise that organisation's cause. In each case the symbol has almost ended up consuming the reality.

   The experience of movements indicates that it is vitally important to distinguish between the importance of structure and the idea of a single leader. There many are often unacknowledged, examples of movement organisations both historically and in the present that have worked very effectively without a single leader. What they have in common is the creation and high respect for transparent structures based on collectively agreed rules that might or might not include leaders of some kind.(see the movement line on the problems of `structurelessness'). They also often produce public figures who act more as catalysts than 'leaders'; and instead of personifying a cause they encourage those already engaged in resistance in their own immediate circumstances to realise the full scope of their potential power and their connection to a wider process of change.

   An issue related to leaders and leadership is the form of unity and connectedess that brings the party together. And here we need to explore the relevance of network ways of organising for a new kind of party.
   An empirical question here is how far have parties that claim to support/be part of the movements, deeply changed their understanding of the political so that there is real respect and equality in their relationships with the movements as they actually exist?

One sign of this would be a real process of change and innovation within the parties, in a direction that learns critically from the experiences of the movements.

4. How must parties change the way they do their collective thinking, develop their policies and strategies to change to take account of the differentiated, experiemental nature of knowledge?
    There are several issues here which I will suggest for further discussion.

    i)   The implications of breaking from the positivistic, predictive understanding of knowledge that underpinned classical parties of the left, and instead recognising the incompleteness of our knowledge and therefore the inherent uncertainty of the consequences of our action. At the same time as working with this uncertainty we have the need to make approximations suffcent to take action. This dilemma of decision-making in the context of necessarily incomplete knowledge implies the importance of building an experimental process into party or indeed any political organisation, and with it processes of investigation, inquiry , self-reflection an brainstorming. A far cry from the tradition party debates which revolve simply around competing programmes. What, if anything, is still of value of traditional party forms of debate and programmatic development?

    ii)   The implications of recognising the many different sources of knowledge, including the importance of tacit and experiential knowledge. This connects closely with the discussion of network ways of organising in the `movement line' of our inquiry. For the expression of such knowledge is more in creative practice and the exercise of capacities in transformative projects and initiatives than in the passing of resolutions and debating of programatic statements. It therefore implies the importance of autonomy of networks and groups within the party as a basis for such initiatives and creative projects; an autonomy based on shared values and views of world views. It also implies a blurring of boundaries between party and non-party activists and groups – maybe also implying a fluidity in an individual's lives as to when they are more or less engaged in party activity.

    iii) This is closely related to the fact that the party no longer has a monopoly – if it ever really had – over the process of synthesising and integrating programmes and perspectives for society. There are many examples from the work of socialist feminists in the 70's through to Social Forums and coalitions like Our World is Not for Sale in the 21st century which illustrate attempts at synthesis and strategic visions independent of political parties and beyond `single issues'. Clearly a common feature of these cases is that these movements were/are not mearly illustating different methods of synthesis, more closely related to practice and experience. They are also redefining what is important and what should be part of public debate and action – in the case of

socialist feminists the gendered division of labour and the organisation of family life, and in the case of Our World is Not for Sale, the wider ramifcations for the state and the eonomy of the international nature of economic power. These autonommous process of synthesis are not entirely successful and there is much more work to be done to develop its possibilities, especially with the aid of new techno-political tools. But it is proving as creative and politically relevant as any purely party process. What are the possibilities, conditions - and limits - for new kinds of party processes and spaces enriching a combined party and movement syntheses?

For these these arguments to go any further we need more systematic reference to the experience of parties trying to reinvent themselves in the context of movements and networks. Hopefully the following papers and further references provides some of the necessary empirical back ground to our discussions.

At the beginning of September we had a small workshop on this line of the inquiry in Manchester. We include a brief report of this. The papers circulated for it (in addition to the three reprinted here) included important studies of innovation in Rifondazione Comunista, of the history of the Scottish Socialist Parties, analyses of the Respect Coalition in England an a survey of radical left parties across Europe. These will be available in the e-library.

Hilary Wainwright, Manchester, May 2006

Brief report of Manchester workshop for the 'inquiry in rethinking political organisation in an era of movements and networks'

Hilary Wainwright

Aim: to go into more depth on the issue of rethinking political representation and political parties with a small group of people coming from a geographical mixture of generations, geo-political and historical experiences. Our hope was that this would raise ideas and highlight experiences that should be the focus of future work and debate and also produce an exchange of ideas and information that would be useful for all the partcipants.

Partcipants: 15 participants came from a range of experiences, both in movements and parties, in contexts where political parties or coalitions of the left were facing major crises or challenges had faced them historically: Frieder Otto Wolfe, a founder member of the German Greens and active on the left of the party including as an MEP until a few years ago; Alessandra Mecozzi from International Secretary of the Italian Metalworkers Union FIOM and very involved in the anti-war movement, the Palestinian solidarity movement, the European Social Forum and the Italian social movement co-ordination.Geraldo Campos, Ex PT now politically itinerant supporter of PSOL, a member of the REPROS network committed to promoting partcipatory democracy across Brazil and internationally. Asjborn Wahl, a leading organiser of the Campaign for the Welfare State and the Manifest Group (an activist and rethinking group inside and outside the Socialist Left Party which is now part of the coalition government in Norway, also involved in the international network `Our World is Not for Sale'; Carolyn Leckie, Scottish Socialist Party Member of the Scottish Parliament, previously a trade union organiser; Alan Mccombes, Press and Policy co-ordinator for the Scottish Socialist Party (The SSP has just been through a major crisis over the Tommy Sherdian, the leader with whose high public profile, the party has been strongly associated); Salma Yaqoob a founder of the Respect coalition and a councillor in Birmingham on its behalf. (just for the Friday night)

Several participants came with a deep knowledge of the 1960's and the feminism of the 1970's: Sheila Rowbothm and Jane Foot

David Beetham a well respected writer on the theory, practice of democracy and an activist on many local and national issues in the UK.

Rashid Bouassi from Red Pepper and the Centre for Democratic Policy-making an activist research and education group based mainly in Manchester whose members and friends hosted many of the participants.

Gemma Galdon from the TNI (and also from a culture jamming project and El Vejco Topo in Barcelona, with a long involvement in the alter-globalisation movement);

Marco Berlinguer Transform! Italia and Hilary Wainwright , TNI and Red Pepper.

Content: Looking back and trying to synthesise content of the workshop discussion had three kinds of elements (an edited transcript will eventually be available):

*A presentation of principles and challenges for a new politics and challenges (examples to follow)

*An exploration of two of the challenges:

a) How the movements maintain their autonomy when the left is in the institutions
    – and the importance an nature of this autonomy;

> Experiences in Norway and Italy especially, inspired an urgent and practical
> discussion about a relationship to the left in government – and more broadly
> the left within the institutions - combining critical support with clear and self-
> conscious autonomy. The emerging argument was that this autonomy would
> be the basis of two tasks: first to develop the movement's own long term
> strategic perspectives beyond the immediate tactical issues of government
> and secondly for the movement to develop and exert its own distinct sources
> of power to act on some of the constraints that limit the options of the left in
> government. Autonomy from state and governmental institutions is not
> necessarily the same as opposition, though the context of this relationship is
> one of a deep distrust of the institutions amongst movement activists.

b) A number of related challenges around deepening the democracy of political
    parties, beyond the formal institutions, how to create democratic consciousness?
    What are the cultural conditions for democracy? Also what forms of
    representation exist that do not reproduce the hierarchies from the past?

There was here an unexplored relationship between struggles to democratise the
state and that state of democracy within the party (sometimes in Brazil for example,
there is the paradox of more radically democratic innovations in the left's
administation of the state than in the organisatation of the parties under whose
regimes these changes have taken place). The central issue is that both in Latin
America and in Europe we are facing the need for a second phase of democratisation.
In other words we have parties that broke in important ways from both the social
democratic and the Leninist models and developed structures that are more pluralist
and more open to the influence of movements and in which leaders and
parliamentary representatives are formally completely accountable. It is now
becoming clear – for example in the PT on the one hand and in the SSP in the other -
that these formal structure of accountability, of the rights of tendencies are not
enough, that we need to explore deeper conditions for a real culture of democracy.
What can be learnt here from the movements? How far can network ways of
organising be applied to parties, thereby breaking up the concentration of power?
And would a dose critical self-awareness – the kind of attention to the power of the

unconscious practiced in the womens movement at its best – help to keep in check the elevation of leaders beyind democratic control?.

*Several themes cutting through both discussions:

a) The issue of history, the past in the present, the fact that many of the debates we are engaged in and the problems we face have significant pre-histories from which we can learn. We must beware of amnesia but also recognise the need for renewal and as several people stressed, the genuine innovations in some of the movement and network developments of today.

b) Linked to this issue of history there was a particular focus on the significance of the 60's: any lessons from the movements at that time for today? the significance for strategy today of the fact that capital's recuperation involved a distorted appropriation of cultural organisation themes of the revolt of the 60's? (see below for future seminars)

c) the signficance of the insights of feminism for ways of organsing and for a deeper culture of democracy. (this was n't in the end explored with any depth – a fundamental issue for the future.

Issues raised but not discussed:

i. the idea of applying the principles of network organising to political parties as an antidote to both the concentration of power;

ii. The importance of self-consciousness and the psychological issues around organising – related to the insights of feminism;the implications of `a politics of the first person;' taking personal responsibility.
iii. How to move beyond the defensive and develop long term alternatives.
iv. The tensions between working transnationally and working democratically
v. How do we build common rules?
vi. The challenges raised by the multiplicity of identity and sources of transformative power.
vii. The need to rethink the aesthetics of politics.

FOLLOW UP FOR DIFFERENT ASPECTS OF THE PROJECT

General. The work of which this workshop is a part is a process. There is a part of the networked-politics website allocated specifically to it. Everyone is encouraged to write further on the issues raised – or not raised in this workshop. We hope everyone will write up their principles and challenges. Everyone attending the seminar will be inscribed on the networked-politics mailing list and is encouraged to add other who might be interested.

Barcelona is the next seminar bringing together the 4 different lines of the inquiry so far.

After Barcelona, we will be consolidating the work so far and suggesting the next phase.

Important to develop the website as a source of tools and experiences that the rethinking left will find practically and intellectually useful.

As far as ongoing work:

Dictionary: A lot of potential concepts came up for the dictionary. The one we discussed directly was `social movements'. Frieder Otto Wolfe is going to draft a possible entry which will be a useful example to consider for the methodology of the disctionary. Other concepts in need of deeper, dictionary style discussion were ` participation', ` autonomy', `rules', `transparency' , `multiplicity', `feminism'. .

Case studies: Is vital to learn from the experience of the German Greens's original attempts to create a movement party in the 1970's. Frieder outlined the movement influence rule originally built into the party's organisation. He agreed to write out these original rules and explore their imits in a brief case study written over the next few weeks.

The experience of `Our World is Not for Sale' seems, from Asborjn's description, to provide a very interesting example of a network combining work outside and inside the institutions, connecting very diverse organisations, developing its own rules and constantly renewing its common strategy. Hilary to talk to Asborjn about writing up this case study.

Future workshops: possible small focused workshop on the different dimension of the the lessons and reverberations of the 60's .

Obvious need for focused discussion on implications of insights from the womens movement –recognising there is no single `feminism'. Need to consider best form for this. Possibly something in Scotland where the issue is extremely `hot'

Another advance on the slippery slope of parliamentary democracy…

ARE THERE LESSONS TO BE LEARNT FROM THE EXPERIENCE OF THE GERMAN GREEN-ALTERNATIVE LEFT?

Frieder Otto Wolf

In the early 1980s an emblematic event has taken in Hamburg, in the North of Germany: After decades of silence about the poisoning of workers and the environment by dioxins and furans, which had been on-going in a local chemistry factory, some workers' wives, whose husbands were suffering from an early stage of chlorate acne, the 'Seveso illness', phoned the Hamburg office of the newly founded 'Green Alternative List" (later to become the Hamburg branch of the German Green Party) that 'this could not go on like that: their husbands selling their health to the company, leaving them with a perspective of housewives nursing the ill and, later on, of early widows – the new party should do something about this!".

All the elements were there which had constituted the hopes and the dreams of the new political formation under construction: a working class radicalism, a concern with the ecological destructions caused by capitalist big industry, a feminist dimension – and a function of party-building as opening new terrains of struggle. This clearly was no middle-class environmentalism of the well-to-do who had the leisure und leeway to be concerned about a romanticized nature. This seemed the germ of a renewal of anti-capitalism out of everyday struggles, tapping the combined dynamics of working class, ecological and feminist movements for reaching a higher level of radical politicization, culminating in the building of a new type of 'new-type-party' – i.e. a new beginning of anti-systemic politics in the metropolis comparable only to the rise of the 2nd International out of the cinders of the 1st Workers International in the 1890s.[28]

And this happened in Germany, where the ruin of the nation-state, the self-inflicted demise of German imperialism, and the historical failure of Stalinism symbolized by the Berlin wall seemed to have brought about a deep breaking away from traditional

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[28] The founding of the 3rd International coming out of the October Revolution has *de facto* functioned as a mere split of the existing organizations of the international labour movement linked to the 2nd International. Even more so the ensuing numbers.- The groupings of states trying to escape from the logic of the Cold War never went beyond intergovernmental co-operation.- International solidarity of the guevarist type has remained a pathetic projection without ever taking any tangible form of organization.- Only with the global networking initiatives of the (Neo-)Zapatistas and the 'anti-globalization' movement in the 1990s converging, as it were, in the World Social Forums and ensuing continental, national, and regional initiatives, another wave of organizing trans-national solidarity and trans-national politics has emerged.

politics and where the student and youth rebellion of the 1960s had begun to 'revolutionize' a traditionally authoritarian culture and an education into subservience.[29]

A quarter of a century later, retrospectively, all this seems to have been mere illusions, like phantasm floating through a pipe-dream.

The German Greens, in a reunited Germany vying for international respectability by sharing a renewed 'white man's burden" in sending troops to the Kosovo, to Afghanistan, and, soon, to the Congo, or by sending its navy to participate in the 'anti-terrorist' controls around the horn of Africa, have been a party of a government from 2002 to 2005. The 'humanitarian interventionism' of NATO against Serbia has been legitimised by a majority of former radical pacifists; and a guarantee of the amortisation of invested capital has been given to the nuclear industry in Germany, by former radical ecologists and anti-nuclear activists, as the counterpart for a legislated promise of phasing out the nuclear. The parliamentary group of the German greens in the federal parliament and the party leaders have been avidly implementing neo-liberal 'reforms', in coalition with a social-democratic party where a translated Blairism (excepting its open war-mongering) had won the day[30]. After a federal election last fall, which has been lost by their social-democratic partner, some leading parliamentary representatives have begun to discuss coming back into government by participating in centre-rightwing coalition governments.

Within the – very much weakened – social movements of contemporary Germany their example is quoted in order to refute all ideas about intervening in party politics at all. Their negative example is actually important in reinforcing prejudices against a new German left party which is in the process of being formalized, after an impressive first presence in the 2005 federal elections – and which still has to rely heavily[31] on the organizational and ideological heritage of the GDR, while far from ready with the self-critical process of overcoming the traditions of theoretical and practical Stalinism.

Can anything be learnt from this failure? Anything more than that the 'West German exception' after the defeat of Nazi Germany – where large parts of the young generation found it attractive to except themselves from the tradition of the German nation state (stemming from 1871 only), and from the grips of the Old Left, doubly losing its hegemony potential after the social democratic 'modernization' of the late 1950s and the public statement of defeat the building of the wall through Germany

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[29] Especially the West-Berlin of the 1960s and 1970s has seemed to continue at the international forefront of theoretical and – later on – also practical renewal of radical anti-systemic politics – cf. e.g. the role it has plaid in the formation of the pioneer of the ecological renewal of the Spanish left, Manuel Sacristán.

[30] The exit of the former social-democratic party president Oskar Lafontaine has clearly marked this decisive turn – without almost anybody within the broader German left noticing.

[31] The new left party of Western Germany (which Oskar Lafontaine has spectacularly joined before the federal elections of 2005) still lacks a sizeable mass basis – although it has a real presence among trade union rank and file – and is vulnerable to facile, but sectarian 'solutions' to the unresolved strategic problems of the radical left which have also been besetting the German green left in earlier decades.

(in order to fence citizens in) on the official communist side, leaving considerable space for an 'alternative left' imagining itself non-national, and free to invent or construct lines of tradition to identify with[32] – has been far more imaginary than ever imagined by those participating in it?

Apart from the simple statement that there is no better way of learning strategically than from the analysis of past defeats and failures, I think I can see some specific lessons to be drawn from this historical experience[33]. These will come out more clearly by using them for commenting two recent interventions into the new debate on party building which seems to unfold internationally and in the USA.

1. THE *PROBLEMATIQUE* OF A NEW PARTY AFTER THE 1960S

It has been a surprise to many that in the wake of the world-wide youth rebellion of the 1960s party building came high on the agenda wherever the spontaneous initiatives of the 'new wave' of radical opposition could not be crushed. It is useful to distinguish two reasons for this unexpected turn of people who had seemed mere 'hippies' or 'culture rebels' a few years ago. In fact, they are profoundly different,

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[32] The heydays of the intellectual preparation for the German alternative left in the 1970s and 1980s had been an age of reprint editions – bringing virtually everything to intellectual presence that had been conceived in Germany and Austria during the crisis of the left in the 1920s, and thereafter censored and 'forgotten' by the official left, excluded form public memory by the cold-war rightwing consensus (and, of course persecuted and destroyed by the Nazis). This has rapidly lead to the emergence of Rühlean, Korschian, Mattickian, and, of course, Lukácsian intellectuals basing themselves on nothing else but re-reading the newly available texts.

[33] This essay is an attempt at an analysis ,from inside'; therefore, implicitly, at self-criticism. Since the end of the 1970s I have been actively participating in small groups of activists looking for a way out of the crisis of the left by making good use of the impulses of the new social movements, especially in the field of renewed electoral politics. This has led me – in Germany – from the Socialist Conferences (1980-81) via the founding of the monthly 'Moderne Zeiten" to participate and often to co-ordinate, as it were, three generations of leading left-green circles and to participate in the setting up of strategic documents like the founding platform of the *Initiative für Sozialistische Politik* publishing the left-green monthly 'Moderne Zeiten" in 1982, Thomas Ebermann's and RainerTrampert's pamphlet on the Future of the Greens (Die Zukunft der Grünen, Hamburg: Konkret, 1983) and trying to organize the left within the emerging Greens – until the strategic defeat of the Green Left in Germany with its opposition to NATO's war on Yugoslavia. After the first tactical defeats of the Ebermann-Trampert line in the mid-80s I have put some emphasis upon developing my international participation in strategic debates in Europe, using the possibilities of my international contacts from the 1970s (mainly with Althusserians, dissident trotskyites, and various brands of communist renovators), reinforced by my position in the European Parliament, for strategically liaising with the emerging green-alternative left in France (co-founding the 'Rainbow Movement'), in Great Britain (actively participating in various red-green conferences), and on the Iberian peninsula. This has led to my co-authorship of the 'eco-socialist manifesto" initiated by Pierre Juquin (A. V., *Europe's Green Alternative,* Montréal: Black Rose, 1992). Looking back on these two decades from 1979 to 1999, I must say I have always worked beyond my real capacities, unable to control the outcome – as it is, I guess, always the case in serious political and philosophical practice.- This essay, however, does not undertake a personal self-criticism. It attempts to lay bare some strategic short-comings underlying the first successes and the ensuing series of defeats of the German green-alternative left – so that a new generation of radical political initiatives may have the possibility of learning from this historical experience, taking up the thread of reflection again underlying already my 'Warum fällt es uns in den Grünen so schwer, über unsere Perspektiven zu diskutieren?, in: *Grüne Perspektiven (Grün-Alternatives Jahrbuch 1988)*, Köln: Kölner Volksblatt, 1988, 88-117.

although customarily lumped together under the name of 'the party': the problem of organising the practice of a multitude so that it may durably reach out beyond an urban middle class bohemia and challenge the established power relations in a given society, and the problem of effectively participating in electoral politics as a central mechanism of the reproduction of these power relations. The traditional left had, in fact, developed two distinct ways of connecting the two: On the one hand, by creating a comprehensive cultural and organisational milieu underpinning a working-class counter-culture linking the everyday life to 'the party' by a sense of class loyalty (which turned difficult, wherever the split between communists and social-democratic parties expressed a rift within the working class, as in the German Weimar Republic); and, on the other hand, by a relation of 'legal front' organisations to conspirative organisations of political professionals (developed by the European left in the post-1848 repression, then cultivated by the SPD against Bismarck's persecution in the early 1890s, and systematized by Lenin in his ideas on a 'new type of party'. Both these linkages had ceased to function: The *first*, because and in so far 'fordist' mass culture of capitalist 'consumerism' had started to dissolve distinct working class cultures; the *second*, because and in so far universal suffrage and the liberal 'rule of law' had made open persecution almost[34] impracticable, even though more indirect ways of discrimination and political exclusion continued to be common-place (like McCarthyism in the US or the exclusion of the PCI from Italian government coalitions). The parties of the old left in Europe were all rather advanced on the way towards becoming mere electoral machines – with no more programmatic or organisational background than was indispensable for electoral survival.

In West Germany, the SPD had shed an enormous amount of such non-electoral 'ballast', beginning with its Bad Godesberg programme of 1960 and continuing to its entry into the Grand Coalition with the Christian-Democrat conservatives in 1966 – transforming itself definitely into an electoral party, the traditional organisational backbones of which in the 'Ortsverein', the local organisation, integrating all kinds of social democratic organisations, had lost its importance as an arena of political debate and decisions.

The question of organisation did not as such necessarily lead to party building. All kinds of local initiatives and co-ordinations sprang up, using autonomous 'centres' for youth or for women, and networking by repeated conferences on overarching issues – from the International Congress on Vietnam in West Berlin in 1967, via the 'Socialist Conferences' discussing ecology and peace issues in 1979 and 1980 or the conferences on the future of labour in the early 1980s to the conference mobilising against WTO and World Bank in West Berlin in 1988. It seems to have been the rather effective extension of the cultural rebellion of the 1960s to the working class youth which has taken place in the late 1960s – with the new militancy of young workers, apprentices and migrant workers – which has not only raised the practical problem

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[34] The example of the FRG is telling here, because it has made explicit that this openness of the political sphere had its limits – by prohibiting an already marginalised CP in 1956.

of going beyond the capacity to organise wild cat strikes, and becoming able to also organise opposition within the trade unions, as well as in local politics.

In spite of some emphasis on Luxemburgian and 'council communist' spontaneism – in the beginning of the 1970s there has been a small journal in West Berlin running the title of 'Social emancipation is not a party affair' – the focus of the debate on organisation rapidly switched from grass-roots organizing[35] to a theoretical (and practical) rehearsal of Lenin's, Stalin's, Trotsky's and Mao's contributions on the problems of the construction of a revolutionary mass party.

As it was clear to everybody present, that the historical initiative of the 1960s rebellion had not come from the working class, let alone from its political parties, students and young workers have created a number of competing organisations attempting to 'rebuild' the working-class party – presumed to have been destroyed by the 'betrayal' of their social-democratic or stalinist leading groups. This has turned out to be rather unproductive – leading neither to a significant presence in the working class, nor to really innovative forms of organisation, rather tending to reproduce old forms of organising long time rendered obsolete by the development of the technologies of communication (copying machines, telefax, and the computers) and transport (cheap and broadly spread cars, which facilitated travelling long distances by hitch-hiking – and, later on, cheap train and air travel for the young and the student population), as well as by the political forms of liberal democracy emerging with universal suffrage, which made political censorship and the open rigging of elections increasingly difficult (i.e. costly in political terms, although not technically impossible, as illustrated by the recent electoral history of the USA).

The public defeat of an activism using violent means in Germany had become patent to all sectors of society in the fall of 1977: After their political isolation, all kinds of urban guerrilla groups have been successfully repressed by a modernised police. This defeat, however, did not coincide with a decrease of grass roots militancy as such: most parts of a broadly radicalized youth continued on more localized and programmatically 'non-violent' paths of resistance for almost another decade.[36] This has deeply changed the focus of the 'organisation debate' in Germany from the building of a more or less conspirative vanguard to a question of mass politics. And here, at first, mainly locally, the electoral process and existing forms of institutionalised politics came into view.

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[35] Which had been taken up in their own way by self-styled 'urban guerilla' groups modelled upon the national liberation struggles in the Third World, like the *brigate rosse* in Italy, the *RAF* in Germany, or the *GRAPO* in Spain, much to the uneasiness of grass-rots activists and networks which continued to predominate in actual everyday practice, even after having lost their hegemony in the field of political ideologies.

[36] In Germany, there never has been an exemplary police repression against the protest movement like in France with the 'battle of Malville' in 1977, where non-violent protesters have been relentlessly maimed and some killed by militarized police forces, breaking the neck, as it were, of the French protest movement. The 'battle of Brokdorf' in 1981, when 200000 protesters participated in an illegalised demonstration against a planned nuclear site, could not be won by a huge police force going to the limits of legal police actions, against well organized resistance. (cf. Simples Citoyens, *Memento Malville. Une histoire des années soixante-dix*, Grenoble, le 14 juin 2005, on: www.pievesetmaindoeuvre.com)

2. A BIRD'S EYE VIEW OF THE HISTORY OF THE GERMAN GREENS

Before developing more systematic lines of argument, some empirico-historical narrative is required to remind the reader of what we are concretely talking about.[37]

From 1976 to the mid-198os the Greens have emerged as a parliamentary force in the Federal Republic of Germany, developing out of a series of local and regional electoral initiatives, naming themselves green, alternative, multicoloured or citizens lists and trying to translate everyday concerns of the new social movements into political representation[38]. This broad 'electoral movement' regroups mostly activists from the 'Basisgruppen', the different regional variants of the short-lived maoist organizations, both having emerged from the student movement, with tactically co-opted 'notables', some of whom with right-wing backgrounds. It has been far more decisive for the emergence of the party than the more or less 'putschist' attempts to occupy its political space from above, which were represented by Gruhl's Grüne Aktion Zukunft or the initiative for a green list of candidates for the European elections of 1979, shaping around Petra Kelly. The founding party congress of 1980 achieves a precarious unity of 'green' and 'alternative' forces with strong principles of grass roots democracy guaranteeing against anybody 'taking power'. The much publicised problem of a right wing presence within the Greens (or of their emergence having rendered obsolete the right left divide) turns out to be largely non-existent, as most of the activists not coming directly from the overarching broadly left wing peace and ecology movements of the period have gained their previous political experience in political grass roots initatives, reaching to dissident young socialists or young liberals. After their entry into the Bundestag in 1983, the opposition between left and right, between 'red' and 'green' ceases to play any political role within the German Greens. Instead, the strategic debate within the party now[39] opposes a

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[37] I formulate it from memory – having practically lived within these developments since the end of the 1970s. There are a number of significant studies of the development of the Greens. To get a general background information I still recommend Werner Hülsberg's *The German Greens. A Social and Political Profile*, Translated by Gus Fagan, London: Verso, 1988. The most relevant study from the perspective of our discussion has been Jorge Riechmann's very thorough and theoretically acute analysis of *Los Verdes Alemanes. Historia y análisis de un experimento ecopacifista a finales del siglo XX*, Granada: Comares, 1994. Of course, the great studies by Joachim Raschke (*Die Grünen : wie sie wurden*, *was sie sind*, Köln : Bund, 1993, and, Id., *Die Zukunft der Grünen*, Frankfurt/New York 2001) are unbeatable in empirical detail and intelligent comment – but it tend s to see things politically in a mainstream perspective, which I do not find very illuminating, whereas Riechmann is defending a radical political perspective, without illusions, yet also without resignation.

[3838] Since the gut reaction of the British Ecologist Sara Parkin (dating from the mid-1980s, but still present in her *Green Parties: An International Guide*, London: Heretic, 1989) who shuddered at the leftism she found in most of the German Greens, the Anglo-Saxon literature on the German Greens is full of projections like Donald Sassoon's "the New Left of the 1960s in green clothes" (in his *One Hundred Years of Socialism: The West European Left in the Twentieth Century*, London: Fontana 1996, 678). But this was exactly what the German Greens were about: to translate the dreams and wishes of the 1960s into effective politics – on the 'Fundi' as well as on the 'Realo' side.

[39] This had not been the case from the very beginning (as Sassoon, ib., 677) believes), but has been the result of a strategic realignment initiated by Thomas Ebermann from the left seeking a strategic alliance with Rudolf Bahro and Jutta Ditfurth only in the summer of 1983 – leaving the pragmatic municipal activists of the green left 'out in the cold'.

minority of 'Realos' who propagated a strategy of full parliamentary participation with the aim of forming a coalition government with the social democrats to a majority of so-called 'Fundis' (fundamentalists) who preferred a parliamentary strategy of provoking a crisis of government, in which some of them would see a chance of using their parliamentary presence for negotiating their support of minority governments ('toleration strategy'). The entire process is accompanied by a high-profile debate within the broader German new left – focussed by the Bahro conference in 1979 and the ensuing socialist conferences, and partly resulting in the attempt to establish a green-left monthly 'Moderne Zeiten" (1981-1984) which brought together a considerable number of future green leaders.

From the mid-1980s onward, until 1989, the 'Fundis' have been losing a clear strategic orientation, while the participation of Joschka Fischer in the state government of Hesse including the practical proof of being able to break the alliance again, if needed, increased the credibility of the Realo strategy. This led to a realignment within the Green left: the Left Forum, formed by left municipal[40] and regional pragmatists who had been left alone by the left leadership's turn to focus on the realo-fundi confrontation, by the adherents of the 'toleration strategy' within the 'Fundis', and a group of ex-trotskyites joining the party, focused on the content of the policy to be advocated by the greens instead of on the question of government participation as such. The small 'Aufbruch' group pleaded for ending the Fundi-Realo blockade within the party 'from below' – while in the end turning out to be one of the spearheads of the introduction of neo-liberal conceptions into the greens, in the disguise of libertarianism. In this short phase, which lasted until the first elections within the newly unified Germany, the hopes of the Left Forum to impregnate an anticipated coalition agreement with an SPD leaning to the left under Oskar Lafontaine seemed to present a productive, although deeply reformist, way out of the crisis of fordism – und the general slogan of a new, 'eco-social', social compact.

All this has been ended by the surprising advent of German unity. From 1990 to 1994 the Left Forum saw itself obliged to save the Western party from the electoral ruins of the 1990 elections, achieving a truce with the Realos, after the Fundis had left, and integrating the party family consisting of the West German Green party, the inheritants of the civic movements of the GDR and the small Eastern green party. Without the presence of the left forces which had abandoned the party – under the leadership of Jutta Ditfurth who tried in vain to build a competing electoral organisation or with the promise seemingly offered by the 'Western extension' of the PDS which had been formed out of the GDR's Socialist Unity Party, and with the strong disorientation concerning left alternatives gripping civil society this has proved to have been no more than a protracted rear-guard action, deferring the final hegemony of the Realo wing for some eight years.

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[40] The decisive role of local politics in the building and functioning of the Germen Greens has been anlysed by Bodo Zeuner and Jörg Wischermann, in their *Rot-Grün in den Kommunen*, Opladen 1994: Leske&Budrich, 1994.

The same must be said for the 'Babelsberg circle' and its radical network which managed to keep alive the Green left, reinforced by exponents of the ex-GDR Greens until the defeat on the Kosovo question in 1998. It has managed, for some time, to stem the tide of neoliberal economic and social policy conceptions within the greens, and it has been able to formulate a political pacifism capable of underlying a realistically radical green 'foreign policy', while keeping and developing the international contacts with other left green and alternative forces in Europe. Already, in the moment of the forming of the first Red-Green government, in 1998, the influence of Joschka Fischer and his Realos turned out to be dominant – mostly within the parliamentary group, while still being forced to observe at least a semblance of parity with the green left. In the end, however, the green left has lost to the combination of Realo tactics and media propaganda supporting bellicist 'humanitarian interventionism' – in the name of antifascism.

Since 1998 the Realo wing, together with a group of a governmental left lead by ministers and federal or European parliamentarians, has been leading the German Greens to produce the results quoted in the beginning of this essay. They have no chances of substituting the Liberal Party as the lynchpin of the German party system. As they still represent a significant segment of the electorate – the social professionals, and the age cohort of the old new social movements – it is not to be expected that they will vanish. But they are being faced with a new parliamentary challenge – because in the emerging new German five party system, it will be to a large part their decision, whether a right wing alliance can have a parliamentary majority (comprising liberals, conservatives, and greens), or a left coalition may be formed (left party, social-democrats, and greens), or whether a 'grand coalition' avoiding any such decisions will again be formed.

3. THE TROUBLE WITH THE EXISTING EXPLANATIONS OF THE FAILURE OF THE GERMAN GREENS AS A POLITICAL PROJECT FOR TRANSFORMATION

I shall not comment the ample literature existing in the meantime on the integration of the German Greens into the existing constellation of domination.[41] This would involve the reader into a rather futile ex-post battle of perspectives many of which have nothing to do with any perspective of emancipatory transformation. Instead, I shall try to discuss typical explanations and arguments running through this literature, or through public debates in Germany, with a view of gradually constructing an adequate framework for the debate on the lessons to be drawn from the failure of the German Greens as a project for an emancipatory transformation to be started in a leading capitalist country.

To begin such an exercise in critical reflection at a point of real difficulty: There are two kinds of trouble with the existing explanations of the historical failure of the West German Greens as a political force opening up an historical alternative to the

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[41] Useful overviews can be found in ###

existing constellation of capitalist domination: *On the one hand*, they tend to mis-describe the existing situation out of which an alternative path of historical change has been sought for: Instead of analysing it in terms of unresolved contradictions, the resolution of which is pressed by historical struggles, they are referring to a totally determined state of affairs which does not admit any real alternatives - no bifurcations, just an onward march of history (or of the biospherical reproduction processes). *On the other hand* they seem to be invariably oscillating between explaining too much, and explaining too little: They are either referring to very broad structural explanations – e.g. the statism implicit in the very form of the political party or the deformations implied by trying to participate in the government of a leading 'imperialist' country – which, if they were true, would imply the impossibility of the party form as an instrument of liberation, or, the impossibility of any gradualist transformation in such a country.[42]

Mis-describing and explaining too much

The type of explanation most current within the Marxist Left is combining the two errors in an almost inextricable way: It is the type of explanation which refers to the green activists (or the electorate or the party builders) as possessing the wrong kind of 'essence', in terms of class, gender, race or societal location. Other parts of the New Left of the 1960s have been reducing this pattern: Just because of their being 'petty bourgeois', male-heterosexual, white or 'Northern' the rebellion and opposition of the greens will never be more than a show, leading, in the very end, to a reinforced dependency on the existing structures of domination.

This kind of explanation is mis-describing the prevailing situation, as it unduly reduces the class of wage labourers exploited by capital to a certain historical type of industrial manual workers, whereas many indicators point to the green pool of activists, voters and party builders representing the more modern segments of the working class exploited by capital, supplemented by public workers employed by the state. If it is considered in terms of gender composition as well as of age cohorts this 'green pool' may indeed seem more representative of this actually existing working class in the core imperialist countries than the more traditional social-democratic or communist electorate. There is, it is true, the real problem of the expanding sub-proletarian categories which poses a real challenge to all possible class politics of those actually employed by capital. It would be an illusion, however, to think that the communist or social-democratic 'pools' seem more accessible from the perspective of this renewed type of precarious workers than the 'green pool', which has at least the advantages of a more feminized gender composition and of less normalized types of employment. This should not mislead us, in turn, into overlooking the profound differences of perspectives existing between real, self-controlled 'flexibility' in the hands of the upper reaches of working hierarchies, and

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[42] To those who will say, at this point of the argument, that this is, after all, what is the case, in a truly revolutionary perspective, I would simply reply that this would mean to defer revolutions, at least in the 'imperialist metropolitan countries' indefinitely, at least for a very long time.

real, others-controlled 'precariousness' to which the low-level tiers of such hierarchies are being exposed, as well as the emerging new under-classes.

At the same time, it tends to explain, not only, why petty bourgeois, peasant or feminist rebellions will never lead to a real process of societal emancipation, but why, in the end of the day, such a process will simply never take place: Because the proletarian movements expected as carriers of a true agency, a real capacity to act, will only materialize, on these suppositions, where and when all leeway for non-proletarian politics will be thoroughly exhausted. This is tantamount to deferring it to a never-never day, when all potential allies of proletarian anti-capitalism will have exhausted their own political resources – and where, therefore, the chances of the proletariat itself to challenge capitalist domination by its own class struggle should be very dim indeed.

The important issue of the changes in the 'class composition' of wage labourers exploited by capital is unduly side-stepped in such an approach, as well as the real problems of determining the relative weight of the processes of indirect exploitation of unpaid labour or directly violent expropriation of the produce of dependent countries within the really existing constellation of capital accumulation in its global, trans-national reality. That the young and better educated segments in the very metropolitan countries of this constellation of capitalist accumulation could combine a motive with a capacity to act, in a way the more destitute segments of the same complex network of capitalist accumulation are less capable of doing, should not be mistaken for an argument of their structural inability for any serious opposition to the very system. Otherwise, if only the most destitute segments were capable of seriously opposing such a network, it would imply that their chances of success were very slim indeed: Unless overthrowing 'the system' with one violent blow – which has never happened and should never be expected – any protracted oppositional struggle will tend to derive its strength rather from its capacity to implicate those workers most urgently needed by capital than from just organizing the most destitute, and therefore most desperate segments of the working class.

The attraction of this type of explanation, in spite of its being blatantly 'overshooting', derives from two extraneous sources which should not be underestimated: on the one hand, the interest of the paid or unpaid functionaries of the traditional (communist or social-democratic) labour movement to harbour some kind of ideology combining an upholding of revolutionary principles with an acceptance of their own day-to-day practice of trying to gain 'improvements' in the interest of the organised working class which could not even be conceived of as 'reformist' in the strong sense of constituting steps towards the great transformation leading beyond the domination of the capitalist mode of production[43], and, on the other hand, the interest of radicalized intellectuals experiencing the difficulty of gaining access to the really existing labour movement of their societal context, let

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[43] The violent opposition existing between Kautskyan and Stalinist orthodoxies seems to have masked their functional similarities in this respect – as well as a whole lot of doctrinal 'coincidences' if not outright 'borrowings' of the latter from the former kind of 'official marxism'.

alone of having their ideas heard in its own public spaces, who tended to be receptive to an ideology comforting them about the utter impossibility of even trying.[44]

The most current explanation of the German Greens' political failure within the mainstream of the social sciences manages to combine both errors in a remarkably different way. The cycle theory of oppositional movements claims that there is an unbreakable cycle of a series of phases through which all oppositions must proceed, throughout human history: a phase of blunt rebellion, to begin with, a phase of creative articulation, to start from here, a phase of routinization, ideologization and organization, required to constitute a mass basis for the new movements, a phase of struggle for asserting the place of this new movements in the arenas of determining the power relations within society, a phase of institutionalization, when the new movement begins to 'take is seats' within the constituted 'places' of established power, and a phase of integration, when the former representatives of the movement are fully co-opted into the established constellation of domination, and the memory of the movement is turned into an ideological source of legitimacy of this new establishment. The empirical and historical bases for such a typology are indeed very broad. And the history of the German Greens may easily be told in a rather convincing way to give this omni-historical truth another striking illustration.

This explanation, in its popular vulgarization, is sometimes coached in terms of a comparison of the 'green movement' with Christianity – from the violent radicalism of Jesus and the early Christians via the establishment of churches, canons, and orthodoxies to the established churches linked to state power from Constantine onwards, with the variants of the cesaro-papist union of state and church power in the early state church of the late Roman empire, the independently institutionalised 'spiritual power' of the catholic church, and the new blends of individual 'enlightenment' and established churches within Protestantism. The Green movement, is then affirmed in this vein, managed to do in a decade what Christianity had taken half a Millennium to realize: the transformation from a radical opposition movement to a part of the established institutions of domination. This is a clear case of a *lucus a non lucendo*, of an argument that does not argue anything in reality: The green movement, although it touches – as any radical movement cannot avoid to do – on the question of the good life, and, in this context, on what is being conceived as spirituality by some, is certainly not a movement of faith, not a religious or millenarian movement.[45]

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[44] Paradoxically, both the stalinist ideology of subservience to the party line (as beautifully 'theorized' e.g. by György Lukács in his *Lenin: Studie über den Zusammenhang seiner Gedanken*, Wien: Arbeiterbuch, 1924) and the 'absurdist' theory of the total impossibility of a praxis non-corrupted by the 'false totality' of the existing constellation of domination, as it has been popularly read in Adorno's and Horkheimer's later writings, are capable of satisfying this need – their relatively changing 'evidence' being mainly constituted by the relative fate of the political organizations of the labour movement outside of intellectual debates.

[45] To think otherwise has been the fatal error of Rudolf Bahro and his followers in the later 1980s (cf. the retrospective collection of Rudolf Bahro' essays in his *Apokalypse oder Geist einer neuen Zeit*, Berlin: edition ost, 1995– who had to pay it by losing any gaugeable influence on the further developments of the greens as a real social and political movement.

A less patently absurd popularization of this general thesis of the unavoidable cycle of uprising and reintegration with regard to social movements has been based on the analogy between the green movement and the labour movement – again stressing the relative velocity of development on the side of the greens who had taken years for developing into a betrayal of their own original radicalism (i.e. 1980-89) whereas the labour movement had taken decades: from the 1860s to World War I (in the case of the social democrats) or to the Stalinist betrayal of the Bolshevik revolution (in the case of the communists). The problem of this 'description' is twofold: on the one hand, it conceives something as 'betrayal', i.e. in terms of a subjective category involving individual and collective guilt, which is a complex objective historical process. On the other hand, paradoxically, it affirms the unavoidability of the outcome of being reintegrated into the established power structure. In order to be useful at all, such a comparison would have to be based on just the opposite premises: analysing these processes in their objectivity – maybe even in their tragic 'entanglement' – lived and suffered by its subjective actors, and at the same time looking for their objective indeterminacies, allowing for alternative outcomes and objective 'bifurcations'.

The central flaw in both arguments is, of course, its inductive reasoning: As there has not been so far, in all history up to the present, any durably successful initiative for social emancipation and liberation, it is inferred that such an initiative is impossible. Impossibility cannot, however, be based on this kind of experiential inductivism. What has been defeated or simply failed in the past, may be victorious or work effectively in the future. The interesting question is not whether it is possible to describe this type of cyclical developments, which cannot really be denied – but to find out the explanations and reasons underlying it. Such a theoretical explanation or such an underlying reasoning, once found, would in turn make it possible to chose a different path, to avoid certain mechanisms of self-sabotage and to decline programmatic lures leading into defeat or into simply giving up the struggle. Such a closer look would also make clearly stand out the particularities and the distinct dynamics of each of the movements which are systematically covered up by such analogical thinking. More especially, it would invariably call into question the purity of the cyclical phases constructed – e.g. pointing to the ambivalences present within the labour movement since its very beginnings – torn between an Owenite reformism, a Proudhonian libertarianism, a Lassallean statism and the very specific kind of transformative revolutionarism advocated by Marx and Engels. Or, e.g. highlighting the presence of right wing reactionarism within the very beginnings of the green movement, and especially within the initiatives bringing it to pary form, well before any cycle of recuperation could possibly have drawn it on the side of the establishment – or the strong presence of municipal pragmatism within these same beginnings, which has always partly subverted the universalising ideological stances structuring public political debates.

Myopic focus and explaining too little

The more timid arguments, however, have a myopic focus on the political processes within and without the greens and tend to explain far too little. The incapacity of many of the early counterparts of the 'Realo' current lead by Joschka Fischer to define and to implement a coherent strategy over considerable time, has certainly been a major determinant of the negative outcome of the overall political process of the German Greens. Even more so, as this incapacity was linked to a guts-based refusal of 'theory' – which has been entirely understandable: after the foreseeable failure of an 'instant revival' of Marxist theory from its protracted and repressed crisis, and after the elaborate counter-insurgency technologies presenting themselves as scientific theories, hardened intuition and historical experience seemed to offer better guides to action. Pragmatism untheorised, however, is a bad basis for strategic thought. Therefore, this pragmatic 'bracketing out' of fundamental questions of societal perspectives is not, to say the least, conducive to any meaningful kind of learning process: It may, of course, support a stubborn refusal to confuse the more elaborate arguments (presented, as a rule, from above) with the more pertinent arguments (presented, again as a rule, from below). But it cannot lead to new thinking and structural insights informing a creative new strategy. This weakness of the German greens (which a handful of intellectuals were unable to cure) has not just been a matter of personal incapacities, but points to an unresolved strategic problems the Greens have shared and still do share with the Left at large: How to find an adequate relation between practical experience and theoretical articulation.

The same kind of reasoning applies to even more anecdotic levels of explanation: Has it been the failure of the 'fundamentalists' under the leadership of Jutta Ditfurth not to anticipate the defeat of the feared take-over of the party by an alliance of the Realo wing with a new centre group and the majority of the East German citizens movement which happened at the Neumünster party congress in 1991, and therefore to support an alliance of the broad left wing of the party to get rid of this new right wing? Or has it been the failure of the Left Forum group lead by Ludger Volmer and others not to use this party congress to split or smash a party bound to be taken over by its realo wing sooner or later, anyway? Or again, should the same kind of reasoning be applied to the party conference at Bielefeld in 1998, when a small majority supporting Fisher's 'bellicist' stance on Kosovo has been facilitated by a few radical pacifists refusing support to an opposition motion less radical than they deemed indispensable. How to pose the right kind of questions here, is the main difficulty, and even where it is possible to find out the right kind of questions to be looked into, and even find out the right ways to answer them, the results will be so specific that they will remain unable to teach others than those participating in the originals events anything of some significance.

There are, however, at least five types of explanation for the failure of the German greens which may rightfully claim more attention. These more interesting explanations can be typified as follows:

- The explanation by the inability of the old and the new left to overcome their divide, by which anti-capitalism, on the one hand, became frozen into obsolete 'reformist' or 'revolutionarist' forms referring to an 'industrial imperialism' of the world before 1914, whereas the new, autonomous social movements, on the other hand, tended to defend their autonomy by closing their eyes to the anti-capitalist consequences of their own demands, leading to a false strategic alternative for the green left, i.e. of either abandoning anti-capitalism or reducing all autonomous struggles, including ecological and feminist ones, to a mere secondary status;

- the explanation by the general crisis of the left ensuing the downfall of the soviet model of state socialism which has, in fact, sapped the credibility of all kinds of radical emancipatory alternatives to the present constellation of domination on a world-wide scale;

- the explanation by the crisis of fordism being resolved, in way, not by any kind of emancipatory alternative, but by a paradoxical neo-liberal sequel;

- the explanation by the crisis of the German nation state having been brought to a sudden end by the unification of 1989/1990; and

- the explanation by a more general crisis of politics in an age of the spectacle where the media tend to over-determine everything else.

The *first* of these explanations has a specific force for explaining the early phases of the German green movement. Links to the labour movement have always been weak, partly captive in older attempts to revive leftist forms of 'trade union opposition', partly anticipating a coming to terms with the trade union leadership which still was staunchly social-democratic. The self-isolation of Marxism in its crisis has limited the influx and the influence even of independent Marxist intellectuals, still wary of accepting other struggles as relevant than that of the white, male, and national industrial worker. And the failure of a handful of eco-socialists, eco-feminists, and socialist feminists to impress the ecological or feminist movement at large has further contributed to the party's losing access to all kinds of critical economic culture, let alone to the Marxist critique of political economy, just reconstructed by the student movements in a tremendous effort. Their incapacity to join at least in a common debate has been decisive for the discursive fragmentation of the alternative and multi-coloured which has made the green label more attractive for the party to be founded although a majority of activists participated in the alternative part of the so-called 'electoral movement'. It then has been decisive for the consecutive failures of constructing a space of theoretical debate carrying an eco-socialist current within the party which would not reduce itself to everyday tactical and strategic decision-making. It may also have contributed a powerful motive for the strategic turn of the greater part of the left green leadership in 1983 to stop playing a game of left vs. right wing, but instead beginning to play the fundi-realo game which they have spectacularly lost in the end. The immediate consequence of this change of strategy has been the trashing of their own theoretical manifesto originally conceived before this turn, and the loss of the municipal pragmatists, mostly coming from far left organisations of the 1970s to the Realo wing. That it had been a strategical losing move only came out with Ebermann's failure to use the leadership of the parliamentary group to give a durably radical left profile to the party, and with Jutta Ditfurth's self-defeating politics in the late 1980s.

The *second* of these explanations has a specific bearing for the alternative left in West Germany, and, therefore, for the West German Greens as its most relevant political effect: At least since the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, if not since the workers' uprising in the GDR in 1953, German communism had lost its credibility with the masses as well as with most of the intellectuals. The building of the Berlin wall in 1963 had fortified the impression that an alternative left should be built in West Germany and in West Berlin alone - which would in no way rely upon the Eastern block and its political representatives. At the same time, it was expected that the system of – hopefully peaceful – co-existence of the cold war blocks would be continued indefinitely, at least for the foreseeable future. As a consequence, the Soviet block was certainly not seen as an Alternative – in the West Rudolf Bahro's spectacular publication was not surprise in its substance.[46] Yet it has been seen as a countervailing power putting some pressure on the block one was living and struggling in – which could at least be used to obtain political gains for one's own agenda: not even an ally, but a supporting instance. As such, however, it was not really interesting any more. It was only discussed by a tiny number of specialists – so that the alternative left of West Germany was deeply unprepared when the fall of the 'Berlin wall' made all these countries appear on the political landscape again – unable to rapidly build connections rapidly with the democratic left 'over there', incapable of compensating for the ensuing loss of political leverage and short of arguments against the propaganda wave proclaiming the 'end of socialism' with the 'end of history. This has been repeated, although on a smaller scale within the German Greens after the unification of Germany – with a double party unification process leading first to the absorption of the small green party of the GDR which could be integrated with the Western green party left in forming the 'Babelsberg circle" as a new radical umbrella network, and then to the negotiated fusion with the 'Bündnis 90' from the 'civic movements' which has strongly reinforced the party's right wing.

The *third* of these explanations seems to explain specifically the sudden ascendancy of central tenets of neo-liberal economics within the Realo wing since the late 1980s, starting from the notions of 'sustainable fiscal policy' and 'generational justice' discovered by municipal Realos in Frankfurt. This observation equally applies to other explanations of why the ideologies of the opposition against fordism seem to have lost most of their biting power, after fordism had been deconstructed by neo-liberal interventions towards a 'market capitalism' shedding all kinds of politically imposed fetters. Green concerns about 'big business, big labour, and big government' coming to terms on structural class compromises at the expense of environmental interests, seemingly vanished into thin air, when the market place alone, without any extraneous power intervening, should mediate all kinds of interests. This may seem intuitively quite acceptable to people without a solid left culture or experience of capitalist exploitation – granted that, any kind of pre-existing power relations would

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[46] Rudolf Bahro, *Die Alternative : Zur Kritik des real existierenden Sozialismus*, Köln: EVA, 1977. What has been surprising about it was the fact of being written by an author from the GDR, and that this author maintained a specific kind of 'communist' perspective.

evaporate from all acts of market exchange, which, however, cannot really be supposed.

This explanation helps us to understand a specific green vulnerability to the market ideology of neo-liberalism – on the one hand, via the negation of political power intervening into market processes, and on the other hand, via the affirmation of real liberty in the hands of the consumer and the citizens expressing their respective preferences. Both assumptions are, however, faulty: capitalist markets are in fact constituted by power relations laying down their basic rules, especially within the market-mediated domination of capital over labour. Therefore, power relations do matter far more fundamentally for the very constitution of markets, beginning with the 'commodification' of useful things and actions, than on the superficial levels of monopolization or cartellization. These are, moreover, quite real problems, not vanishing under the light weight of a mere declaration of market equality (limited, anyway, to the postulate of one dollar, one unit of power, and not extended to any equality of people).

The *fourth* of these explanations refers to a post-national moment which had been strong in West Germany's young generation before German unity[47] rapidly became a tangible possibility, and then a reality from 1989 to 1990. This unexpected turn of history certainly has prevented a red-green constellation under Oskar Lafontaine from winning the elections against Chancellor Helmut Kohl who had already seemed definitely defeated. Both the red and the green side of the alliance were then losing an election they had been certain to win, partly because they have been at loggerheads with the re-emerging 'national question': Oskar Lafontaine antagonized the majority of the East Germans by calling into question the monetary integration[48] which has been the main engine of Kohl's unification strategy; and the Greens proved their non-German focus by campaigning blatantly with the central slogan of 'All do talk about Germany, we talk about the weather!" In the elections following Kohl's historic success the SPD was unable to overtake the lead of the reigning Christian Democrats under Kohl, and the West German Greens failed to pass the 5% barrier, losing their parliamentary representation in the federal parliament, while the East German alliance of civic movements and greens just scratched into parliamentary representation.

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[47] Talking about 're-unification' is somewhat misleading: The territories effectively unified had never formed a German nation state, and considerable parts of the territories staying outside had been part of a German empire, which had colonised other nations, especially Poles – not to mention the Austrian traditions of empire, which had always been part and parcel of the German political tradition, until the turn towards a 'smaller Germany' operated by Bismarck in the 1860s.

[48] The results of the implied re-valuation of export prices for the East German industry by a factor of 4.5 were (foreseeably) truly devastating.

4. POSSIBLE LESSONS TO BE DRAWN FROM THE HISTORICAL EXPERIENCE OF THE GERMAN GREENS

I can speak about possible lessons only at this point, as there will be an act of translation required for anybody trying to learn them, avoiding by a concrete translation into one's own historical situation, that such lessons take the form of schematic rules or of inconsequential anecdotes – trying to convey too much or too little of what may effectively be learned.

The first rule may sound trivial, indeed, but it should not be underestimated: It is simply the rule that any initiative from below which does not succeed in displacing the existing constellation of domination by a revolutionary transformation, will be used by this constellation as an impetus towards a 'passive revolution' granting a new lease of life to it. This should, of course, not be invoked to stop revolutionary initiatives 'from below' – in order to avoid 'recuperation' from above.

It is certainly true, and verified by the now historical experience of the West German Greens, that 'only a freely evolving praxis of participation can mobilize the imagination and bring together the innumerable points at which anti-capitalist struggle originates" as Joel Kovel has vividly pleaded[49] in his blue-print for 'the eco-socialist party and its victory"[50]. As, however, more or less exactly this has been the idea underlying the 'multicoloured' and 'alternative' line within the West German Greens – which did not exist, it is true, in its East German counterparts, being mirrored by a merely libertarian stress on civil society self-organisation opposing state socialism – the question has to be asked why it has shown so little resistance and resilience against being drawn into a process of 'parliamentarization' leading also the West German Greens, in the end, into 'defining themselves as a progressive populism within the framework of bourgeois democracy" and therefore 'solidifying as a kind of intermediate formation that stops considerably short of what is needed for transformation" [51]. I continue to think that Kovel is right in stressing the challenge of party-building: 'And only a 'party-like' formation that postulates a goal common to all struggles without constraining them from above can organize this into 'solidarity solidified' and press towards power."[52] Relying upon a fluid mere network like the ones postulated by John Holloway[53] would underestimate the role of the state in controlling the reproduction processes of society – and lead into some variant of 'the social-democratic gap' experienced by radical social movements in West Germany before the advent of alternative and green electoral lists[54]: They

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[49] Joel Kovel, *The Enemy of nature: The End of Capitalism or the End of the World?*, Nova Scotia: Fernwood / London. New York: Zed, 2003, 233
[50] ib. 232-38.
[51] ib., 233
[52] ib.
[53] John Holloway, *Change the World Without Taking Power: The Meaning of Revolution Today*, London: Pluto, 2002
[54] Donald Sassoon (1996, 673) has touched upon this problem as a "fraught division of labour between new social movements and parties of the Left". He does not, however, understand that Green party

simply had to address their demands, in order to have them translated into institutionalized politics and implemented by legislation and government, to more or less sympathetic social-democratic politicians who in fact acted as gate-keepers to the 'real political' process. There are good grounds, therefore, for 'pressing towards power'. The question, however, is to be asked, if and how such a 'party-like formation' can escape the vicissitudes of the party form (which even in its revolutionary variants has been analysed as an Ideological State Apparatus[55]). And the experience of the West German Greens seems to indicate that the measures proposed by Kovel to cope with the potentially sinister dialectic of the party form in a way determined by 'artfulness and subtlety"[56] are structurally insufficient, as he makes them explicit – i.e. either realistically inapplicable or insufficient for reaching the goal of the required transformation of the party-form itself as a condition of the eco-socialist transformation of society.

The first principle of organisation Kovel postulates[57] is the party to be 'grounded in communities of resistance", by 'delegation from such communities" supplying 'the cadre of party activists as such". Such a principle has been acknowledged in the early formative phase of the West German Greens, too, turning out to be impracticable from the moment the party organization was also 'open to individuals", as Kovel admits in the same phrase. And, in fact, building a party on collective membership alone would create a innumerable series of problems of accountability and participation (in a real world structured by the individualistic ideology of law – and would specifically need a guarantee for the internal democracy of each and every of the units participating. At this point, further reflection could take Althusser's (cf. note 23) radicalization and subversion of the concept of the communist 'party cell' as a starting point.

Kovel' s second principle of organisation may seem self-evident for US-American readers: 'The party is to be internally funded through contributions by members, structured in such a way that no alienating force can take financial control." In contrast to the 'sponsors' buying politicians by their 'voluntary contributions' to electoral funds requiring many millions of US Dollars this is, in fact, self-evident. But what about constitutional state funding of parties which is a recent tradition in continental Europe, modelled on the state funding of churches? The state does not, in these frameworks, intervene as an 'alienating force': churches/denominations/religious or life stance communities have determinate rights to be funded based on general rules open to control by the judiciary, based on membership, socially useful activities developed or votes received. Neither extreme left not extreme right wing parties, in so far they are legal (this is a different matter) are excluded from state funding. In the German system of party funding, even the

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building in Germany has been an attempt to do something about this kind of problems, by creating a 'parliamentary arm' for the social movements (cf. ib., 674).
[55] Althusser well-known general thesis has been concretized later by him in a vivid plea for 'the liberty of a communist', as well as in a specific description of 'what cannot go on like this in the French Communist Party' (cf. his *Ce qui ne peut plus durer dans le parti communiste*, Paris: Maspéro, 1978).
[56] Kovel, 233.
[57] The following quotes are all from Kovel, 233.

'establishment effect' of these rules is rather mitigated: any party or electoral list getting more than 1.5% of the votes cast is entitled to its share of state money. Refusing to take this money would be damaging oneself in relation to competing political parties who all take it. Taking it, would certainly tend to reinforce the electoralist tendencies within the party, by making its functionaries dependent on electoral success. If, however, the electoral success of the party is any yardstick at all for the success of a party as such, as e.g. evident by the number of parliamentary seats to be filled, this tendency towards electoralism would seem inherent in the party form as such, and not the effect of a system of state finance for parties.[58]

Third, Kovel advocates a flexible variant of the 'imperative mandate'[59]: all 'delegates and administrative bodies" should be subject to a system of regular rotation and recall. This principle of grass roots democracy[60] has been re-elaborated and amply implemented in the early history of the West German Greens[61]. Are there lessons to be learned from its embattled abandonment – stretching from the middle of the 1980s to the early 1990s? Yes, I think, there are, basically, two such lessons: First, these rules should be clearly distinguished from the principles of the liberal non-professionalism in politics[62], which in reality serves to make politics a reserved area for professionals, civil servants, and teachers possessing or being granted enough disposable time in order to engage in politics. This implies that there should be the real possibility 'to live from politics', and not only 'for politics' (Max Weber) during the considerable stretch of a life-time needed to build not only individual competence with regard to specific areas of politics but also the kind of media presence and grass roots trust needed to make one's voice heard. This could be made possible by accepting rotation between different types of posts within one area of politics, including NGO or Social Movement organisation positions, or – in a maybe more radical vein - by a system of funding political activism by concerned 'communities of struggle'. Second, the application of this principle should flexibly obey the aim of creating a higher kind of party unity in action, relying on consent, and not on coercion, and not be operated as a system of 'checks and balances' to avoid any significant unity of action.

Fourth, Kovel postulates openness and transparency of all party deliberations 'except certain tactical questions (for example, the details of a direct action)". This cannot be called into question. And yet he seems totally unaware of the 'other side' this principle has in a modern mass party, which the experience of the German Greens

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[58] From this perspective, it is significant that the in the late 1990s German Greens have started trying to add sponsor money to the party funds.

[59] For a more detailed discussion of this instrument of democratic control in the left tradition cf. my contribution ‚imperatives Mandat', in: *Historisch-Kritisches Wörterbuch des Marxismus*, ed. W. F. Haug, Bd. 6.1, Hamburg 2004, 837-847

[60] This translation of ‚Basisdemokratie' is very approximative. Especially it does not render the ambivalent 'metaphysics' linked to a 'basis' which was at the same time the object of a passively plebiscitarian mobilization by informal leaders, like Joschka Fischer or Jutta Ditfurth, against the institutions of democratic procedure within the party – reminiscent of Robert Michels or Alfredo Paretos 'law' of 'oligarchical rule'.

[61] Cf. the very thorough and critical retrospective treatment of the real functioning of green 'grass roots democracy' by Paul Tiefenbach: `Wie hat die grüne Basisdemokratie funktioniert?', in: Id., *Die Grünen: Verstaatlichung einer Partei*, Köln: PapyRossa, 1998.

[62] Not to make this distinction is the main flaw of Tiefenbach's polemics.

has amply exemplified: Openness and transparency do in fact operate in two directions, with the media serving as a hugely important filter and agency – and may result in published opinion controlled by media tycoons overlaying and dominating the internal debates of the party. In the case of the German Greens this has probably been the single most important factor weighing in favour of the 'Realo' wing of the party, consistently supported by the entire spectrum of published opinion, and the defeat of the left wing which has been far more deeply anchored among the first generation of party activist, but was framed as being 'fundamentalist' by the media – to the point of helping to change the very composition of party activists giving the Realo wing, reinforced by the parts of the left preferring to stay in government, a real majority at a party conference for the first time in 1998. Developing a strong alternative media culture within the party and in its supporting areas is certainly a must from this perspective, but it certainly is not sufficient. Some degree of party control about general media access to internal party debates, and some disciplinary rules for party members in using their media access (e.g. excluding the use of certain tabloids and TV chains for interviews) will also be needed.

Even if Kovel's principles would have been fully applied, and handled with real 'artfulness and subtlety", it is doubtful whether such a development as that of the German (and more generally of the European continental Greens who have to some degree, although often less markedly, travelled the same path into a renewed political establishment, because the underlying paradox of the very form of the emancipatory political party is not really addressed by them: to 'press toward power" with the aim of overcoming all structures of domination, to become part of the existing ideological system of electoral politics with the aim of achieving a liberating transformation of the underlying society constituted by structural relations of domination and dominance. A 'prefigurative vision surpassing the given society', as postulated by Kovel would be very helpful indeed in handling this elementary paradox. Without clear ideas about the 'contradictions' and tendencies operating within this given society, or if we envisage the global situation as we should, within the given societies within a world-wide constellation of societies such a clear idea will tend to sink into an increasingly infertile utopianism. There is an urgent need, therefore, to inform the social movements by critical theory, by scientific inquiries into the constellation of societies they are rebelling against. Anti-capitalist, anti-patriarchal, anti-colonial, anti-sexist, anti-racist theorizing are needed to fill the social movements and an emancipatory party with sufficiently clear and sharp ideas of the need transformation of their societies. Marxist, Feminist, and Cultural studies analyses will have to be re-read and synthesized with a view to providing the leading ideas for such a new kind of emancipatory party. This is urgently needed now – not because the movement activist as such were somehow structurally unable to address the underlying causes of their predicament – as Kautsky and Lenin have lead generations of Marxists to believe about the working class, supposed to be bound to reformist 'trade unionism' in its 'spontaneous consciousness'. Rather, because the very articulation of the experiences underlying these social movements which is needed to communicate them – to other social movements with other experiences, or over time, to ensuing generations – is simply impossible without

adequate concepts which cannot be had in other ways than by a critique of existing conceptualizations which is the core work of critical theory.

In his ensuing argument, Joel Kovel[63] has gone some way in showing how an informed and emancipatory 'anti-capitalism as a point of reference'[64] – in Germany, it is impossible to forget about the existence of right-wing anti-capitalism, which is anti-semitic in its very essence – , especially as a way of overcoming the 'petty bourgeois" side of green politics – which has taken the form of the 'social advancement' syndrome in the case of the West German Greens, not so much of localism and parochialism[65], making the political representation of migrants who 'made good' one of the strong points of green politics in Germany up to the present. And yet, we still are a considerable distance away from the 'kind of self-generative and non-linear dialectic' he anticipates 'that can rapidly accelerate the motion toward eco-socialism'[66].

Are there any lessons to be learnt from the experience of the German Greens on how to strive in an effective way to get from here to there? I hope to bring out some such lessons in critically reading Stanley Aronowitz's arguments for a radical party[67] which are analysing these more immediately imminent questions of party building as such, although very specifically addressing the situation in the USA. Aronowitz's starting point[68] is the diagnosis another kind of parochialism which certainly has also been present within the German Greens – the 'parochialism of late Critical Theory'[69]. As the late critical theory of the Frankfurt School had been the dominant intellectual force within the German independent left, there have been many ways in which it has helped to shape the more fundamental political outlook of green party activists (who have been even less intellectually cohesive than Anglo-Saxon greens).[70] The kind of parochialism Aronowitz describes does not need this kind of influence, as it may also be seen as being part of the 'common sense' of most people engaging in politics in Germany since the 1960s: 'only Western Europe and North America were worthy of concern" and 'only white men were capable of entering history'[71]. Therefore, Aronowitz argues cogently, they 'could not see … the profound implications of the emerging global vision of the ecology, feminist and labor movements for the creation of a new opposition to transnational capitalism'[72]. So far Aronowitz's argument coincides with Kovel's[73]; the he takes a slight turn by specifying the present situation with regard to which he argues: 'The Seattle

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[63] ib., 234-238

[64] ib., 234

[65] ib.

[66] ib., 236

[67] I refer to 'The Retreat to Postmodern Politics', in: *Situations: Project of the Radical Imagination*, Vol. 1, Issue 1, 2005, 15-46, as Aronowitz 2005, and to 'Ìs It Time for a Radical Party', in: *Situations: Project of the Radical Imagination*, Vol. 1, Issue 2, 2006, 117-58, as Aronowitz 2006.

[68] Aronowitz 2005, 40-45

[69] Aronowitz 2005, 42

[70] And it certainly has been no accident that the Realo-Fundi opposition – overlaying so much of the internal struggles of the German Greens – has originated in the Frankfurt of the 'Frankfurt School'.

[71] Aronowitz 2005, 42

[72] ib., 42f.

[73] cf. esp. Kovel, 234ff.

demonstrations of December 1999, the subsequent mass demonstrations at Quebec, Genoa and Spain against the key institutions of global capital, and the development of the World Social Forum, whose location in Brazil's Porto Alegre was symbolic of a global shift, as both an attempt to create a new civil society and as a post-911 continuation of the protests, present new possibilities'[74]. The most salient lesson of the experience of the German Greens seems to be that the decisive element in the building and in the development of a party is never to be found within the party itself, but in the broader trends and tensions of the 'conjuncture' within which it lives as a social, ideological and political entity – in the 'occasions' and in the 'impossibilities' with which it has to confront itself in order to survive as a meaningful political project.

These 'new possibilities" have then been identified by Aronowitz, in his 2006 essay, as a historical occasion for party building, more concretely for building a 'radical party' as a new type of 'third party' in the USA. His 'meditation on left political organization'[75] is not primarily referring to '"American exceptionalism"'[76]. It also takes on board, e.g. the international effects of 'Krushchev's revelations at the 1956 20th Soviet Party Congress'[77], 'the stunning decline of once powerful mass Communist parties of Italy and France" in the wake of the 'end of "really existing" socialism'[78] – or even the ways in which 'the imperatives of liberal democracy have bedevilled European Marxists, since, in the aftermath of the suspension of the anti-socialist laws in Germany, they formed social-democratic parties'[79] – from Friedrich Engels via Eduard Bernstein (and his refuters Rosa Luxemburg, Karl Kautsky and August Bebel) up to Rudolph Hilferding, Vladimir Ilyitch Lenin and Robert Michels[80] – until 'the revolutionary period" had been 'exhausted'[81] and 'the social-democratic parties in the most advanced capitalist countries have settled into a pattern according to which the party consists chiefly in its parliamentary delegation and the campaign apparatuses created to win elective offices"[82], a situation which relegated them to 'the role of legitimate opposition when not in power and to seek to become parties of government, within the framework of capitalism".[83] He expressly addresses the 'rise of the New Left in all western nations"[84] after the bankruptcy of the 'main political

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[74] ib., 43.

[75] Aronowitz 2006, 117.

[76] ib., cf., ib. 124ff.

[77] ib., 118f.

[78] ib., 119f.

[79] ib., 135.

[80] These historic figures are all referred to on ib., pp. 138-37.

[81] ib., 138.

[82] ib.

[83] ib., 139. - Stanley Aronowitz does not delve deeper into the sequels of Lenin's strategic advice to communists 'in a new phase of relative capitalist 'stabilization'' (2006, 138) – 'to dig in and take advantage of democratic institutions in the leading capitalist states by joining with established unions and other workers' parties in the struggles for reform" (ib.), within the communist movement – which can be seen in the Stalinist fixation of 'building socialism in one country' on the one hand, and, on the other, in a long story of waves of re-absorption of revolutionary militants and intellectuals into the social-democracy of their country, which in Western Germany had brought leading political figures like Willy Brandt and Herbert Wehner and a number of renowned intellectuals who had been active within communist or left socialist groups in the 1930s 'back to the flock'.

[84] ib., 140.

parties of the Left" had become patent, with the end of the post-war period: 'as dramatic, as it was short-lived' and the emergence of 'a series of 'new' social movements which consciously spurn the concept of 'party' itself'[85]. Aronowitz's moderately ironizing the 'newness' of these social movements seems linked to the short diagnosis of the 'exception, the global phenomenon of Green parties" he gives, understanding them 'in the framework of the revolt of the ecology movement against the social-democratic mainstream rather than as an attempt to form a new radical party'[86] (ib.). Aronowitz is indubitably right in putting into question the amnesiac illusions of newness widespread in the emancipatory movements of the 1960s which in Germany had to start from scratch, with traditions eradicated by Nazi Germany and even the larger part of the older literature unfindable. However, he seems to underestimate the importance of the demand for 'autonomy' which was a defining element in a whole set of radicalizing 'second generation' movements – from the *autonomia operaria* in Italy, which had counterparts in most other leading capitalist countries, and the autonomous women's liberation movement which emerged transnationally from its very beginnings, to a new generation of anti-colonial, anti-racist, and ecological movements. It is also true, and in retrospect irrefutable, that all of these movements have been historically marked very specifically by their opposition to the fordist constellation of capitalist domination, being vulnerable, therefore, to the lures of neo-liberal anti-fordism, promising to put an end to their immediate enemies – big capital, big unions, big goverment. This apparently leads him into thinking that the ambition of green party building did not go beyond changing social democracy – which is in fact what has been mainly achieved by it, and what the Realo wing of the party has for some time claimed as a strategic objective (before aiming at substituting the liberal party as the decisive lynchpin of the German party system, which they have utterly failed to achieve). In actual fact, the building of a new party of systemic opposition, capable of bundling all the radical opposition movements from the new ecological movements, via the new women's movement, to the new peace movement, has been the formulated aim of the leading exponents of the green left in Germany. Their failure cannot simply be explained by assuming that they did not try. And the difference between the Realo wing and the green left in the 1990s did no more relate to the simple question of parliamentary vs. extra-parliamentary perspectives[87]. It was about the strategy of parliamentary politics the necessity of which in itself had been accepted by all wings of the party[88]: Was it to prepare for participating in governments by operating a constructive opposition tactics, or was it to develop political contradictions to a point, where deeper changes would become possible – accepting the necessity of longer phases of opposition, if participation in government could not be had under a radical political programme? And with the rising wave of the neo-liberal counter-revolution sapping the continental welfare-states, the key question of strategy became more and more whether the greens should support neo-liberal 'reforms' destroying fordist power

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[85] ib.

[86] ib.

[87] ib., 140

[88] The argument of the intelligent fundamentalists had been, from the very beginning, that the party would get a better deal in punctual agreements in critical situations – within parliament – than in coalition agreements stretching over an entire legislature (or even more).

structures (as the centre and right wing of the party affirmed), or whether they should support the resistance against them, with a view to turning them away from fordist nostalgia to a new kind of affirmation of democratic politics and a new kind of globalised anti-capitalism (as the green left has affirmed with far less attention). The lesson to be learned here, with a view to realistically initiate the building of a radical party in any other advanced country dominated by the capitalist mode of production, is rather how urgent and how difficult it is to disengage some key parts of today's opposition movements like the trade unions, the women 'manning' the gender-mainstreaming instances or the environmental movements from their entanglement in the vestiges of fordism – be it in the form of resentment or of nostalgia.

In spite of these criticisms, the general conclusion Aronowitz arrives at, seems to be convincing: before seriously engaging into party building in the sense of creating an organized agency for radical, transformative, and system-transcending politics[89] - which would effectively embody in a specific historical situation what Kovel[90] postulates for his Eco-Socialist party – 'one might propose to form an organization that would attempt to mediate between theory and practice, humans and history'[91]. Here again, I am afraid, the West German experience of creating – as it were – a new left from the burnt and forgotten remnants of the old, practically without left father figures to rebel against, or without elder brothers capable of lending a helping hand, may offer a warning lesson: There has been a series of – mostly Maoist – competing party building organizations created to create the very conditions for the re-building of the German Communist Party, before such a task could be seriously addressed. If I am not mistaken, all of them, after some time of frustrating attempts to create these conditions, which they did not even come any nearer to, have declared now *to be* the reconstructed CP of Germany (and later on dissolved themselves, admitting their utter failure, some of them directly in to the green party).

The tasks Aronowitz[92] assigns to this party building organization do not exclude such a turn of its development: 'bring[ing] together those who are already discontented with the current state of things'[93] – this formulation (although not nowadays in the USA) would be unduly open to right-wing discontent which in part extends to right-wing 'anti-capitalism' and, more frequently even, to right wing 'anti-globalism', which an internationally active radical party should have to fight without

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[89] It should be noted here that the currently on-going attempt of creating a common parliamentary party out of the PDS (combining already, unequally, the remaining organizational heritage of the East German 'socialist unity party' and the remnants of the West German alternative left (after leaving the Greens again, or staying outside of them) and the WASG (combining trade union activists with some SPD dissidents and a considerable number of new radical activists, some of them of Trotskyite orientation) may, in so far it succeeds, constitute an important step in changing the parliamentary balances inside Germany, but certainly is not yet a process of 'party formation'' in Aronowitz's (ib., 156) sense.

[90] op. cit., 232ff.

[91] Aronowitz 2006, 156.

[92] ib., 156f.

[93] ib. 156.

any ambiguity – and 'the development of a public presence"[94] is certainly as much a task of the emerging radical party as of the party building organisation preparing its emergence. 'To initiate a broad discussion of the central problems of social and political theory, situated in the actuality of global as well as of national situations'[95] certainly is an important task in preparing the ground to the kind of radical party Aronowitz is advocating; but, once merging or having formed, it will also certainly have to carry on with this task, with the penalty of gradually losing touch with contemporary reality. The same holds true, I think, for the task of 'revisiting the history of the –left" and of 'developing an adequate theory of our own situation'[96] (ib.). It may be a better idea rather to think the organization needed to prepare the ground for the building of an effective radical party in terms of broad alliance for education and self-education – like the 'People's Global Alliance, initiated by the 'Zapatistas' or the international network of ATTAC initiatives, initiated by the French ATTAC! Organization. Or even better to embed its creation into the process of the World Social Forum, and its Continental, National or Local/Regional levels of self-organised arenas of debate. On the other hand, given the complexity and foreseeable long-windedness of at least some of the necessary debates the whole thing will not effectively be able to function without maintaining or even gaining some strongholds within the institutionalized social sciences, i.e. without a continued presence within academia.

CONCLUSION

Donald Sassoon has summarised the development we have tried to analysed: "The political challenge of the greens was never sufficiently strong to cause a real crisis in West European Socialism."[97] Stanley Aronowitz, in a rather opposed perspective, criticizes that they had been limited to "the revolt of the ecology movement against the social-democratic mainstream"[98]. The most important lesson that the failed project of the German Greens has to teach may be simply that this is not the right kind of question: This development has not been interesting, because it tried to dislodge the established Left, communist, labour, or social-democratic. It rather has lessons to convey, especially in its formative phases, to those who try to build forms of explicitly political struggle giving voice and power to an emancipatory anti-capitalism in a positive way, addressing the unsolved conundrums from the history of the established left. Even this will still need adaptation to concrete conjunctures and conditions. And yet it will not be had without more general radical social and political theory.

I Would like to thank Matthias Oberg for commenting on an early draft of this paper.

Left parties in government:

THE NORWEGIAN CASE*

Asbjørn Wahl **

> In Norway we are currently experiencing what it means to have a left party in government in an era of neo-liberalism. The parliamentary election in the autumn of 2005 gave us a new, centre-left, majority coalition government for the first time ever. The previous centre-right coalition experienced a serious defeat. The traditional Conservative Party, in particular, lost about one third of its votes (down from 21 to 14 per cent).

The new coalition consists of three political parties: the Labour Party (AP), the Centre Party (SP)[99] and the Socialist Left Party (SV). The last mentioned party joined a government for the first time. In a European context, SV can be compared to the parties in the GUE/NGL group of the European parliament. Since the experiences of having the left in government have not been very exciting in Europe since neo-liberalism conquered the world in the 1980s, there is great interest on the left in what is going to happen.

THE BACKGROUND

There are at least three important reasons why the centre-left coalition won the parliamentary election in Norway last autumn. Firstly, many people were fed up with the policies of the previous government. It had pursued neo-liberal policies across the board – including privatisation of public services, cuts in public funding, increased inequality and poverty and serious attacks on labour market legislation. This was not in breach with previous governments. On the contrary, all governments, whether right wing, centre or social democrat, have more or less followed a neo-liberal agenda over the last 20+ years. However, the centre-right government proved to be more extreme in its market fundamentalist approach than the previous ones.

Secondly, the trade union movement and other social movements pushed strongly for the establishment of a centre-left coalition. Up until a couple of years before the last election, the leadership of the social democratic party refused to even discuss the

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[99] The Centre Party is traditionally a peasants' or a rural party, which has been radicalised by being one of the leading forces in the successful campaigns against Norwegian membership of the European Union (in 1972 and 1994). The anti-EU sentiments in Norway have always been left-leaning, contrary to the situation in for example the UK, where the so-called eurosceptics are right-wingers. In some areas, e.g. welfare policies and democratic, public control, it has taken up many positions to the left of the social democratic party, while it is rather conservative in other areas (private ownership, traditions, moral). Under a different name, it was also this party that helped the first ever labour government to power in Norway, in 1935.

possibility of forming a government coalition with the Socialist Left Party in particular. In the first years after World War II the Norwegian Labour Party had a parliamentary majority alone, and after that got lost (in 1961), the party had preferred minority governments with passive support from other parties, rather than joining coalitions. It was the trade union movement that insisted on the establishment of a centre-left coalition. The traditionally very social democratic Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions (LO) started to invite also the SV-leader to their congresses, and the biggest trade union started to hold meeting with all the three parties in question. These pressures, including pressure from the rank and file in its own party, finally made the leadership of the Labour Party cave in and go for a coalition. This created new energy and optimism on the broad left.

Thirdly, the social democratic party moved politically to the left after it was punished heavily by the voters in the 2001 election. The party lost about 1/3 of their votes, and ended up with 24 per cent, which was the worst result since the beginning of the 1920s. Partial privatisation of the state oil company, Statoil, and the state telecom company, Telenor[100], was unpopular, in addition to a market oriented reform of the hospital sector and a soft, neo-liberal agenda in general. It was again the trade union movement that made the difference. The Labour Party was set under hard pressure to abandon its policy of privatisation, to strengthen public services and to reverse the destructive labour law reforms of the centre-right government.

Decisive for this political development in the social democratic party was a new tendency which developed in the trade union movement. This tendency could particularly be witnessed in the local elections in 2003, most strongly in Trondheim, the third biggest city in Norway.

Traditionally, the Norwegian trade union movement has been closely linked to and dominated by the Labour Party. In elections the trade union movement has campaigned in favour of this party and its policies. After long time frustration with the social democratic party's political move to the right, some local trade union branches started to become more politicised themselves. A coalition of trade union organisations in Trondheim thus developed its own political programme for the 2003 election, consisting of 19 concrete demands. These were sent to all the political parties with the following message: we are going to campaign for those parties that support our demands.

This had great educational effect, particularly on the Labour Party, which, together with some other parties on the centre-left, came out in favour of most of the demands. The trade union alliance run an effective campaign, contributed to a more polarised election campaign, something which proved successful, and secured victory for the coalition of friendly parties, while the governing conservative party became the big looser. Thus, a new local government was formed, one which not

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[100] Both Telenor and Statoil were partially privatised by a Labour government in 2000 and 2001 respectively. Today the state owns 70.9 per cent of Statoil and 54 per cent of Telenor.

only stopped the privatisation policy of the previous majority, but which also started to bring back to public sector services which had already been privatised.

This tendency of increased independence from the political parties among trade unions and other popular movements is probably the most important and successful development on the left in Norway over the last few years. It represents a political innovation which will be important to follow up and develop further in the future whatever the experience will be with the current centre-left government. In this way trade unions and other popular movements have increasingly become political actors themselves.

Even the biggest national trade union (Norwegian Union of Municipal and General Employees), which historically has been very closely linked to the Labour Party, followed this path before the 2003 local elections. It sent its own demands to the parties, received support from four of them (the three in the current coalitions government plus the Red Electoral Alliance) and issued a leaflet urging its members to vote for one of these four. The same trade union initiated in 1999 a broad coalition of trade unions and other organisations, the Campaign for the Welfare State[101], to fight against privatisation and neo-liberal policies. This alliance played an important role in informing and educating its members and in changing public opinion regarding privatisation and neo-liberal "modernisation" of public services.

In last year's parliamentary election a number of organisations, including trade unions, Attac Norway, Campaign for the Welfare State, solidarity organisations and others formed an alliance in Oslo, focusing not on political parties, but on the need for a new political direction. "25 years of neo-liberalism is enough!", was one of the slogans. In effect, this worked as a support for the centre-left coalition, but by focusing on politics rather than on political parties, the loyalties were clearly signalled. In other words, no parties should take any support for granted.

THE POLITICAL CHANGE

The political platform of the new government surprised quite a few of us. It was already clarified before the election that the Socialist Left Party would have to accept the Norwegian membership of NATO as well as of the European Economic Area (EEA)[102], so this was no surprise. Neither was it a surprise that the new government quickly made a full reversal of the labour law which had been seriously undermined by the previous government, since this was an important promise during the election campaign. The same goes for the anti-privatisation policies that became part of the political platform. It simply says no to privatisation and competitive tendering of core public welfare services (education, health, caring of old people).

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[101] You can find more information on this alliance on its web site:
http://www.velferdsstaten.no/english/

[102] The EEA is an agreement between the EU and Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein which makes these countries part of the Single Market – with some limitations regarding agriculture, fisheries and foreign policy. The agreement was carried into effect as from 1 January 1994.

In some other areas, however, the platform was even better than expected. It signalled a much more active use of public ownership in core companies and market intervention policies. Public ownership in companies like the previously mentioned Statoil and Telenor would not be further reduced. Public control of strategically important hydroelectric energy resources would be secured. The public postal services would not be privatised. Poverty should be abolished. Holiday pay for people on unemployment benefit should be improved (or reintroduced, since it had been removed by the previous government).

Also in foreign policy, the political platform introduced important changes. Norwegian soldiers were withdrawn from Iraq[103], and the government would "not renew Norwegian participation in Operation Enduring Freedom when the mandate period for these forces expires"[104]. On the other hand, it would "strengthen Norwegian participation in ISAF in Afghanistan", something which was met with dissatisfaction by most of the peace movement.

Regarding development policies, the government said that it would "work to ensure that the multilateral aid is increasingly switched from the World Bank to development programmes and emergency aid measures under the auspices of UN agencies. Norwegian aid should not go to programmes that contain requirements for liberalisation and privatisation". The new government would further "review and reassess all requirements that Norway has made for developing countries regarding liberalisation of the services sector in the GATS negotiations", as well as "work to ensure that Norway supports the developing countries' demands for a renegotiation of the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (the TRIPS Agreement)".

As soon as the government took power, it started to introduce its promises from the election campaign. A comprehensive privatisation of the railways, which had been prepared, but only just started, by the previous government, was immediately stopped. A newly adopted law which opened for extensive privatisation of schools was withdrawn. All Norwegian GATS requests to Least Developed Countries, as well as requests in education and in water and energy distribution to all developing countries, were withdrawn. No radical change of the state budget for 2006 was expected, since this had been prepared by the previous government, and the new government only had a couple of weeks to make some few amendments. However, it did find room for a strengthening of public welfare services by increased funding of the municipals. On the other hand, it also introduced tax relief for some rich people, something which met heavy criticism from the Norwegian LO.

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[103] The previous right-wing Norwegian government did not support the attack on and occupation of Iraq in 2003, not least because of resistance from the opposition and huge mobilisation in the streets. After the occupation was accepted by the UN, however, some Norwegian soldiers were sent to Iraq.
[104] All quotations in this and the next paragraph are taken from the English version of chapter 2 of the government declaration, http://odin.dep.no/smk/english/government/government/001001-990363/dok-bn.html

As far as I can see, apart from the mentioned tax relief, the current Norwegian government is the only one in Europe which has done anything like this during the last 20-25 years in terms of anti-neo-liberal policies. So, what is the problem?

THE PROBLEMS

Well, there are lots of problems. The government did deliver the core package of election promises, as mentioned above (the "morning gift" from the government to its electorate). As time has passed, however, the centre-left government seems to have run out of energy only some few months after if took power. None of the political parties in the government are consciously using the best and most radical parts of the political platform in their campaigning. One should maybe have expected that at least the Socialist Left Party would have done so, but also this party has, on the contrary, contributed to weaken some of the best parts of the platform.

One good example is the answer given by the Minister of Finance (SV) to a parliamentary question recently raised by a conservative MP regarding Norwegian policies towards the IMF and the World Bank. Included in her answer was the following statement: "The Government is against ideologically based requests for liberalisation and privatisation. The Government will oppose demands for liberalisation and privatisation in IMF programmes *if they are not oriented towards development and poverty reduction or part of the work against corruption*." The part of the statement which I have emphasized here is a modification which is not mentioned in the government's political platform itself and represents in reality an adoption of IMF/World Bank language.

In other ministries the situation is even worse. The Minister of Labour and Social Inclusion (AP), who is a close ally of the social democratic Prime Minister, has hardly made any change of the previous right wing immigration and social policies. The "welfare-to-work" policy[105] which is being pursued by the centre-left government does not represent a support of the poor and the unemployed, but an attack on them.

The Minister of Trade and Industry (also AP) has, at least not so far, made any convincing attempt at intervening in the markets or more actively using public ownership in companies to achieve political goals. The Minister of Foreign Affairs (AP) is pursuing the same biased, US-friendly policies towards the Israel/Palestinian conflict as the previous government. Even the withdrawal of the GATS requests to developing countries proved to be an exception, a one-off concession to the radical left, as it seems to be more or less business as usual again in the on-going WTO negotiations.

The Minister of International Development (SV) is undermining the World Bank-critical position of the government's own political platform. Maybe we are explained

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[105] In Norwegian called "arbeidslinja". This policy was initiated in the USA during the presidency of Ronald Reagan in the 1980s and was later exported to Europe as part of the neo-liberal offensive.

why in a contribution made in the Parliament recently, when he summarised "what a country needs to overcome poverty: it needs peace; it needs a strong, well functioning state that ensures equitable distribution of wealth; *it needs an open, market-based economy*; it needs to focus on education; and it needs resources to be mobilised through investments and development assistance"[106] (my italics).

What we experience is that the Socialist Left Party does obviously not have a strategy on how to use its participation in the government to strengthen socialist positions and shift the balance of power in the long run. Neither does it try to form strong connections with the trade union movement or other social movements outside the parliament in order to push for more radical political solutions. The party does not even seem able to use and defend the best parts of the government's own political platform. What is even more serious, this does not represent isolated political "mistakes" – it represents the actual political level of the Socialist Left Party in government.

No part of the centre-left government in Norway seems to realise the specific challenges posed by being in government in an era of neo-liberalism. What has taken place in Norway, as well as internationally, over the last 20+ years, is a comprehensive transfer of power from democratically elected bodies to the market. Thus, governments have lost power. Any government that intends to pursue a radical welfare policy under such circumstances will therefore need a strong social movement outside the parliament to challenge the increased structural power of capital. There is, unfortunately, no social movement with such power in Norway today, and, what is more, there is no consciousness in the current government of the need for such a movement. On the contrary, we are being told by official representatives of the actual political parties to stay calm, to be patient and to give the government more time rather than to "create problems for them" by criticising them or mobilising for more radical solutions.

Some of the decisions which the government made immediately after it took power (the "morning gift") were very important indeed, no doubt about that. However, they do not go far enough, and are not followed up in a way which can create enthusiasm among workers and people in general. The optimism and the energy that was produced by the anti-privatisation and pro-public service election campaign and the promises of a new political direction in the government's political platform, therefore seem to have vanished. After the election, it is therefore the right wing populist party (the Progress Party) which has profited the most. It today stands at about 30-35 percent in current opinion polls – up from 22 in the last election.

The lack of understanding of this political phenomenon is probably the most important weakness of the centre-left government coalition and on the left in general. The current discontent among workers and people in general seems to be very difficult to interpret. Social democrats often state that "the more people gets, the

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106 International Development Minister Erik Solheim's statement to the Storting, 16 May 2006, http://odin.dep.no/ud/english/news/speeches/minister_b/032171-090600/dok-bn.html

more dissatisfied they become" – as a sort of decadence or an effect of an over-affluent society. Nothing can be more mistaken.

The social and economic basis for the discontent among people is deeply embedded in the neo-liberalist economy – in the unregulated capitalism which increases the exploitation of workers, reduces their influence at the workplace, alienates them in relation to the work process as well as to society in general (remember Margaret Thatcher: "there is no such thing as society") and makes life more socially and economically insecure. The "brutalisation of work" is the term we have given this phenomenon in Norway, and it is probably the main cause for the growing discontent, which in turn is cynically and successfully being exploited by right wing populist parties.

Of course, the success of the right wing populist parties to exploit this situation is to a high degree made possible by a lack of political parties on the left which understand the situation, take people's discontent seriously and are able to politicise it and channel it into an organised struggle against alienation and exploitation – for a social, just and solidary society.

With the left party in a centre-left coalition government, this problem can actually become more serious, since there is hardly any opposition on the left that can pick up and politicise the messages of the discontents (even though I am not sure of the Norwegian Socialist Left Party's ability to play such a role even outside the government). The right wing populists then become the only anti-establishment, system-critical alternative, while the centre-left government is administrating and defending the existing order. The on-going weakening and undermining of the Nordic welfare states are hardly recognised or understood by the centre-left parties in Norway, not even by the Socialist Left Party[107].

The enormous shift in the balance of power which has taken place over the last 20+ years and the current hegemonic neo-liberal order is not going to be changed considerably in Norway alone by the new government. The new power relations in the labour market in particular will therefore continue to create powerlessness and discontent among workers. This development can only be turned if the left is able to create a situation in which workers and people in general experience that they are being part of a real emancipatory struggle, a struggle which the centre-left government in Norway obviously has no intension or ability to launch.

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[107] The Minister of Finance (SV) actually tried to make the current "successful" Nordic welfare state model an export article at an OECD meeting in Paris recently (reported in the daily newspaper Nationen, 23 May 2006, http://www.nationen.no/Utenriks/article2114201.ece), obviously unaware of the fact that the welfare state is disintegrating around her, because the post-World War II power relations which formed the basis for the development of our welfare states (the social pact, or the historic compromise between labour and capital), are no longer there. A more thorough analysis of this development can be found in Wahl, Asbjørn, The ideological legacy of the social pact, in *Monthly Review* No. 1/2004.

CONCLUSIONS

First of all, there is no doubt that the current centre-left coalition in Norway should be supported in the election campaign by the non-sectarian left, tactically or whatever, as the only realistic alternative to the previous conservative/neo-liberal government. There is no doubt, either, that the achievements which we have gained (the "morning gift" referred to above) are of great value. They are mainly of a defensive character, but important for the development of the balance of power – not least in the labour market.

However, the problem addressed in this discussion goes further – to the question on whether or not left parties should join coalition governments of this kind, or what the preconditions should be for making such a political move. The problem is whether this will serve a long-term socialist strategy, and this is a completely different, and obviously more difficult, question.

In this context we should have in mind that the formation of the new centre-left political coalition in Norway was decisive for the injection of new optimism and energy in the broad left. This was the situation even though the three parties did not campaign on a joint political platform, but limited themselves to a statement of intent to form a coalition government. A statement of intent, however, is not the same as a decision to join a government. This is dependent on the contents of the political platform which has to be negotiated between the parties involved.

My consideration is that the concrete political gains that we have experienced so far under the new government most probably also could have been achieved if the Socialist Left Party had stayed outside the government. For a left party, passive, but critical support of a centre-left government – as "the better of two alternatives" – could often be a better alternative than to join the government. It gives much more room for manoeuvre, and the possibility to pursue primary positions and more radical solutions than the often watered-down compromises reached in the government. However, with the many surprisingly radical points in the negotiated government platform in Norway in the autumn of 2005, it would have been difficult for the Socialist Left Party to explain and defend a political break with the coalition.

Seen from a socialist point of view, nor has it been the government platform which has posed the main problem since the government was formed, but the inability of the Socialist Left Party to defend and use the best parts of the platform, to let its own participation in the government be guided by a more long-term socialist strategy and to seek support from the trade union movement and other social movements. The serious political weaknesses of this party were clearly exposed already during the election campaign, when many of us with astonishment could witness the party modifying its own political programme in area after area as it was attacked by its political opponents and mainstream media.

Of course, socialist left parties should seek alliances with other parties, also in government, if this can contribute to shifting the balance of power in society.

However, certain preconditions must be in place for the establishment of such coalition governments. Only concrete negotiations with other parties can in the end reveal whether or not the political preconditions are satisfactory. Based on the experiences so far with the Socialist Left Party in the Norwegian government, as well as with other experiences with left parties in centre-left government coalitions in Europe over the last 20+ years, I will conclude with the following four minimum conditions:

1) A socialist left party should of course not at all join a coalition government if this government is not opposed to a policy of privatisation – at the national level as well as internationally. Another minimum requirement is that such a government should defend, not attack, trade union and labour rights. Neither should it take part in imperialist wars.

2) The party must let its participation in the government be guided by long-term socialist visions and strategies. It must also be able continuously to assess whether or not its participation serves these long-term goals and be able to break out if this is not the case.

3) Under current circumstances, there is no possibility to carry out consistent anti-neo-liberal policies from a government position without the existence of strong popular movements (including trade unions) outside the parliament. This is of course determined by having parties in the government which both understand the necessity of such movements and are able to join forces with them.

4) The government platform and actions must address the problems, the insecurities, the concerns and the anxieties of ordinary people. Their discontent with current developments must be taken seriously. This includes a programme which challenges existing power structures, limits the power of capital, redistributes wealth and extends democracy. Only a government which, through concrete economic and social reforms, is able to create enthusiasm among workers and ordinary people can have any chance to contain right wing populism. The indications from experiences so far are that only in a situation in which workers and people in general experience that they are being part of a real emancipatory struggle, can the left in government succeed.

Of these four conditions, only the first one is more or less met in the Norwegian context. The situation is therefore far from promising. The most decisive and successful experience in the current situation is the increasing independence which trade unions and social movements have developed as regards political parties. The most important task for the radical left in Norway today is therefore to build alliances of social movements and NGOs to demand and mobilise for more radical policies from the government. Such alliances should not, of course, be hampered by mistaken party-political loyalties.

It does not make any sense to moralize over the behaviour of a left party in government if we think it is undermining socialist positions. There are deeply rooted

reasons why a political party behave the way it does, based on its origin, its history and traditions, its social basis as well as the level of social struggle in the society in which it operates. Rather than to moralize and to try to tell the party in question what it should have done differently, we should therefore try to analyse and to understand why it behaves the way it does, and then criticise their faults and use the experience and knowledge to judge whether or not the actual left party in government is the party we need if a socialist society is still our aim.

> It is still too early to draw the final conclusions of the experience with a left party in government in Norway. However, it is highly possible that the "success" of the centre-left coalition could, as a worst case scenario, end as a political disaster at the next parliamentary election, with a right wing populist/neo-liberal government, and the most left oriented party as the biggest looser. The scenery is already all too familiar. A centre-left government in the era of neo-liberalism is truly no tea party. Time is ripe for more radical, non-sectarian alternatives.

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* Contribution made at a seminar organised by the Rosa Luxembourg Foundation and the Initiatives Pour un Autre Monde at the European Social Forum in Athens on 5 May 2006.

** Since the subject in question is very sensitive regarding party political loyalties, I find it correct to make clear that I am not a member of any of the political parties in the Norwegian government coalition (nor of any other political party). I have mainly been working in the trade union movement for the last 25 years and consider myself to be a socialist. I did campaign for the current Norwegian government coalition, both in order to have the previous, neo-liberal government replaced with a better alternative and in order to try to build a movement strong enough to continue to exercise a pressure on the new centre-left government.

LULA'S LAMENT

Hilary Wainwright

(article written in October 2005 after the corruption crisis in the PT.)

The success of the Brazilian Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT), or Workers Party, acted as a beacon to the left worldwide. Now it has been revealed that it was governing on the basis of systematic corruption. Hilary Wainwright reports on how the quest for power perverted the PT and subverted democracy

'When there is such an overwhelming disaster and you see yourself as part of this disaster, you begin to question your whole life. Why so many years of sacrifice and struggle?' Congressman Fernando Gabeira expresses the feelings of many *petistas* – members or supporters of the Brazilian Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT) – when they heard that the party they built or supported as an instrument of democratic, ethical politics, was governing on the basis of systematic corruption.

The Brazilian left is in a state of profound shock and confusion. Over the past two decades hundreds of thousands of people have devoted their lives to creating the PT as a principled and forceful instrument of social justice against one of the most corrupt and unjust ruling elites in the world. Now they are having to come to terms with their own party's lack of principle.

The exact details of the corruption are still being investigated. It is generally admitted that the *cúpula* (group at the top) of the PT bribed political parties of the right to join their alliance in Congress and gave monthly payments to congressmen of the right to support their legislation. (The PT president, Lula, won with 67 per cent of the vote but the PT only has a fifth of the seats in Congress – though it is the largest party.)

As for the legislation itself, Lula's government pushed through neoliberal reforms of which Tony Blair would be proud. These included the reform – effectively partial privatisation – of an extremely unequal public pensions system, which nevertheless left the inequalities almost untouched; and amending Brazil's relatively radical, albeit contradictory, 1988 constitution to facilitate the creation of an independent bank with the freedom to raise interest rates as high as it wants. There have been social reforms – for example, a basic (but very low) income for all poor families – though these are hardly adequate to the problems; and many of them, along with the relatively progressive aspects of Lula's foreign policy, did not need Congressional approval.

The corruption also extended to the PT's strategy for winning the election. This, it turns out, was based on a *caixa dois* (literally 'a second cash till' – a secret slush fund) whose sources of donations seem to have included businesses contracted by PT

municipal governments, public companies and private companies seeking government contacts. The publicist responsible for Lula's 2002 advertising campaign admitted he had received money from these PT funds through an illegal account held by the PT in the Bahamas.

There is evidence of personal corruption. The PT treasurer received a Land Rover; the finance minister and Trotskyist-turned-monetarist, Antonio Palocci, made a suspiciously vast speculative gain on a house. But far more important than corrupt individuals is the corruption of democracy and of political goals and values as a result of the instrumental political methodology of 'any means necessary'. It is significant in this respect, that the mastermind of all this was José Dirceu, an ex-guerrilla leader, responsible indeed for kidnapping the German ambassador and a devoted party man. He had been party president since 1994 and the architect of Lula's election campaigns from 1994 to the victory of 2002. It's unlikely that his record will show any sign of personal corruption.

The evidence of corroded ends is stark. The revelations of political corruption came after it had become clear that the government had moved from a supposedly tactical acceptance of the IMF terms to a wholehearted acceptance for neo-liberal orthodoxy. Interest rates are, at 19 per cent, among the highest in the world. The government continues to generate an internal surplus far high than that demanded by the IMF, which no longer feels it has to have an agreement with Brazil. It can rely on the economists who determine policy in the Palácio do Planalto.

Perhaps the most crucial signal that the leadership had broken the bond at the heart of the original PT project – that of achieving social justice by building on the power of popular movements to do so – was Lula's failure to turn his electoral mandate and huge international support into a democratic counter force to drive a hard bargain with the IMF. 'He could have got much better terms in order to pursue the social programme for which he was elected. At that point, the people would have been on the streets behind him,' says Plinio de Arruda Sampaio, a founder of the party with Lula and now, in his 70s, he stood (winning 13% of the vote) in the party's recent presidential election, to test 'for the last time' whether the party retains any integrity. It's a widely shared belief.

It's not just Brazilian leftists who are shocked and disoriented by what has been happening in the elegantly designed corridors of office – but patently not of power – in Oscar Niemeyer's Brasilia. Lula and the PT are not a Soviet-style 'god that failed'. But many western leftists, myself included, vested great hopes in the PT's ability to combine, in Plinio de Arruda Sampaio's words, 'the building of popular movements with occupying spaces in the political system'.

This was seen as a strategy for socialist change more powerful than the failed parliamentarism of west European social democracy, yet building on struggles for the franchise and other liberal political rights in a way that the Leninist tradition rarely did. The disaster of the Lula government is not just a repeat of the classic scenario of a social democratic party that talks left in opposition and is pressured

into compliance when it gets to office. The PT's particular origins in mass movements resisting the military dictatorship of the 1960s, 1970s and early 1980s, along with strong traditions of popular education and self-organisation, produced something new.

One illustration of the PT's innovative politics was its relationship, historically, with the landless movement MST – a movement that occupied the land of the rich *latifúndios*[itals] and then tried to use it for co-operative agriculture. The PT both supported this movement and was supported by it, while at the same time respecting its autonomy. Another illustration was the way that when the PT won the mayoral elections in cities such as such as Porto Alegre in Rio Grande do Sol, Rio Branco in the Amazon, Sao Paulo, Recife and very recently Fortaleza in the north east, it sought to 'share power with the movements from whence we came'. These were the words of Celso Daniel, the mayor of Santo André, who was murdered in 2001 for trying to stop corruption. The PT did so by opening up the finances of the municipality to a transparent process of participatory decision-making through which local people had real power. One of the main driving motives behind this experiment was to expose and eliminate corruption.

How, then, could the party of participatory democracy have become the party of corruption, following the methods of every other Brazilian party before it? I went to Brazil to find out.

I had been to Brazil several times to write about the participatory political experiments of the PT and to engage in the World Social Forum hosted by the then PT government of Porto Alegre. What had happeneed to all this democratic creativity? Was the emphasis on participatory democracy really only a feature of the state of Rio Grande Do Sol with it's highly developed civil society? For a reality check I began in Fortaleza, where a radical PT member, Luizianne Lins, had stood for mayor and won against the wishes of the leadership; Jose Dirceu had flown in from Sao Paulo to campaign against her.I attended meetings of citizens deciding on their priorities for the city's plan to negotiate over them with Luizianne. The partcipation was strong, pushing municipal policies in a more egalitarian direction. The co-ordinator of the Office for Participatory Democracy, Neiara De Morais explained how they were developing the politics of participation: `popular participation is about more than the budget: we aim for it to run through every aspect of the municipality.' They also have a process of training or `formacão', explaining the workings of the government machine, especially the finances and helping ` people to become fully conscious of the process, improving, taking control over it'. Clearly, in Fortaleza, 2,500 miles from Porto Alegre, here was a participatory administration that had taken the process deeper than its original and world famous home. My next stop had to be Sao Paulo and then to Rio to talk with people who had sounded the alarm about signs of a leadership that bypassed this grass roots radicalism at an earlier stage.

I visited Chico De Oliveira, Marxist sociologist and a founder of the PT, from Pernambuco, like Lula. He had recently written an excoriating letter of resignation from the PT over the government's economic policy. His analysis was comprehensive. First he stressed the context of the Brazilian state, which gives greater powers of patronage to its politicians than possibly anywhere else in the world, offering huge opportunities for clientelism. The president has 25,000 jobs in his gift. The French socialist president, Francois Mitterand, by way of contrast, had 150. The electoral system, in which people tend to stand not on party lists but as individuals, also makes for weak parties. Patronage and bribery has been a normal way of getting measures through congress, and through the assemblies of regional and municipal government, which mirror the presidential system.

It was exactly this system that the participatory budget was fashioned to attack. The idea was that instead of bribery and patronage, the mayor or governor (and, it was imagined, eventually the president) would rely on a process of shared decision making with institutions of popular part cipation. This would be underpinned by a process of direct and delegate democracy that councillors and regional deputies would be unable to ignore because their voters were part of it. A visit to Porto Alegre confirmed this. 'We ruled for 16 years without bribery,' said Uribitan de Souza, one of the architects of the participatory budget, both in Porto Alegre and for the state of Rio Grande Do Sul.

The essential principle guiding Uribitan, Olivio Dutra and the other pioneers of participatory budgeting was the recognition that electoral success does not on its own bring sufficient power even to initiate a process of social transformation but that an electoral victory can be used to activate a deeper popular power. Such an approach, without immediately developing new institutions, would have led at least to the kind of mobilisation that *petistas* expected from Lula in dealing with the IMF and a hostile congress and Brazilian elite. Indeed, one government insider told me that bankers expected it too and were reconciled to some tough bargaining. But from Lula's 1994 election defeat (when many had been looking forward to a PT government) to the successful campaign of 2002, the leadership of the party was not in the hands of people with a deep commitment to participatory democracy.

D'Oliveira stresses the emergence of a group of trade union leaders, including Lula, whose approach was essentially one of pragmatic negotiations. He argues that in the 1980s, when the independent trade union movement was highly political as its every action, however economic or sectional in intent, came up against the dictatorship, they appeared as radical political leaders. But as the militant trade unions, in the car industry especially, faced rising unemployment and declining influence, the influence of leaders was one of caution and pragmatism. Another group in the post 1994 leadership – for example, ex-guerrilla José Genuino – had reacted to the fall of the Berlin Wall by dropping any belief in radical change and adopting a variant of Tony Blair's 'third way', weak social democracy. And finally there was Dirceu, whose break from the Communist Party in the 1970s had been over the armed struggle, not its instrumental, ends-justify-means methodology.

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Dirceu's end – shared by every *petista* – was 'Lula Presidente'. For Dirceu, this was by playing ruthlessly the existing rules of the game. For most *petistas* it was by also mobilising and educating the people to be ready to take actions themselves. But the difference in methodology was overwhelmed by the desire for a PT victory. People who tried openly to warn of corrupt deals with private companies, like César Benjamin, a leading official of the party until 1994, were rebuffed as disloyal.

'We believed too much in Lula,' confesses Orlando Fantasini, a deputy for Sao Paulo. A radical Catholic, Fantasini is part of a 'Left Bloc' of around 20 deputies and a few senators that was quick to demand an investigation into the corruption revelations. A number of these, including Fantasini, have now left the PT and are now joining or at least `sheltering' in the PSOL, a party formed by PT deputies who split from the party over the pension reforms.

Throughout the 1990s, Lula personified *petista* hopes for social justice and popular democracy. If Dirceu and the increasingly tight *cúpula* demanded greater autonomy, or argued for a centralisation of the party at the expense of the local nuclei in the name of a Lula victory, their demand was granted. In election campaigns, political campaigning in the market places and street corners gave way to marketing on the conventional model, activist campaigning gave way to paid leafleteers. Meanwhile, Lula drank bottles of whisky with the bosses of Globo, Brazil's Murdoch-like media monopoly, thinking he could get them on his side. The PT had established Brazil's first mass political party according to its own ethics of popular democracy, but after the disappointment of 1994 – and even more so of 1998 – it accepted the rules of Brazil's corrupt political system.

The PT's reputation for democracy has been based partly on the rights of different political tendencies to representation at all levels of the party. But from the mid-1990s, according to César Benjamin and others, Dirceu started to use the slush fund to strengthen the position of the 'Campo Majoritário' (literally, majority camp), building a network of local leaders who depended on him. This, along with the autonomy demanded and granted for Lula's group, meant that the PT's democracy become ineffectual as the majority tendency monopolised central control and no other mechanisms of accountability were put in place.

As I listened to party activists and ex-activists at every level, from the organisers of Fortaleza's new-born participatory democracy to a veteran leftist advising Lula in the Palàcio do Panalto, it became clear how interlinked the two scandals are. The neoliberalism of the government and the systematic corruption in the organisation of the party go hand in hand. The steady strangling of democracy – which is, after all, what corruption is about – meant that the party lost all autonomy from the government. It also meant that all the mechanisms linking the party to the social movements and therefore acting as a political channel for their expectations, their pressure and their anger had been closed down. Even Marco Aurelio Garcia, co-founder of the PT and Lula's chief advisor on foreign affairs, felt he had no way of calling the economics minister to account.

What now? Everyone recognises that the corruption disaster is a huge defeat. 'Our strategies have to be for the long term,' says José Correio Leite, from the now-divided left tendency Democratic Socialism (DS). The elections for the party leadership present a short term opportunity for different responses to be debated. As I write they are entering their second round. In the first round Ricardo Berzoini of the Campo Majoritário, with Jose Dirceu on his slate, won 42% against at total left vote of 58%. The results of the four main candidates of the left were extremely close: Plinio received 13.4%, Maria do Rosario, with the slogan `we want our party back' won 13. 2%, Valtar Pomar who is associated with the left the Majority Camp and a critic of the cupula but a Lula loyalist and Raul Pont, twice Mayor of Porto Alegre, and a leading member of the DS, standing a platform of radical reforms to party and state each got over 14.5% with Pont 0.003% ahead of Pomar. Raul Pont will go into the second round. Plinio and 400 of his supporters, are leaving the party. The leadership's conduct of the elections did not pass Plinio's integrity test. He wrote a strong article in Folha de Sao Paulo accusing it of bussing supporters to the poll and paying en masse for their registration fees and arguing that the hold of Dirceu and the group around him is too strong for Pont and the left to effectively break. Without the votes of the Plinio camp, and with the mobilising power of the leadership's machine, it is unlikely that Raoul Pont will win, though Pomar is supporting him. Those leaving the party will join the PSOL but not as a permanent political home, more as a transition, emerging their hope out of a wider dialogue and collaboration with social movements like the landless movement and the left in the trade union federation CUT. Indeed they do see electoral activity as their priority but rather will return to working with social movements.

 PSOL is hardly a full fledged political party, more a party in the making which will grow rapidly in the present crisis of the PT. Led by a widely respected, very principled Senator, Helouisa Helena, it tries to recapture the early radical spirit of the PT but has not as yet really shown an ability to develop those early principles in the present very different context.

Those remaining in the party are also loyal to the early days of the PT. 'We must find a way of consolidating and developing the real PT traditions. We cannot let the *cúpula* destroy this,' says Luciano Brunét, who supported fellow Porto Alegren, Raul Pont.

All agree 'the situation is open – very open.' They also stressed the importance of international discussions. Across the world, there is an experimental left refusing the idea that all that remains for the left is a kind of Blairism, or an abandonment of any engagement with electoral politics. The disaster facing the PT requires us not to turn away and search elsewhere for a new political holy grail, but rather to learn with our *petista* or ex-*petista* friends from their defeat and deepen the innovative but incomplete answers they were beginning to give to questions that face us all.

See also dossier (http://www.tni.org/reports/newpol/brasildossier.htm) and artcile by Emir Sadir

5.

TECHNO-POLITICAL TOOLS OF INQUIRY

Hot issues/questions on techo-political tools

Mayo Fuster

How could technologies introduce highlights on innovative forms of democracy and political organization? How could they improve the possibilities for, and the means of achieving, more direct, less mediated, forms of democratic organisation? How can these new social tools open forms of democratic participation beyond the logic and the limits of the representative systems? Are there limitations and negative consequences of the new technologies in the process of achieving this ideal of a more radical democracy?

How new technologies are affecting processes of mobilization and the facilitation of swarming dynamics; the development of new forms of organization, communication and internal decisional making of the movements; the emerging of communities of creation and production and different ways of knowledge management?
Which are the most inspiring experiences in the application of new ICT to processes of autonomous social mobilization, organization, communication, creation of communities?

Which limits, traps, difficulties, contradictions are emerging in the first experiences curried out along this line of search?

What does define a techno-political tool? Which principles could emerge and guide the accumulation and development (of knowledge, wisdom, ideas, reflections, decisions) of experiences of "techno-political tools"?

How do new technologies increase confidence in the possibilities of political change? How far do new technologies allow for/facilitate mass communication and development of opinion independently of elite control? How could they approach differently the dialectic between multiplicity and unity, autonomy and common?

Which is new and which is not new on the politics after the net?

FREE/OPEN SOURCED POLITICS, STARTING POINTS & PROPOSALS

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> *"This article is distributed in the hope that it will be useful, but WITHOUT ANY WARRANTY"*[109]

"Every human being, every man, woman and child, has the inalienable right to access information, communication and commerce. To this end the Internet has evolved to serve mankind … The Internet is the nervous system of this planet. We are all connected via this system. Any restrictions on the free flow of energy through this system must be viewed as an impediment to the overall health of the system and must be remedied. The Internet is an evolutionary force that must be accommodated. It will continue to revolutionize the way we communicate, do business and learn. For too long, the primitive systems of governments have sought to retain power by controlling just these same functions. Those systems are now obsolete! The Internet is Democracy in its most pure form, without awkward political processes. The power of the Internet is unlimited." HIP INC., http://www.hippy.com, "The Internet Manifesto"

This article contains emerging ideas and tries to open up or show possible ways to take advantage of living within highly-connected networks available in rich countries for the last 10 years.

1. INTRODUCTION

10 years of connected societies

Rich countries are becoming increasingly connected to the Internet. In addition, most people living in these countries have small devices that allow them to call (voice and/or video) anyone almost anywhere in the world. This has been happening for ten years.

I assume that this is the historical fact that is dramatically changing 20% of people's daily lives. Ten years is not a long time and apart from the economic digital divide[110], we must also talk about a generational digital divide. Some people, older than 35, are

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109   From General Public License text (GPL) - http://www.gnu.org/copyleft/gpl.html
110   . The digital divide is the gap between those with regular, effective access to digital technologies and those without.

reluctant to undertake further steps to advance in an information society. We can expect a number of people who are technically illiterate within the coming years.

I can also see a self-exclusion when some people distance themselves from any kind of digital technology. The majority of people driving cars are not specialists in automotive technology, however, they extensively use cars, motorcycles, trucks, and so on. When we encounter something new in communication technology that we don't understand, we think we are stupid. Is this intellectual damnation of self some sort of mysterious human behavior or is it just fear of the unknown? Young people catch on quickly to new ideas and concepts; older people on the other hand, find it difficult to change their habits.

How networked groups and collectives can use tools for logical self-organization

When a tool is well-designed, people don't need to spend too much time learning how to use it. At the same time, when people are already using a tool, they easily accept small modifications in said tool. Now is the time for users to demand friendly interfaces and worthy software processes for publishing, editing or other basic functions. Everyday, more tools are becoming standardized. Today, an information user must be familiar with concepts such as wiki, blog, rss, podcast, audio-video stream and of course, the *older* ones such as mailing list, newsletter, chat, messengers.

Who makes optimal use of the networks?

Free software communities are a type of organization that primarily uses networks to communicate, coordinate and distribute their work. In the top of that these communities creatres, as C. Formenti says, 'a sphere of social relationships integrated with economic, political and cultural relationships to the point that they become one body'. These communities are born and growed up in the Internet, but consolidated outside of internet When an open/free project is consolidated, it starts to manifest in the form of events, conferences and presentations.

The idea is to extract several *secrets* from internet-based communities and add them to the networked politics field. From ten years a go, after Castells theories, we can talk about networked states as a non clear institution as it was the simple state-nations before. States are loosing sovereignity about themselfs because of the global economical conditions and equilibria. In my opinion, political organizations must afrontate the challenges to be in the head front using networked tools, in order to create referencies for a better future organizations of the society.

What you have to learn and why. Be courageous!

In this times of post information revolution, already we all are trying to understand till where will arrive all these changes in this parcially networked society. Meanwhile the chips are everyday smaller and we cannot be victims of it.

First of all, I would like to say that a person using communication technologies needs a good memory to remember how a device or software works. We don't necessarily need to understand everything about it.

I'm sure most of you reading this article right now are saying "of course, that's obvious!". If you agree with that, we are ready to proceed to the next step.

An information user is not a mathematician, they're just someone with a good memory. That's why pre-teenagers are able to understand everything related to computers or mobile phones faster than older people. This is called the net-generation effect[111].

2. TECHNOLOGY MEDIATES?

What do we understand by mediate? Communication technologies just simplify and above all, multiply the ways to communicate, resulting in increased potential communication. Hopefully, more communication, well-managed and coordinated, can accelerate and improve human organizations.

Technology only manages the participation of many people. It can manage decision processes and large amounts of mailing lists. The latest technologies can also filter contents for you with incredibly high precision. In my own idea of technology, it doesn't mediate at all; I am in favor of transparent technology, transparent mediation and transparent representation where technology has to turn to an intimate tool.

The development of technology and how we use it, is always limited by human boundaries. Consider a tool, a hammer for example; it makes no sense if it is lost in the middle of a forest. No humans, no tools.

Good tools must mediate between humans and data to produce good representations.

Mediation, is a term defined in a positive way(*) . In despite of it, when we talk about technologies we interpret mediation in a negative way, as a sinonimous of an uncontroled filter, a kind of censure of the reality, a non transparent medium that we are forced to cross, a non save environment. In the most negative points of view, some people uses mediation technologies as a black box with all kinds of monsters inside.
In my opinion it occurs because of two main reasons: in one hand, generation tv people, we are afraid and/or disappointed with the use of massive corporative media last years. So, we have a tendency to relate communication monopolies with communication technologies. Generation TV, we are not trusting anymore screens.

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111   Growing Up Digital The Rise of the Net Generation, by Don Tapscott:
http://www.interneteconomybooks.com/Internet-Economy-Books/Growing-Up-Digital.htm

In the other hand, mediation implies a way to influence the results, a false short cut to the expected results and not direct contact between reality and results.

I use here mediation in the positive sense. Mediation as a way to make easy the relation and the use of data (digital data) by humans. And also mediation as an added way where communication flows, a way not avaliable without any phisical device, just a one more way.

I don't like to use mediation of tools as a sustituation of the human mediation Computers only are able to do a part of the job. Human mediation in open communities has the same role that it had during the history.

Talking about humans I'm avoiding, specially, the word *users*, instead of it I'm using *humans*, so it is a wider concept and allows expect any kind of reaction in front of a new tool. The technology is becoming more and more transparent, so let's speak about humans, people, person.

Representation & Representation Tools

'The ability to communicate ideas, visions or arguments all depend on the ability to represent these abstract notions in a concrete and recognizable'(*).

Read a map is not an easy process: read a geographical map, for example, requires a previous abstraction by the user about the territory represented on it. It is also really usefull if the user has some previous experience using representations. For mathematical or conceptual representations, the user needs still more previous experience and knowlodge about representations tools.

When we talk about representation -based on real data, not only as an art creation-, we are including maps, 2 and 3-axis representations, timelines and a big sort of draws that represents data. Most of the good tools that I'm talking during this article, are post-APIs tools, that's: most of third part applications are just filters or new representations of the data it self.

One source of data allows infinite points of view of this data. In the middle: a representation tool. When we want easy representation tools, what we really want? What we can desire? Of course, humans, we where representing since the beginning of the times, that's clear. But in the digital era we can access to amounts of data never realized before. That makes more and more complex and interesting the study of representations.

In my opinion, for a non standard representation -that's a non geographical one, or non simple maths-based one- we need to start from a very very first stage. If we want a self-explained way of representing, we are limited to represent simple ideas, simple concepts.

A representation is made with a language and an amount of data. The language of the representantion is a list of codes, colors and/or shapes. And the dictionary is the so-called legend of the map. The limitations of the map and the legend makes us to use well known criteria on the use of symbols and easthetic components, and represent data in order to comunicate, or explain specifics messages.

(...) And this, essentially is what maps give us, reality, a reality that exceeds our vision, our reach, the span of our days, a reality we achieve no other way. We are allways mapping the invisible or the unattainable or the erasable, the future or the past, the what-ever-is-not-the-represent-to-our-senses-now and, through the gift that the map gives us, transmuting it, into everythiyg it is not. (...) (*)

3. COMPLEX SYSTEMS - NO PANIC, NO FEAR

The size of the cellules of a mouse is the same size as those of a blue whale. The neurons of a mouse are the same as the neurons of a human, the primary difference being the number of them and consequently, the number of connections.

We live in complex systems. Nature is extremely complex and we are just starting to understand how it works. Mutations and chemical reactions that occur every millisecond seem magic and on top of that, they work. But allow me to add something about complexity: when we cannot understand something, we usually say "this is too complex". When we are not trying to understand the process but are just users, the process seems simple and useful. It's not the same to drive a bus than to be a passenger on a bus. If you want to drive a bus, you will need some knowledge of basic mechanics and driving experience.

So what's happening? Sometimes we simply don't notice the complexity of the systems and tools we are using and sometimes it's too difficult to understand them. We have to use appropriate tools for each task or process.

Don't be afraid if I mention complexity - just imagine a tool that interfaces complexity, minimizing it and simplifying it according to your knowledge and needs.

From visible structures to natural complexity

From a Before-the-Net point of view, we understood the networks we were living in. In this context, visible meant simple. When we cannot access all the data in our networks, we feel a bit lost and we start to sense the chaos around us. Not enough time to process all the information equals informational stress. In my opinion, this is the right moment to take a step forward and begin to use appropriated tools, efficient ones that solve the problem.

4. NETWORKS OF… DATA, THAT'S THE QUESTION!

Network is the most widely used word in the network, especially when people try to describe chaotic or comprehensible relationships between entities. We know what a network is[112] , we have been defining it for years. We also represent these relationships in 2- or 3D graphs in the hope of producing a magic image that will reveal a lot about this highly-connected, multiple reality.

In rich countries, in the context of *networkization* of life, data can be interpreted in many ways. Data means time storage, past logs and dictionaries/encyclopedias. Data also means communication. This data communication is the real medium for social organizations of people.

Under people and collective relationships there are networks of data -more commonly, flows of data. The tools we need to interface this amount of data must be complex in their core but at the same time they must be simple for humans. Most standard protocols for metadata date back to 1999 and 2000. Good tools can understand our needs using these protocols and can deliver it to us in nice, effective, easy ways of visualization.

A node in a data network is an important amount of data that's really well indexed, semantically linked to others nodes and easily accessible from the Internet.

Data must be indexed as efficiently as possible. The more sensible data we have, the more a tool will satisfy us and our needs.

Quality of data is the limiting step for the rest of the process.

Fig 1. Good tools
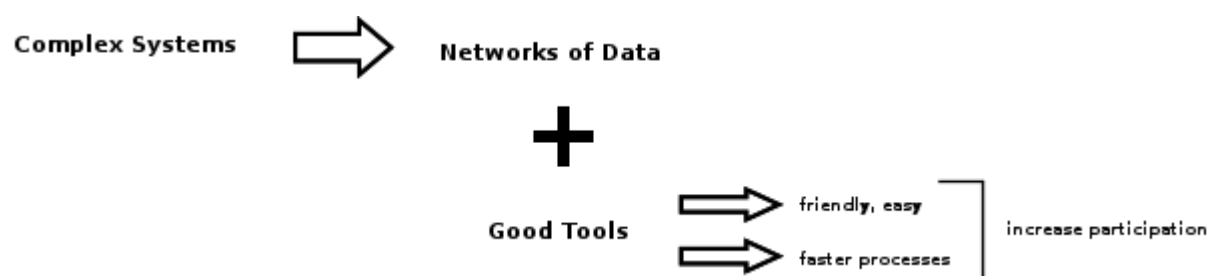
We can find two data tendencies that our tools have to manage.

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112   . Bo Grönlund, 'The Urban Question' and 'The Rise of the Network Society' (1999)
            http://hjem.get2net.dk/gronlund/Castells.html#anchor350760

➢ Data from crossing data

To avoid a non-accessible amount of data we need to cross, compare and filter data from several sources. With appropriate filters and managers, we can get an essence of all the available data.

➢ Data about user behaviors

The tool records all our actions while using it. With this information, the tool can adapt itself to you; making their use easy and more effective. Imagine the application of this data in commercial or governmental uses, its terrible! Nevertheless, they have been using it for some time and its use is increasing everyday. Now is the time to start using these types of techniques to our benefit.

You are the node: data point of view

Imagine a room. Imagine two people sitting opposite one another in the room. If each person draws an image of their perception of the room, the two images will be completely different. This physical example demonstrates how your point of view can vary with respect to other people's, particularly when we are not only talking in physical terms, but also ideological, cultural and political terms.

When we talk about network visualization, we try to choose between several visualization tools. In my opinion, the most important thing we must decide is which point of view we want to communicate. I'm talking about Self-centered Networks visualization. The customization of the point of view is the first parameter to be considered when we want to represent relationships between nodes, that's networks.

Maybe there is only one database but there is more than one possible representation of the data it contains. Tools for browsing data have to allow users to specify some parameters about how and from where they want to see the data.

Fig 2. Rules

$$rules = F(time)$$

5. TOO MUCH INFORMATION - THIS IS THE GOAL!

When you arrive at the point where you receive more information than you can process, this is the critical moment when the good tools start to prove themselves useful, necessary and more effective. In other words: when you manage a large-enough amount of information to make you feel stressed and irritable, you have to seriously think about the help of technology of information.

Web 2.0[113] is a slightly fashionable term and I'm only using it because it seems its meaning has really extended to everyday applications. I will also use the term 2.0 to discuss tools. When I am talking about tools, I'm usually referring to them as software but also as combinations between software and hardware (servers).

I use the term tools 2.0 as the interface between users and networks of sensitive data.

A good information tool or a 2.0 tool has to be able to get good data (as sensitive as possible) from dynamic online databases. This is possible because really good data has good APIs[114] to make it accessible. Most of the important data tanks -like google[115], wikipedia[116], yahoo[117],... publicly offer their APIs to remotely access the data and open the process for their data representations.

One of the latest examples of this type of tool in free software is Amarok[118] , a music manager and jukebox. Amarok crosses data from wikipedia, music related to music databases, lyrics databases, covers databases, etc. Amarok also learns from your listening habits, so Amarok can satisfy you more everyday.

The emerging technologies I am discussing are more complex than mass sms hurricanes or some other "new" tactics that political parties and governments are beginning to try. Most of these offline groups are just using simple and sometimes useless methods. They are using 1.0 methods.

Tools 2.0 have to be sincere with us. They have to translate effectively to be a user-friendly, simple interface for fashion and gift searches and queries for desires etc.

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113 . Web 2.0 (from wikipedia): refers to a second generation of services available on the World Wide Web that lets people collaborate and share information online. In contrast to the first generation, Web 2.0 gives users an experience closer to desktop applications than the traditional static Web pages. Web 2.0 applications often use a combination of techniques devised in the late 1990s, including public web service APIs (dating from 1998), Ajax (1998), and web syndication (1997).

114 . An application programming interface (API) (from wikipedia) is the interface that a computer system, library or application provides in order to allow requests for services to be made of it by other computer programs, and/or to allow data to be exchanged between them.

115 . Google APIs: http://www.google.com/apis/

116 . Wikipedia, and its software, mediawiki, have a lot of APIs to make queries using a lot of software languages.

117 . Yahoo! Developer Network: http://developer.yahoo.com/

118 . Amarok, Rediscover Your Music! Amarok is a music player for Linux and Unix with an intuitive interface. Amarok makes playing the music you love easier than ever before - and looks good doing it. http://amarok.kde.org/

A tool 2.0 is a complex tool. It is a kind of configurable parser for human networks.

Usually these growing models of tools follow the same structure. Let's take the example of wikipedia. Everything initially starts with an application that allows you to store data in a sensitive way. The wikipedia project wrote a second generation wiki called mediawiki[119] . This platform was the starting point. Subsequently[120], people started to use wikipedia and the number of articles has quickly multiplied since 2001. The Wikipedia process had to add and assume its size several times at least. Wikipedia became a community and it had to organize and coordinate the project, choosing the best rules and decision systems.

Today, wikipedia is also a big container of good data and there are many APIs to easily access this data from other tools.

6. HIERARCHY, LEADERSHIP AND HORIZONTALITY

Warning! The following paragraphs contains forbidden words.

Can hierarchy or leadership be compatible with horizontality in free sourced communities?

I'm talking about communities, as groups of people with a sosteinable size accordint to the goal and the work of each community. Hierarchy, Leadership and horizontality systems depends a lot on the size of the communities whom decide to use and redefine those options for organization, coordinatination and advance of their project.

I will use also the Castells[121] suffix *networked-* to refer to the complex and consistent network of data around us.

Networked Hierarchy

When we consider hierarchy, we used to think in military terms, with striped signs. The hierarchy I'm referring to is spontaneous and temporary, based on knowledge or responsibility/engagement hierarchies.

In a society as an space of flows -as M. Castells said-, hierarchies are responsabilities, filters about flows (moviment) of the most important information related to each

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119   . MediaWiki is a free software wiki package originally written for Wikipedia. It is now used by several other projects of the non-profit Wikimedia Foundation and by many other wikis, including this very website, the home of MediaWiki. http://www.mediawiki.org/

120   . History of wikipedia: http://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/History_of_Wikipedia.

121   . Ned Rossiter, 'Organised Networks: Transdisciplinarity and New Institutional Forms' (2006) http://info.interactivist.net/article.pl?sid=06/04/22/035228

community process or subprocess. I use to talk about participation hierarchies, or "talks who works" systems.

In an free source commnity, most of the work is made in a volunteers way, that meants people is there because they-want-to-be-there. The decicion to join a project comes form outside of the community; the commnunity is, simply, open.

Inside the free sourced communities there are a wide rage of organizational philosophies and structures; next section shows three examples of communities as a case of study[122].

Using *networked* as a dinamic grup of entities plus the communication flows between them, -and in the way for a networked politics hipothesis- we can use networked hierarchies, as the hierarchy rules in a network of people in the time of informacion technologies.

Networked Leadership

The definition of leadership according to Debian (see next section for further information about Debian) is:

"*The Debian Project Leader (DPL)[123] is the official representative of the Debian Project. They have two main functions, one internal and one external.*

In the external function, the Project Leader represents the Debian Project to others. This involves giving talks and presentations about Debian and attending trade shows, as well as building good relationships with other organizations and companies.

Internally, the Project Leader manages the project and defines its vision. They should talk to other Debian developers, especially to the delegates, to see how they can assist their work. A main task of the Project Leader therefore involves coordination and communication."

The concept of Leadership was chanching a lot along the history. In the new digital networked society it is not different:

"*As a result, a post industrial digital age style of leadership is emerging characterized by stronger horizontal linkages among elites across different sectors and even different countries, especially government leaders, private entrepreneurs and executives, researchers and civil society leaders.*"[124].

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122   . The Power of Maps, Denis Wood, p5. 1992. The Gilford Press.
123   . Debian Project Leader: http://www.debian.org/devel/leader
124   . Ernest J. Wilson III, 'LEADERSHIP IN THE DIGITAL AGE' ()
http://www.cidcm.umd.edu/wilson/leadership/Leadership_in_the_Digital_Age.pdf

Networked Leadership makes the person who lead the project to work serving the project more that the rest. Of course, human personalities are not included in this analisis. Leader is just one place on the hierarchy, the most public and, ussualy powerfull place in the hierarchy system.

A *desirable* networked hierarchy would be based on taxonomies and on folksonomies. An example of networked hierarchy, descentralized with non-hierarchical ubiquity could be de blogsphere, where each reader has his/her own point of view and his/her intimane hierarchies in terms of trust of the information you read.

Horizontality of the network

Horizontality in terms of "you are where you want", in terms of open paths to each branch of the organizational tree is a non equalitarium term. Horizontality here is not used as an homogenazation of roles and tasks of people; on the contrary, horizontaly means here a way to, actually, coexist lot of heterogeneities[125].

Non concentration of power and resources is another requeriment for a free source organization or project. In that sense, horizontality can refers also to that queston: horizontality of power, of resources, of opportunities.

A third use of horizontality as a homogenizaton of individual rights within the network. One people, one vote, ok, but also, one people, one voice.

Horizontality is wrong as a equalitarian tasks, knowledge or responsabilities strategy. The richest quality of the networks itself is their flexibility, their difussion, their heterogenity of indivuduals.

The way that open communities networks works, in part, is a consequence of the phisical design of the digital networks technicaly. Internet is designed to be like it is, independent from the individual desires of control. Hierarquies, horizontalities and leaderchips using networked tools could be compatible. These arguments are not talking about magical formula for the abolition of conflicts; this is another field that makes no so much difference during the history.

7. DECISION SYSTEMS[126]

Classically, decision systems are clasify by:

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125   . J. Nualart, 'About riereta' (2004) http://riereta.net/tiki/tiki-read_article.php?articleId=7

126   . Very interesting post and discusison: mitchell"s blog: http://weblogs.mozillazine.org/mitchell/archives/2006/06/the_community_and_decisionmaki_1.html

    * Unanimity
    * Majority: requires support from more than 50% of the members of the group.
    * Consensus: tries to avoid "winners" and "losers". Consensus requires that a majority approve a given course of action, but that the minority agree to go along with the course of action.
    * Sub-committee: involves assigning responsibility for evaluation of a decision to a sub-set of a larger group
    * Plurality: simple majority
    * Dictatorship or autocracy

Let's take a look at the way that open networked communities takes decisions.
I took three examples of auto-organization and auto-management of free software communities with names like Debian, Drupal and Indymedia in mind:

Decision systems set rules or ways to assist the project to advance. There are numerous proposals to tackle this issue ranging from voting, using different rules to decision-maker hierarchies, all within the framework of the rules naturally.

In my experience, decision systems must be tailored as much as possible to each specific case. The size of the collective ~~or~~ and the networks involved in a process is the main parameter when you want to find the best way to take plural decisions.**(X5)**

It seems clear that the bigger and unlocated is a community, the more rules and resources are needed for a participative decision system. From a presential small collective,, using consensus with discussion methods, to an international one hundred people chat meeting for the discussion of the first draft of a new document about the community itself there is not so much in common. That's sure, but a part from that, it is also very important the character of the community, that's the social posicion that the community takes publicly. Same rules could be seen too burocratic for some people and too superficial for some other people.

It seems clear that every decision system needs some rules. However, rules, as the whole system, must also be temporary and adapted to requirements. I have experienced a lot of hefty bureaucratic processes for small groups of people. When people spend more time reporting their work than actually doing it, system reports are not scaled and this makes people unhappy doing their work. Of course, I am talking in terms of free software communities where most of the time dedicated to a project comes from volunteers. The system chosen must be a participator-centered service, assisting and accelerating their work. Projects coming from an offline style have less options for decision systems. They are limited to decision systems derived from presential or semi-presential meetings and voting rituals.

On the other hand, we can find a wide range of decision systems management tools but the main secret of success in the case of free software projects is that the structure of these communities is based on the goal of the project. Every task or assignment is designed to help the project advance. Concretize the goal of the project, the mission and aims of a group, makes easy clarify decisions and, by extenssion, take decisions.

At the same time it contributes to feel yourself part of the community and, by extenssion, part of the project.

Debian.org[127] (born in 1996)

'The Debian Project is an association of individuals who have made common cause to create a free operating system. This operating system that we have created is called Debian GNU/Linux, or simply Debian for short.' (About Debian, http://www.debian.org/intro/about.en.html)

As you can see, the definition itself is the goal of the project it self.

So, Debian is the name of a linux-based operating system, that you can install for free in your computer. Linux has really advanced graphical environments, such as Gnome or KDE. Now is, at least, the moment to start using the products of our public free software market.

The Debian community is a very structured community[128] with strict rules for almost everything. I really recommend taking a look at the good debian pages where everything is explained. Debian uses several decision systems including a decision-maker according to the rules and specialized voting systems[129].

A first view to Debian rules[130] could be a bit hard because of the number of rules and their clarity and directness. An explanation of this character could be referred to the language in the world of programming. Coding, you should be very precise; a simple colon can make a program unusable. Maybe the language of the Debian rules and, may I say, constitution texts are extremely directs and univocal, they are not in the tipical legal style. They tries to find an effective and clear way to comunicate some ways of organization, some behaviours in front of certain situations. This comes from the programming code way of thinking.

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127   . About Debian GNU/Linux: (from Wikipedia) Debian, organized by the Debian Project, is a widely used distribution of free software developed through the collaboration of volunteers from around the world. Since its inception, the released system, Debian GNU/Linux, has been based on the Linux kernel, with many basic tools of the operating system from the GNU project.
128   . http://www.debian.org/devel/constitution
129   . The Debian Voting System: http://seehuhn.de/comp/vote
130   . More Debian links: Debian decision-making: http://www.us.debian.org/devel/constitution | Debian Voting Information: http://www.us.debian.org/vote/

Fig 3. Simplest Free Software scheme
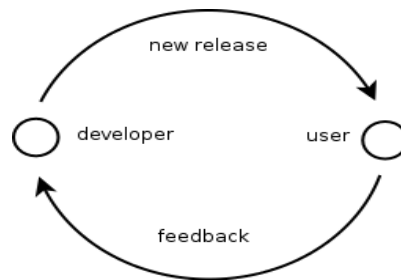
Drupal.org[131] (2000)

Drupal is a growing community based around the goal of building and maintaining a content
management system for free use and distribution in accordance with the GPL license.

In other words, drupal is a web site and a system to administrate this web site. And again, the goal is the definition of the project. A part from generalists goals like "make a better world", could that be possible for a political project define such goals as clearly as we see on free sourced communities?

In Drupal, you have a leader, a core team and a lot of contributors. In terms of organizational structures, Drupal is still in the early stages and at the moment you can find debates about the democratic needs for drupal's project decisions.

Drupal mainly uses publics forums for debates. There are historical threads on forums, where new modules and improvements have appeared from. The style of the discussions they use still respects the old etiquette and the final decision is made by the core team, so it doesn't seem too democratic if you forget who is who in the project. This is a participation hierarchy case. And, of course, everyone can contact the core people directly.

Drupal is interesting to study the evolution of the organization of the project itself and the management of this fast growth, that makes difficult to get any perspective about what's going on, from inside specially.

Indymedia.org Independent Media Center[132] (1999)

'Indymedia is a collective of independent media organizations and hundreds of journalists offering grassroots, non-corporate coverage. Indymedia is a democratic media outlet for the creation of radical, accurate, and passionate tellings of truth.' **(http://indymedia.org)**

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131   Drupal website: http://drupal.org
132 IMC website: http://indymedia.org

Indymedia is one of the most important networks for independent media contents.
I decided to use Indymedia as an example for two main reasons. Firstly because I was one of the founding members of Indymedia Barcelona, which started 5 years ago. I learned a lot about how to organize an off-site team with a clear goal inside an almost global network of orher teams, forming a big free sourced community.

The second reason is more related to the topic of this article. Indymedia is a very good example of how to use the techniques of free software communities and apply them to a project whose requirements go beyond a technical level. Today, the technical aspect of Indymedia only represents a small fraction of all the work that volunteers from around the world are contributing every minute.

Decision systems in Indymedia are mainly by cosensus. The local groups can use their own way for decision-making. The global indymedia and the main indymedia site -http://indymedia.org- run with very good defined information process, using normal tools: email lists, chat, wiki-editions...

About indymedia it is interesting to explore how local stability of groups running indymedia's editions contrinute to the whole indymedia. Resources are distributed totally: from technical resources to video knowledge, from edit-copying volunteers work, untll translators and editors around the world. Everyone from indymedia, commonly, has a local indymedia as a reference, as a way to work, as a process of organization, as a handbook or a pandora's box how-to. 'Dont hate the media, be the media' is the main indymedia's slogan that clearly describes the goal of the project. Obviously, for an independent news project, as a social project, goal is dissambiguous and should be adapted to each news local habitat.

This autonomous-groups based-organization is a step forward in the organizations structure comparing to the other examples. In Indymedia most of local dayly text production is not gonna be reused for other editions. In Debian or Drupal, most of new good or accepted code -text-, it will be used and reused till it would be changed. In Indymedia not any local organization is critical. There is a number of local editions appearing and some others dissapearing or been inactive. In Debian or Drupal if some part of the package mainteiners stop working they will need spare people, because the project, probably, depends on their work too.

So, Indymedia looks a bit different from the other examples; different for the project goal, different for the public and social presence, different because of the use of the work it self. That's true but, at the same time, Indymedia is like Debian and Drupal in terms of freedom of knowledge, freedom of communication. In fact, in terms of freedom, they are the same.
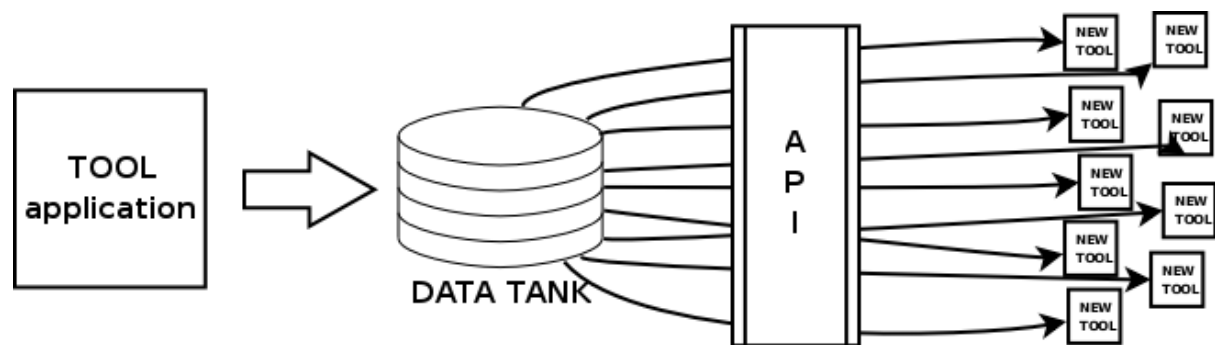
Figure 4: Main tool = data + api = lot of new tools

8. SEARCH FOR A MODEL

I would like to propose some notes for a model to start up a free sourced political project.

Political parties began in offline times. They need to do the opposite trip, learning from online organizations. On the other hand, a political party needs very clear rules for auto-organization.

The model would consist of elements of the Indymedia project, the Drupal project and the Debian project.

From indymedia

An offline organization needs to have good communication channels between teams and projects within the organization. It is also necessary to study the goal of the indymedia project. In comparison with the other examples, Indymedia's goal is to generate independent news and agendas, the other projects build software packages. Debian is a gnu/linux distribution and Drupal is a content management software tool.

From drupal

I'd take the naturality of the project assuming they are growing and changing rapidly. It's a good example of a phase in the process. It demonstrates how rules must be temporary depending on the size of the project. I also recommend reading the Drupal mission and principles because they perfectly define what is public and what is to serve the people.

From Debian

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I would take the most important ingredients: organization and coordination. This is my proposal: analyze the Debian rules-for-all and try to adapt them to a networked political party. Debian defines almost everything concerning rules, internal processes, quorum conditions, leadership and hierarchy. The Debian organization could be the equivalent of the first white book for a networked political project.

At this point, there's still a lot to be decided. Let's take a look at the differences between classical offline organizations of political parties and online free community projects. We need to find translations or ways to replace open and free habits with classical ones online.

Every emerging model has the challenge to appropriately define how to reinterpret concepts like:

➢ Volunteer-based

➢ Clear and open goals of the project

➢ Open decision systems

➢ Open process discussions

➢ Clear leadership elections and tasks

➢ Public access to main team members

➢ Open way for contributions

As Castells[133] pointed in 2001, the EU fact is changing the concept of the intouchable EU states because their power of decission, their level of autonomy is also changing. Currently the final decission in EU is taked for a complex relationship network of institucions -national and supernacional ones-. The nature and role of the state changes from the nation-state in the industrial era to what Castells calls the networked state in the informational era. That indicates that is the time for networked politics?

Accepting the Castells vision[134], we can agree about the urgence to start implementing the use of networked technologies in any new political project. Social moviments, from ecologists to women rights groups, most of them, they were doing it from the beginning of the net.

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133   . M. Castells, 'Conversations with History', Institute of International Studies, UC Berkeley
(2001) http://globetrotter.berkeley.edu/people/Castells/castells-con0.html
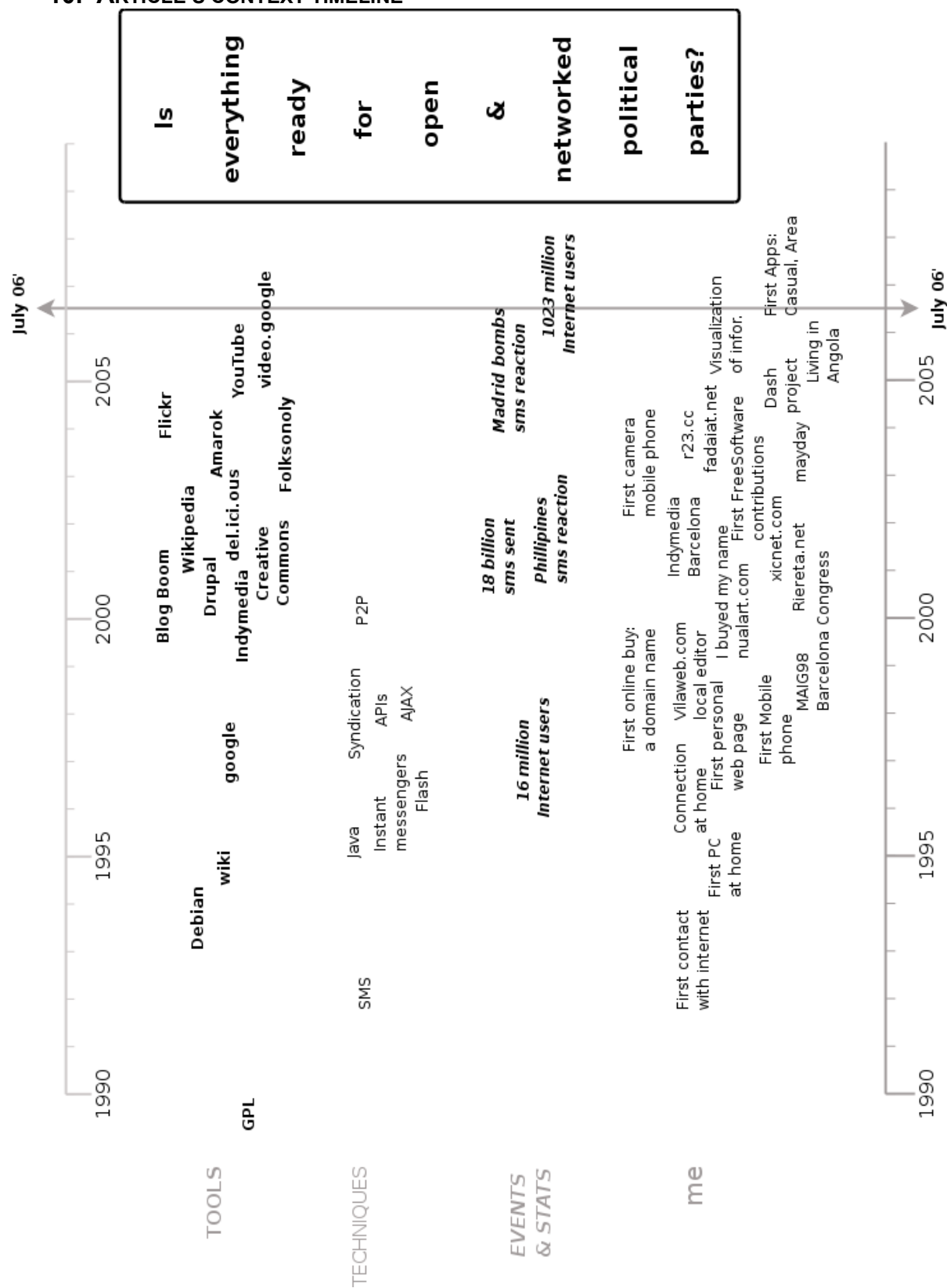134   . Manuel Castells' "The Rise of the Network society" (1996)

9. APPENDIX

Sentences

➢ If you think that free technology can help people on a global-level, then technology must be cherished, studied and improved for your benefit also.

➢ The best technology is transparent technology.

➢ Optimizing the use of technology is not easy. We need to start addressing a new problem: excess of technology. We must also think in terms of sustainable technology.

➢ Rules can be useful, in fact, this is the point of a rule, isn't it? So, if an organization is changing, their rules must always be temporary and optimized to be as useful as possible.

➢ All online, open decision systems share a common factor: scheduled, clear and participative phases. Time gives sense to the decision.

➢ If the debian goal is to build and maintain GNU/Linux distribution and the Indymedia project aims to produce independent news, what's the goal of an free sourced politics project?

➢ Folksonomy is the most democratic and easiest method of classifying things.

➢ Web 2.0 exists but it's nothing new under the netsky.

➢ I prefer to talk about Good Tools instead of Tools 2.0.

➢ Please don't use complex tools for really simple tasks (i.e. don't use a calculator to tell me the result of (23 + 230)/10, for example) -

➢ A 1-dimesional list of millions of search results where the reason for the order of this list is unknown, is just the first step in information visualization. Therefore, Google's current concept is not the future. Oops!

10. ARTICLE'S CONTEXT TIMELINE

Is everything ready for open & networked political parties?

July 06'

1990   1995   2000   2005   July 06'

TOOLS

GPL   Debian   wiki   google   Blog Boom   Flickr
Wikipedia   Amarok   YouTube
Drupal   video.google
Indymedia del.ici.ous
Creative   Folksonoly
Commons

TECHNIQUES

SMS   Java   Syndication   P2P
Instant   APIs
messengers   AJAX
Flash

EVENTS & STATS

16 million   18 billion   Madrid bombs
Internet users   sms sent   sms reaction
Phillipines   1023 million
sms reaction   Internet users

me

First contact   First online buy;   First camera
with internet   Connection   a domain name   mobile phone
at home   Vilaweb.com   Indymedia   r23.cc
First PC   First personal   local editor   Barcelona   fadaiat.net   Visualization
at home   web page   I buyed my name   First FreeSoftware   of infor.
First Mobile   nualart.com   contributions   Dash   First Apps:
phone   xicnet.com   mayday   Casual, Area
MAIG98   Riereta.net   project
Barcelona Congress   Living in
Angola

1990   1995   2000   2005   July 06'

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CATHCART'S LIST

A brief review of current movements and trends in information politics

Jamie King

The current social/technological moment puts one in mind of the paranoid Colonel Cathcart in Joseph Heller's *Catch 22*. Plagued by insecurities, the Colonel jots down a list of occurrences under his command that constitute, for him, a 'feather in the cap!!!' or a 'black eye!!!' The state of the list indicates the likelihood of his promotion or demotion, and thus his sense of well-being.

Unfortunately not all events in Cathcart's world can so easily be delineated. An occurrence can simultaneously be a 'feather in the cap!!!' in the eyes of one General and a 'black eye!!!' in those of another. Worse still, Cathcart himself can often not decide which is which: events appear in both the 'feather!!!' and 'black eye!!!' columns at the same time, or switch back and forth wildly between the two. The indeterminacy is a source of great distress to the Colonel. Never sure what an event portends, he is forced to analyse and discuss each in painful detail.

Like Cathcart, none of us today is quite sure in whose favour the intrigues of information technology lean. Corporate, military, capitalist, anti-capitalist: we all seem to using the same technologies, and, perplexingly, what is taken as 'radical' in one context is seen as reactionary in another. Case one: in the first weeks after September 11th, the media fixed on the advanced information technologies putatively used by al-Qaeda to manage its fighting cells: satphones, mobile data transfer, the internet and, to conceal messages as they traversed the network, strong cryptography and steganography. One report even suggested that the hijackers had checked out of a hotel before the attack because it couldn't provide them with sufficient bandwidth.

This intense, early focus on the technologies and techniques al-Qaeda used in its communications was significant. Whilst it might have been ludicrous to cast this 'terror organisation' as a band of technophiles, American military strategists had been arguing for some time that terrorist cells had something in common with the 'network society': their use of non-hierarchical, 'distributed' command structures to produce sturdy and flexible organisations. That, regardless of whether 'al-Qaeda' operatives relied on the stone-age tech of face-to-face communications, or used wireless-enabled laptops, made it a 'networked' organisation -- at least in the eyes of the American military. At a technology conference months later in Washington DC, the special assistant to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff went so far as to call al-Qaeda 'a dispersed enemy who basically is operating on a peer-to-peer system, at a very low level.'

So 'networked' was the shape of terror. But it was also uncannily mirrored in shape of the 'post-Fordist' world economy, with its 'fluid' work in the 'factory without walls, 'just-in-time' delivery and transnational outsourcing. Likewise the network became, quite famously, the structure of the 'open' activist networks. From 'flash mobs' and 'swarm' structures produced using a combination of handheld and online information technologies, anti-capitalist activists were held to embody networkedness. So did the very force they opposed, and so did the 'terrorists'. Did the fact that the 'enemy' was also using it make the network form a 'black eye' or a 'feather' in our caps? What would Cathcart have said? Well, he would have said nothing, because he'd have known that the military for some years has been turning over the idea that a distributed, non-hierarchical communications system could give the armed forces enough of the adaptability and speed evinced by anti-globalisation and 'terror' groups to achieve what is unblinkingly called 'full spectrum dominance'. At that DC Conference, Lieutenant Colonel Robert Wardell told technologists that peer-to-peer technology could in future be of 'significant value' to the military – who, he explained, intended to enlist the architects of peer-to-peer networks like Gnutella and Morpheus in the 'War Against Terror.'

What is of importance here is the US military's very real identification with the putative 'nature of the beast': its conviction that to defeat the enemy, you have to become like it. There is an important and constant refraction here between America and its technologies, and 'terrorists' and theirs; TCP/IP, the routing protocol at the centre of the net's operation, is a US innovation leading out of work begun during the Cold War, and it is still absolutely fundamental to all of the key communications technologies running over the network today. In 'learning lessons' from the September 11 actors' use of that network, and its principles, the US military is in fact re-reading the work it sponsored at the Advanced Research Project Agency (ARPA) in the light of the way it has been incorporated by its very own enemies.

The radical indeterminacy doesn't end there. One might forcefully argue, as Anustup Basu did, that networked information distribution was key in bringing into 'informatic affinity' the two 'disparate propositions' -- 'Saddam the evil one, and 9/11, the horrible crime' -- that produced in key nation states public consensus for the invasion of Iraq. In this reading, the explosive propagation of productive and reproductive media technologies during the last half decade has served to radically potentiate massification, towards the fascist peak, 'extinguish[ing] pluralities, and replac[ing] them with a monologue of power that saturates space with, and only with, the immanent will of the dictator.' This is because informatic exchanges do nothing but replicate the mega-utterances of the Dictator: 'fascism becomes a political reality when knowledge based exchanges between entities of intelligence give way to a technologism of informatics.'

We can clearly see how Basu is 'right'. All of those who have argued (myself included) for the liberatory or radical potentials of various information technologies have to contend with the fact that the production of consensus for war has continued with disturbing efficacy at the same time that producing and distributing media

technologies have been ceded more and more into the hands of the general population. The 'multitude', we might say, has got hold of these tools, but it has not yet delineated its will through that of the mass, for it is the mass, quite clearly, that allows the war machine to roll on.

But wait. Yes, the war machine grinds on, but the opposition that exists to the wars in Afghanistan or Iraq - and the speed with which this opposition has made its voice hear -- is far more intense than it was during, say, the Vietnam war -- unprecedented, in fact. And it is quite clear that one of the major factors playing into this intensity of opposition is the availability of *information*: whether it is about torture at Abu Ghraib or Guantanamo Bay, hearing the voices of bombed-addled Lebanese civilians, or reading the blogs of disillusioned GIs in Iraq. Another is the massively augmented capacity to self-publish and reproduce information. While what Tony Blair once called 'the case for war' can still undoubtedly be propagated in the current media environment, it can also be more swiftly dismantled than ever before.

To the next item on Cathcart's List: the arguments raging over the peer-to-peer (p2p) technologies that have become such a critical force in media distribution. We find further radical indeterminacy. There are many voices in this debate, but the vexed question is roughly as follows: is p2p going to smash corporate media, or revitalise it? Will p2p destroy Hollywood, or will corporate media be able to use cheap/free networked distribution to its advantage? This delicious dilemma is currently the talking point on entertainment industry boards across the world... *and* in the private IRC channels of the pirate network operators. Some of those running trackers like The Pirate Bay, which receives approximately 2,000,000 unique visitors a day, quite reasonably look to make a living from their re-distribution activities. Those on the corporate boards wonder not just if their livelihoods will be taken away, but if they can 'make peace' with the new networks and even find ways to to business with them. There is, in other words, an uncomfortable 'coming together' of the old and the new media networks around the corner. Will the feather be swapped from one cap to another, or will it be feathers all round?

Not unconnected to this is the phantasmagoric spectacle (some would say bubble) of 'Web 2.0', a phrase coined by O'Reilly Media in 2004 to refer to a 'second-generation' of Internet-based services — such as social networking sites, wikis and other online communication tools -- allowing people to collaborate and share information online. Web 2.0 services like Flickr and Digg are essentially enabling shells in which social activity takes place. Companies like Technorati and Blogpulse collate blog entries produced across the Web. Del.icio.us is composed entirely from bookmark-like information, essentially expressions of Web users' interests in particular items. With Web 2.0, our social activity has become a commercial product.

In this regard, Web 2.0 seems rather pernicious, a machine that commodifies human affect -- what object could be more loathed by a good autonomist? And worse still, as reported recently in the *New Scientist*, US Intelligence is funding research into the mass harvesting of the information that people post about themselves on the social networks enabled by 2.0 to build 'extensive, all-embracing personal profiles of

individuals'.-

Though anyone who has ever seen an average MySpace profile will have sympathy for poor spooks trying munge millions upon millions of the things into useable intelligence data, such reports are undeniably terrifying. And yet the forces unleashed in 2.0 services can be seen in an entirely different light. Indymedia, although by now dwindling in popularity, is an early example of a 2.0-style service. So is Wikipedia, a highly popular online encyclopedia to which any Web user can contribute. The forms of collaborative production (Yochai Benkler calls it 'commons based peer production') could also manifest themselves as something very dear to the autonomist heart. Indeed, in one case -- the Gnu/Linux operating system -- the form of production has been *so* powerful as to be able to compete head-on with the commercial alternatives. It is a body of software - indeed, it is not too grand to say, of work -- unparalleled in traditional cultural production models. This same power is now beginning to be harnessed in other avenues of media production. Is it necessarily the case that such social innovations will, like Flickr or del.icio.us, simply be consumed by corporate machines, or is it possible that they contain enough potency to challenge the corporate media model altogether?

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While this kind of indeterminacy might be exhilarating in a world of so many doomy certainties, anyone could be forgiven for posing again the Cathcartian dilemma: 'feather in the cap', or 'black eye'? Who will benefit from the current turns in information technology? What can we do to ensure things go 'our way' and not 'theirs' -- toward more direct, less mediated, forms of democratic organisation? Toward forms of deliberation and decision-making that minimise the gulf between representatives and those represented?

Two key factors must taken into account in understanding the current (multivalent) radicalisation of communication: digital reproduction, which provides for non-finite, zero-cost multiplication of media objects, and network distribution, which allows those multiplying objects to reach potential recipients with a minimum of resistance. One major consequence of this innovation is that an idea (musical, theoretical, scientific) is no longer limited to a cumbersome physical instantiation, but may immediately take flight, in a variety of digital formats, across the network, multiplying as necessary at zero cost.- It is this that allows the copy/paste, read/write, produce-and-disseminate Web that is realising itself today in popular forms like YouTube and MySpace.

This aspect of Tim Berners-Lee's vision for the Web was forgone when it first took off as a commercial proposition in the early 90s: what developed was a more top-down system in which those who possessed the technological know-how still dominated the production of new media content. Services like Indymedia sought to some extent to re-inscribe the Web's intrinsic 'write' capacity, but, it can be seen in retrospect, still attempted to centralise too much both in terms of editorial control and infrastructural maintenance. Web 2.0 represents the return of Berners-Lee's 'read

write' Web: its core applications and services are designed to allow users to easily create continuous Web-based content of all kinds. An early example of this was Blogger, a 'Web logging' tool that allows users to simply keep and update an online journal. As a few commentators pointed out contemporaneously, and even more today, blogging was a much more 'natural' use of the underlying characteristics of the internet than Indymedia's 'portal' model. Each individual chooses to run her own blog, and what to say on it, and if it is updated or not. 'Aggregation', bringing together the content from disparate resources, happens later, using standards like Really Simple Syndication, and this process is again not in the hands of 'editors' or 'collectives', but in those of the individual, or multitude.

Digital reproduction and networked distribution have a further, ineluctable consequence. In today's economy, information goods have zero 'marginal cost', that is, the cost of reproducing a given information is nothing. This apparently dry economic principle has interesting consequences for the structures of domination that were built in the last century. Creating, buying and selling media goods is the basis of the media industry and, therefore, of the social apparatus that defines how mass consensus is produced. At the moment, that industry is, with the co-operation of some governments, the UN and the EU, doing its best to prop up the intellectual property regime through a combination of legal activism (strengthening IP law and making it more punitive) and technological provisions (known broadly as 'Digital Rights Management'). However, the underlying conditions cannot be legislated away or technologically tricked-out. Knowledge divorced from physical media is 'non-rivalrous' by nature. Nothing short of legislating away the internet itself, or reversing the switch to digital media will re-establish intellectual work as the subject of property. Sooner or later, given continued increases in bandwidth, disk space and processor speed, and a consequent further glut of media, the price people are willing to pay for units of media will start to tend rapidly towards zero. When this tipping point is reached, the disruption we have seen with the acceleration of information production and reproduction to this point will seem rather petty. The entire basis of the media *qua* industry will have been undermined.

What is intensely peculiar about all of this is that the social change is being forced not by activists, or activist-lawyers, or even by technologists, but by millions upon millions of people doing what they want with consumer-grade information technology -- which is, downloading and sharing media online. Some few do it because they have a bone to pick with Hollywood. Many more do it because they can, because it is free and easy, because the risks of being caught are minimal. Most are downloading the products of the very industry whose business model their activities threaten -- however much they enjoy these products, and might therefore want to see them supported, they do not stop. None of this is conceived of as 'political' activity, and activists have, by and large, had nothing to do with Peer to Peer activity. (Piratbyrån -- The Bureau of Piracy -- a Swedish organization established to support filesharing and to promote new ideas about intellectual property in this regards, has received such attention precisely because it's almost one of a kind in the activist world.) Rarely is it conceived politically, and yet its political shockwaves, it is safe to say, will be felt for a long time to come.

What can we all do (other than download!) in the face of this distinctly un-Cathcartian piece of inevitability? This is where things become fun. We all have to think creatively about what comes next. At the precise moment the media industry, faces potential bankruptcy if the genie of P2P is not put back in the bottle (and it cannot be), ordinary people find themselves, for the first time, in possession of the means of media production (cheap, high quality cameras, recording equipment, editing machines), reproduction (low cost disks, storage media) and distribution (networks of all kinds). The same combination of factors (distributed networks + digital reproduction) that seems likely to put paid to the media industry immediately suggests a new 'industry': networks of small(er) producers making their own media in their own way. It does not seem likely (despite the false feather/black eye presented earlier) that old-style media monopolies will be able to form in the face of abundant means of distribution online: like Indymedia dwindled in the context of the blogs, kings of p2p like The Pirate Bay will dwindle when the tipping point is reached and *everyone* becomes a distributor.

Serious problems are revealed in this form of networked co-operation for traditional modes of organising the 'knowledge economy'. While those who have most to lose spend a good deal of time working out ways in which the value of an information good can be preserved, it is becoming harder and harder to separate one particular piece of information from the 'common good', either conceptually or practically. A hypertext document (a web page, say) allows us to follow links to others' documents; it makes us aware of the ecosystem of ideas that surround any other. In this way, the network re-reveals the matrix of co-operation and collaboration hidden inside the invisible fortress of intellectual property *at the precisely the same moment* that its potentiation of reproduction and distribution make the category of information property radically unstable. As the phenomenon of massive, distributed collaborations between peers organized without markets emerges, creating any work is increasingly coming to be seen again in the context of the public resources that surround it. IP law struggles to maintain the Renaissance of human productivity not the combined ingenuity of humans working in consort, but the singular genius of an idea owner. Meanwhile, as we see how much immaterial labour, and indeed all labour, depends on that which goes before and surrounds it, quantifying work in isolation makes less and less sense.

The recognition of this new relation of the self to the social may well be muted by the series of recognitions that have gone before it. Many commentators have celebrated the emergence of a 'collective intelligence' or 'hive mind' as a new phase of capital that will improve innovation and lead to an ultimate realisation of the free market. That formulation is -- to risk ending on a Cathcartian note -- both the problem and the challenge. The crucial question is how far what Vincente terms the 'plural, multiform constantly mutating intelligence' unleashed by these productive and reproductive technologies can be contained or co-opted again.

[1] Joseph Heller, *Catch 22* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1961)_ [2] Leslie Walker, 'Uncle Sam Wants Napster', *Washington Post*, November 8. 2001. (http://www.washingtonpost.com/ac2/wp-dyn/A59099-2001Nov7)_ [3] also see Kenneth H. Pritchard, 'Asymmetric Approaches to Warfare.' Officer Review, vol. 39, no. 1, July 1999, p. 11. For more papers on asymmetry, see (http://www.jfsc.ndu.edu/library/bibliography/asymetric.html)_ [4] for more material on this, see Jamie King, 'Terror Is A Network And The Network Is You', in *Mute magazine, March 2002.* (http://www.metamute.org/en/Terror-Is-A-Network-And-The-Network-Is-You)_ [5] Anustup Basu, 'Bombs and Bytes', in *Mute* magazine, 12 January 2004 (see http://www.metamute.org/en/node/6346/print)_ [6] see, e.g., Chomsky on this topic, (http://www.zmag.org/content/showarticle.cfm?ItemID=2962)_ [7] Paul Mark, 'Pentagon sets its sights on social networking websites', *New Scientist,* 09 June 2006._

[8] Or, to put it technically, digital information is 'non-excludable'. By all means let's avoid Stewart Brand's 1984 anthropomorphisation. Information does not 'want to' be anything, and is anyway everywhere in chains. _ [9] I am indebted to Rasmus Fleischer -- private IRC conversation 21 September, 2006._ [10] See for example Hal Varian, 'Market Structure in the Network Age', available at <www.sims.berkeley.edu/~hal/Papers/doc/doc.html>_ [11] See e.g., Joel de Rosnay's 'Cybiont' or 'symbiotic man', Kevin Kelly's 'Hive Mind', the Derrick de Kerckhove's 'Collective Intelligence'._ [12] Jean-Marie Vincent, 'Les automatismes sociaux et le "general intellect."'', in Futur Antérieur 16 (1993), p. 121 (trans. by Nick Dwyer Witherford in Cyber-Marx: Cycles and Circuits of Struggle in High Technology Capitalism (University of Illinois: 1999), available at http://www.fims.uwo.ca/people/faculty/dyerwitheford/index.htm_

THE DILEMMAS OF AN INEVITABLE RELATIONSHIP: DEMOCRATIC INNOVATION AND THE TECHNOLOGIES OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION[135]

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1. INTRODUCTION

In a conference on the new information society, the rector of the Open University, John Daniel, said 'Ladies and gentlemen, the new technologies are the answer. What was the question?'. The phrase is a good way of expressing the great expectations generated in many different areas of our lives by the prospect of the application of information and communication technologies (ICTs), but at the same time the prevailing disconcertion over their possible uses and impacts. The remark recalls the comment made by the one of the fathers of wireless communication, Marconi, when a collaborator, flustered by the discovery, said, 'We can talk with Florida', to which Marconi responded: 'But do we have anything to say to the people in Florida?'. Similarly, we can say that not a day goes by that we do not meet someone filled with enthusiasm for the possibilities opened by new technologies in the field of democracy and the functioning of the political system. But we should first think about the problems facing us today and in the potential and real uses of these ICTs. The present work aims to first point up the deficiencies of the current functioning of European democratic systems, to later explore to what extent ICTs can contribute to processes of innovation and improvement.

It has been said[136] that modernity can be defined politically by democratic institutions and socially and culturally by the civilization of technology. But the relations between these two components are not free of ambiguities. While some, like Jean-Jacques Rousseau, have always been hesitant before the effects scientific progress would have on privacy and on equality in political relations, others such as Karl Popper or Bertrand Russell understood that there was a close relation between the spirit of science and the success of democratic institutions. But what is ever more present is concern about how to relate the proliferation of ICTs with the processes and values of democracy[137]. Simplifying somewhat, we could say that there are at

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[135] Joan Subirats, "The dilemmas of an inevitable relationship: democratic innovation and the information and communication technology", en Jordana,J. (ed.), <u>Governing Telecommunications and the New Information Society in Europe</u>, Edward Elgar, Cheltenham, 2002, pp.228-250

[136] Benjamin Barber, 1998, *A Passion for Democracy*, Princeton University Press.

[137] See Hoff, J.; Horrocks, I.; and Tops, P. (eds.), 2000, *Democratic Governance and New Technology*, Routledge, London;
Bellamy, C. and Taylor, J.A. (1998), *Governing in the Information Age*, Open University Press, Buckingham; and

least three interesting (and not necessarily exclusive) possibilities for ICTs in relation to political democracy. They could aggravate the problems parliamentary democracy now presents, help to solve or overcome these problems, or create new problems they are not capable of resolving.

Some are of the opinion[138] that if first-generation media (radio, television) have made politics into something almost virtual, this will be enormously strengthened in second-generation media (interactive electronic networks),[139] leading to a sort of apotheosis of sharply directorial political forms. To complete this pessimistic scenario, it is predicted that ICTs will allow exhaustive control of data and sophisticated political marketing, and will offer great possibilities for manipulating information, with little margin for generating change. Other authors[140] consider that ICTs could favor easier access by the citizenry to the activities of the government, transforming it into a more controllable entity with fewer possibilities of exercising hierarchical control without adequate checks and balances. At the same time, the new forms of communication among citizens, parliaments and governments may come to balance or compensate for the current power of the media, pressure groups and parties, who shape the political agenda and 'format' the issues of the system. This would be a hopeful vision of democratizing and power-balancing effects in relation to institutions and elites that are now rather closed to society.

But in the sphere that interests us here, we must note that the modus operandi of ICTs and that of the political system do not seem to coincide overmuch. While democracy leads us to a scenario of deliberation, prudence and parsimonious interaction, with a great investment of time, the technological revolution is characterized by the speed it imparts to everything it touches. While the digital form of reasoning is very simple, binary, always seeking a choice between A and B, between Yes and No, political reasoning seeks to delve into complexity, bringing to light nuances and various ways to see the problem. Before the dilemma of A or B, it can look for such answers as 'both', 'neither', 'these are not answers to the problem', or even 'this is not the problem'.

We should therefore treat with a certain caution the topic of the incorporation of ICTs into the field of democratic institutions and their forms and procedural rules, since the starting points are quite different. We have no reason to cleave to a certain technological determinism that tells us it is a waste of time to worry about whether use of ICTs in democratic systems of government is appropriate or not, since it is

Tsagarousianou, R.; Tambini, D.; and Bryan, C. (eds.), 1998, *Cyberdemocracy: Technology, Cities and Civic Networks*, Routledge, London.

[138] Holmes, D. (ed.), 1997, *Virtual Politics. Identity and Community in Cyberspace*, Sage, London.

[139] Poster, M., 1995, *The Second Media Age*, Polity Press, Cambridge.

[140] Dutton, W. (ed.), 1999, *Society on the Line. Information Politics in the Digital Age*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

simply inevitable.[141] We are interested in analyzing the real difference that might be generated by the use of ICTs on what were considered problems or deficiencies of democratic systems, in order to find useful connections between the two worlds, from positions that are not free of normativism, since we are interested in what reinforces democracy and broadens its spaces of civil participation. And we will do so trying to carry the debate into the European context of parliamentary democracies, with relatively well organized, centralized parties, with a strong presence in intermediation of interests and with well established and notably hierarchical administrations.

2. DEFICIENCIES IN THE FUNCTIONING OF DEMOCRACY?

We find ourselves at a curious moment. Never in the history of humanity has the complex of rules and mechanisms of plural representation, participation and control that historically have made up the concept of democracy been so widespread. From this point of view, we would say that democracy seems to be living through halcyon days all over the world. Nonetheless, there is still a growing dissatisfaction with how it works. The foundation of this criticism can be found in what Bobbio called 'unkept promises'.[142] But it is also evident that democratic decision-making mechanisms show little capacity for resolving problems. Formalism, distance between representatives and the represented, opacity, and asymmetry in theoretically equal resources are some of the criticisms in political debate which are directed at the current functioning of our democratic systems.

In recent years a strong base of empirical evidence has been gathered for this group of perceptions, which some have defined as a phenomenon of disaffection of the citizens towards the political players and institutions of each country.[143] It is not so much a distancing from democracy as a system of government (this being an aspect in which a reduction of legitimacy is not seen, just the opposite), but a marked decline in public confidence in how representative institutions operate and perform. There are no signs of preference for non-democratic or authoritarian governmental alternatives, but it is noted that public attitudes towards parties, parliaments and governments express more and more mistrust.[144]

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[141] Grossman, L.K., 1995, *The Electronic Republic. Reshaping Democracy in the Information Age*, Viking, New York.

[142] Norberto Bobbio, 1984, *Il futuro della democrazia*, Einaudi, Turin.

[143] Norris, P., (ed.) 1999, Critical Citizens, Oxford University Press; Newton, K. and Norris, P., "Confidence in Public Institutions: Faith, Culture or Performance", in Pharr, S. and Putnam, R., (ed.) 2000, *Disaffected Democracies*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, pp.52-73.

[144] In 18 of the world's 20 best-established democracies, among them all the best-established European democracies, voter turnout has fallen an average of ten points over the past ten years. See Putnam, R.; Pharr, S.; and Dalton, R. J. 2000, What's Troubling the Trilateral Democracies?, in Pharr and Putnam, pp. 3-30.

This tendency may be considered significant, since we are not talking about changes in popular confidence in any governments or parties in particular but in the representative institutions that have characterized the model of political governance in the contemporary history of the Western world. What could explain this tendency? Is it, as has been suggested, simple disaffection or disagreement with how the modern world is evolving? Is it a response to the perceptible inability of public powers to control an economy ever more heedless of borders and regulations? Is it a product of the growing individualization of lifestyles that weakens social bonds and community participation, and therefore decreases confidence in everything that representative institutions of collective action are? Or is it simply a loss of credibility and recognition of the way each government operates and the concrete actions it takes, its real ability to resolve the problems posed by living together in society?[145]

We would therefore have a scenario in which the democratic system appears to be enjoying good health, since its legitimacy has increased everywhere, while the alternatives that historically have been set in motion have ended in resounding failures. It has even been argued that the criticisms of how it really functions from country to country are part and parcel of the mechanism of continuous perfecting that democracy sets up. According to this vision, there is at bottom no problem. The thing to do is to go on improving what exists without calling into doubt its essential parameters: representative power chosen in competitive elections among parties, participation, and channels of controlling legitimately constituted power. Yet as we have mentioned, growing dissatisfaction with the 'quality' of this democracy is observed.

The questions connected with these observations immediately arise. Does disaffection towards democratic institutions produce a decline in the mechanisms of conventional participation? Or are these mechanisms what do not satisfy citizens' expectations, leading them to use them less and less and to mistrust representative institutions? Or is it both things at once? There is abundant literature on the subject, which we will not enter into here.[146] But in general there are problems of dissatisfaction with the systems of selection of the representative elites; excessive ritualism in the channels of representation; the quasimonopolistic position of political parties in the scenario of political participation (facing which the voiceless can only walk away); and the difficulty of seeing reflected in electoral platforms the issues that might be of more direct interest than the debate over who the next prime minister will be, or which political force will gain a sufficient majority to form a government.

Universal suffrage has not brought us to the full realization of the ideal of popular sovereignty but to the development of more sophisticated techniques through which

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[145] This last hypothesis is the one that has found most statistical and empirical support in recent works on the question. See Pharr, S. and Putnam, R., (ed.) 2000, *Disaffected Democracies*, Princeton University Press, Princeton.

[146] See Font, J. (ed.), *Ciudadanos y Decisiones Públicas*, Ariel, Barcelona 2001, for a panoramic view of the issue.

the elites of the parties and the administrative bureaucracies have increased their capacity to control the citizenry. It would then seem that the mixture of constitutionalism and democracy has transformed parliamentary institutions more into instruments of government than channels of representation and popular expression. If we add to this the confluence of interests and organizations brought about by the consolidation of Keynesian welfare options and the use of mass media, we can say that space for a public sphere of debate and opinion, truly autonomous from the state apparatus, has been disappearing. Our democracy, apathetic and alienated, has become more 'managerial' than anything else.[147]

3. WHAT IS TO BE DONE?

The alternatives under this type of diagnosis are unclear. If one of the principal concerns is democratic regimes' lack of performance, one might think of strengthening their performance by authoritarian options following the logic of 'less participation, more efficacy'. Increasing the 'decision' capacities of the system at the cost of reducing the capacity of control and citizen action ('delegative democracy' in O'Donnell's expression), or trying to depoliticize the system through trusting in 'captains of industry' and figures who make 'common sense' their ideological banner (Perot, Berlusconi, Fujimori), and others who present themselves as 'cleaners' of the rot of 'politics as usual' (Chávez). Less traumatically for the values and rules of democracy, the idea has been taking hold that it should be isolated from institutionalized politics in certain spheres of public action considered 'sensitive matters'. The solution would be to create independent authorities, agencies and organisms to make legitimate their actions and capacity to make decisions, not according to the principles of popular representation but according to their capacity to 'solve', based on professional and technical criteria of authority and representativeness (and therefore legitimacy). It is in this line that independent authorities have been appearing in securities trading, electrical regulation, the environment, nuclear power, control of competition, and sports discipline, not to mention the increasingly important influence and independence of the authorities of the central banks.[148]

We do not believe these alternatives are in the line of combining reinforcement of democracy with increased capacity of representation and credibility of democratic institutions. In a meliorist line attempts have been made to find new formulae in the traditional systems of representation and participation. Thus work has been done on improving the forms of candidate selection, whether through primaries, open list systems or reforms of the electoral systems (with a combination of proportional and majority formulae), which increase the capacity of choice and involvement of the electorate in the selection of candidates and accentuate the responsibility of the representative to the citizenry. Other formulae on which more emphasis has been

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[147] Luadon, K., 1977, *Communications Technology and Popular Participation*, Praeger, New York.
[148] GianDomenico Majone (ed.), 1996, *Regulating Europe*, Routledge, London.

placed recently have been those referring to improvement of communication channels between institutions and citizens and between parties and citizens. Initiatives to offer windows of institutional information from parliaments and governments at all levels continue to proliferate. At the same time, these institutions and parties use surveys and other instruments for measuring public opinion to compensate for lack of feedback on their policies and proposals between elections.

At the essentially local level, there has been enormous development of the participation of very diverse entities and associations, with essentially sectorial bases (seniors, youth, women, the environment, sports …), but also territorial ones (neighborhood, district …). It seems undeniable that the large expansion of public administrations' areas of action has been generating the presence of more and more players in debate over policy formulation and implementation and has also caused the loss of the hierarchical and *super partes* role that characterized their traditional action. Thus, it is not strange that in many of the policies pursued by governments there has been a tendency to create specific spaces for encounters and information exchange between institutions and entities. In general, these are councils or fora in which policies are agreed on, problems are anticipated and pacts are reached on implementation or even co-management, functioning with more or less formalized rules.

> Little by little we have also been seeking or recovering formulae of direct participation of the citizenry in public decisions. The most traditional mechanisms of direct democracy, such as referenda or popular legislative initiatives, have been complemented with other more complex formulae of citizen involvement in public decisions such as 'citizen councils'. It seems clear that in recent years the use of this type of participatory formulae has notably increased. In the case of referenda, we have examples at the nation-state level (in France and Denmark on questions of European integration, or the habitual ones in Italy on legislative abrogation), and they also proliferate on the local scale when especially significant conflicts or decisions considered strategic are faced. Experimentation with involvement in new ways of participation and popular consultation is also increasingly frequent, especially on the local scale (citizen councils in the Basque Country and Catalonia, fora in Great Britain, participatory budgets in Latin America, deliberative mechanisms in the United States, participatory formulae linked to Agendas 21, etc.) (see Font, endnote 9). The reasons that explain this proliferation of citizen involvement and the dissemination of direct participatory experiences, whether in a classic or an innovative format, are linked to the deficiencies of the traditional ways of participation foreseen in representative democracy, especially their inability to link the global legitimacy obtained in electoral processes with the legitimacy necessary in the day-to-day, facing specific issues, freighted with meaning, for which reason extra legitimacy is sought in these new participatory forms.

4. THE COSTS AND PROBLEMS OF PARTICIPATION

Skepticism towards these new alternatives, or towards the search for a more lively democracy and the citizenry's involvement in decision-making processes, is very widespread among the political elite. The reasons alleged are very diverse. Some allude to the costs of time and resources entailed by these processes, while others refer to the dangers of 'capture' by special interests. It is usually mentioned how all this erodes the indispensable legitimacy of parties and institutions for good democratic praxis, and also mentioned is the lack of 'added value' (because of the unpreparedness of citizens for the problems posed) that many of these mechanisms end up producing. Connected with all this is the widely held and well founded opinion that we cannot confuse these 10% who are more are less intensely interested, in a manner inconsistent with the political decision-making process, with the rest of the population, who only in certain circumstances enter a world they consider foreign and the province of specialists. In this context, it is said, we wind up confusing the citizenry with a very restricted part of the population, that which organizes, mobilizes, and says it represents the rest.

The political elite, while publicly deploring this lack of participatory enthusiasm, or declaring their concern over the increase of abstention in elections, later do not show themselves especially keen to support non-conventional openings for participation (popular legislative initiatives, autonomous referenda …), nor to accept the legitimacy or binding force of more novel forms of citizen participation in public decision-making processes. As Flores d'Arcais has said, a sort of vicious circle of shirked responsibilities is created: citizens experience the political system as foreign, turning their backs on it (contrast with this the vitality of new social movements or campaigns based on a single issue), getting what little they can out of it, and globally criticizing something in which they do not feel involved. While politicians say they are hurt by citizens' lack of understanding and complain publicly of the lack of participatory life, they take advantage of a conception of politics that is more and more a thing for initiates and professionals.

The problem is knowing whether, in this context, the democratic system requires or can do without greater and more extensive doses of popular participation, and knowing what mechanisms can contribute to this without overloading (with time and transaction costs) the citizenry's already tired shoulders. We have taken a cursory look at the difficulty and skepticism that surround this issue. The ever greater complexity of the decisions in the public sphere and the habitual inconsistency between citizens' opinions (for example, simultaneously asking for increased social services and reduced taxes) offer new handles for old elitist conceptions. We think, however, that it is more and more difficult to maintain positions of this type. Whether because of the enormous diffusion of information and access to education that have come about in many countries in the past few decades, or because of the sophistication in scientific progress that leaves us with ever fewer unequivocal responses from the technical point of view on how to solve problems.[149]

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[149] To cite only one reference, Lindblom, Ch., 1990, *Inquiry and Change*, Yale University Press, New Haven.

In many of these criticisms of more direct forms of citizen participation lie skepticism and suspicion about the very bases of democracy.[150]

Certainly those of us who think that we should advance in looking for and experimenting with new mechanisms of participation, as a way of improving the quality of democracy and its capacity to resolve the problems generated by living together, should be able to demonstrate that participation and efficiency are not contradictory concepts but are increasingly complementary concepts, and to seek out and experiment with instruments and mechanisms of participation that avoid or at least reduce the existing risks and minimize the problems noted.

As for the presumed complementarity of participation and efficiency, we would like to point out that increasingly often we face problems that are more global and interconnected, and therefore more difficult to segment, define, and approach from the specializations we have been constructing. In such contexts, we cannot fall into the error of confusing technical feasibility with social feasibility, and we will have to work in both directions to address problems on which there is often no consensus, not even on whether there is a problem and what kind of a problem it is. Many of the difficult decisions to be made, which affect deeply rooted social interests, can reach important consensuses in the technical sphere, but they will find it hard to advance if debate is not opened and there is discussion and comparison of costs and benefits, alternatives, and solutions with the whole of society. Since people will be increasingly able to accept and share decisions that even affect some of their interests negatively if the consider legitimate the route by which a decision was reached. From this point of view, efficiency and participation are not contradictory but absolutely complementary, and will become more and more inseparable.

> How is the complexity of public decisions to be shared with as many citizens as possible? We do not pretend to give a single response to such a complex issue. We believe that the skepticism and danger that surround the world of participation have to be analyzed and treated specifically, and can be better or worse resolved according to the participatory mechanism used. There are no universal recipes or ad hoc solutions. We must clarify the dilemmas posed, the limitations that exist and the conditioning factors that make up the case, determine who the most affected parties are, and collaborate with them in trying to find the best participatory formula that broadens the debate and gives it a way out. Here, as we are trying to show in this work, the use of information and communication technologies can be very significant.

5. THE ROLE OF ICTS BEFORE THE PROBLEMS OF DEMOCRACY. THE VARIOUS STRATEGIES.

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[150] Budge, I., 1993, "Direct Democracy: Setting Appropriate Terms of Debate", in Held, D. (ed.), *Prospects for Democracy*, Polity, Cambridge, pp.136-155.

It is obvious that the possibilities of using ICTs are manifold, but it is not the same to work in them from the internal logic of the current system of representative democracy, from the prospect of constructing, with the aid of the new technologies, the old ideal of direct democracy, or trying to imagine new forms of articulation and collective governance.

We can operationalize the question attempting to relate in a table the alternatives that relate the use of ICTs with the processes of democratic innovation. A first broad option would be to try to apply ICTs in the more specific field of policies and their management or in the field of polity and relations between institutions and the citizenry. We have a second broad criterion of distinction if we consider only processes of improvement and innovation within the current constitutional and political framework characteristic of modern European parliamentary democracies, or if we are willing, in a democratic framework, to explore alternative ways of making decisions, thinking, and managing in policies that incorporate the citizenry more directly and accept the pluralism inherent in an open conception of collective responsibilities and public spaces. Crossing the criteria, we have four political strategies or discourses on how to relate ICTs and democratic systems and their processes of decision and management.

Table 1

Processes of democratic innovation and use of information and communication technologies		*USE OF ICTs*	
		Policy	Polity
Degree of democratic innovation and acceptance of participatory and pluralistic processes	Low	1 consumerist mechanisms	2 changes in democratic elitism
	High	3 pluralist networks provision of services	4 processes of direct democracy

We will briefly explore each of the alternatives furnished by the table, understanding them not as closed models but as discourses or strategies, sometimes simultaneous, developed in the intersection between ICTs and the way democratic systems operate.

6. THE CONSUMERIST OPTION

This strategy's starting point is situated in the liberal universe, with absolutely no intention of calling into question the way constitutional and parliamentary democracy operates, with its mechanisms of participation centered essentially on parties and elections. According to this vision, what is failing are the mechanisms of information at the citizenry's disposition, so that they can exercise their possibilities

of choice more completely and efficaciously and have more power in their relations with the public bureaucracies. The greater strength or influence of the people would come not so much from their greater capacity for involvement or letting their voice be heard in processes as from their greater capacity to choose, to change providers, and to express their preferences clearly. Somehow it is understood that the process of collective consumption of resources derived from public policies has no reason to be connected with 'high politics', with values, and is expressed only in efficacy and capacity to satisfy citizens' needs.

How can ICTs serve these objectives? It seems clear that the demand for more and better information jibes well with the most evident potential of ICTs. There are many varied examples of how ICTs have improved relations between citizens and administrations, and abundant literature that tries to analyze and propose improvements in this area. Not a day goes by that we do not hear of new advances in administration-citizen interfaces that allow or will allow online resolution of what are now complex and costly procedures of obtaining permits, renewing documents, settling taxes or getting information. The advances in the security of these processes through the acceptance of electronic signatures and the growing coordination among different levels of administration are a good example of this. In similar fashion, one observes ceaseless efforts by public entities or services to put online for citizens ample information on the services they have access to or the rights they can exercise, as well as explicit presentations of who is responsible for what, and how to locate specific employees or supervisors in each process or service.

The values that implicitly or explicitly govern these processes of change and the use of ICTs are those of economy, efficiency and efficacy, which served to put in motion the processes of administrative modernization of the 1980s and 90s ('new public management'). New public managers who wished to implement in public administrations systems of management closer to those of the private sector and politicians who sought renewed forms of legitimization in an improvement of the administrations' capacity to provide service and the growing accessibility and transformative potential of ICTs coincided in time and in their expectations. The strategies of 'citizen charts' and 'total quality' are examples of this. Furthermore, the dynamics of 'flattening' structures and decentralizing management, seeking closeness and more personalized service, found in the new information systems the necessary levers for avoiding misgovernment and buck-passing, through contractual systems and establishment of management guidelines and ad hoc organizational charts. ICTs seem to offer the realization of a long-sought dream: maximum decentralization without abuse of discretion or loss of control or responsibility. In this way, we are probably witnessing the transformation of many European bureaucracies into 'infocracies'.[151]

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[151] See Van de Dok, W., 2000, "Infocracy or infopolis?. Transparency, autonomy and democracy in an information age", in Hoff, Horrocks, and Tops, op. cit., pp.137-152. See also the emphasis with which the OECD is insisting on this type of vision: Focus. Public Management Newsletter, OECD Public Management Committee.

However, the problem is that these improvements in the method of managing policies and in communication channels between the citizenry and public administrations not only do not offer new solutions to the problems of democratic disaffection but introduce certain problems in handling the large flow of information that ICTs allow us to store and process with extraordinary ease. It seems clear that we are talking about processes that are to some extent depoliticized, in which the reason for the services or to whom they are directed are not questioned or evaluated, only the best way to provide them. Nor is it a matter of redefining policies or questioning the design of their implementation. We could thus ask ourselves (obviously without disdaining the increases in effectiveness and efficiency that are achieved), whether with these new forms that incorporate ICTs into the provision of public services we are really responding to the problems of democratic disaffection mentioned at the beginning of these reflections.[152]

Attention has also been drawn to the perverse effects that may be produced by large volumes of information about persons and their behavior, preferences and habits accumulated by administrations through the use of ICTs. Besides processing large quantities of administrative data, the growing use of video surveillance with the new programs for detecting suspicious persons, etc., although able to improve the efficacy of security policies, pose problems of the potential violation of the privacy of certain information. A situation is being caused in which the administrations' growing capacity to give service and the increased personalization of that service are inevitably accompanied by a large volume of information on these citizens in the hands of the administrations.

> This type of link between processes of innovation via ICTs, very much linked to policies and processes of services, will definitely not change in the slightest the technocratic and top-down logic characteristic of well established democratic systems in the second half of the twentieth century. Rather than strengthening the presence and participation of the citizenry in collective affairs, the use of ICTs could end up reinforcing the control and authority of institutional elites.

7. THE IMPROVEMENT OF REPRESENTATIVE AND ELITIST DEMOCRACY

We have commented that various ways have been sought to improve communications between democratic political institutions and the citizenry. It would not be so much a matter in this case of improving efficacy in the provision of services, in the outcomes of the system, as of strengthening the legitimacy of government institutions, trying to avoid the sensation of detachment and to reduce the perception of distance between those who decide and the ones they say they represent.

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[152] See Raab, Ch., 1998, "Electronic confidence: trust, information and public information", in Suellen and Van de Donk (eds.), Public Administration in an Information Age: A Handbook, IOS Press, Amsterdam.

We are not talking about a scenario occupied only by professional politicians. The webs of interests and players formed around politics have been creating a demoelitist conglomerate basically concerned with flows of information and influence between voters and representatives, between representative institutions and government, between government and external elites, and between elites and interest groups.

It is in this scenario that attempts to apply ICTs in various spheres of parliamentary democracies have been made. These initiatives have been concentrated on such questions as improvement of the internal functioning of parliaments, executives and administrations; better informing the citizenry about parliamentary and governmental activity; or improving and expanding the possibilities for interaction between parliaments, governments and citizens. In Europe, the examples are significant, within individual countries and in the institutions of European Union.[153] We do not wish to nor could we review here the multitude of initiatives of this type that are taking place in Europe. We will limit ourselves to covering their principal characteristics and establishing certain critical elements that allow us to fit them into our analytical scheme.

In the relationship between parties and electors, numerous initiatives have been implemented for improving channels of information with party activists and contact with sympathizers and voters using ICTs. Besides the usual electronic newsletters, there have also been interesting experiences in the systems of selecting candidates (as in the Arizona primaries, where Democratic voters could exercise their right over the Internet, which has served as an example for other initiatives), of debate over program alternatives, and online advocacy, with the presence of groups and individuals who express their interests through the network.

Governments and parliaments have undertaken many projects for using the potential of ICTs essentially for facilitating the citizenry's access to institutional information. Through institutional websites, citizens' requests or complaints can almost always reach the government, or in the case of a parliament, proposals of individuals or groups, so that they can be channeled by the parliamentary groups who deem it advisable.[154]

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[153] In relation, for example, to the use of new technologies in the functioning of representative assemblies, see Bellamy, Ch. and Raab, Ch., "Parliamentary Democracy and New Technology: Reform, Reinforcement or Replacement?", paper presented in the colloquium *Les Parlaments dans la Societé de l'Information*, Paris, November 1999, mimeo; also Dutton, W., 1999, *Society on the Line. Information Politics in the Digital Age*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

[154] See the interesting experience in Spain of the Fundació Jaume Bofill and its www.democracyweb.com, specialized in following the activity of the Catalan Parliament. The Fundació's website offers numerous links on electronic democracy.

In general, it may be said that the parties and institutions that have taken up ICTs have done so without overly predetermined strategies. There are substantial reasons to highlight an organization or institution's symbolic values, and there is also a desire to show that it is up to date and modern. The flow of information is usually one-way, and even when the possibility of two-way flow exists, control of the medium and the decision on whether it is opportune to take outside opinions into account fall to the party apparatus rather than the directors of the institution. In this case it is not a question of giving more options to citizens-consumers, but of generating consensus towards the organization, or facilitating the work of advocacy or lobbying from the outside, but always understanding that there are 'experts' in the institution who will decide what should be borne in mind, what should be accepted and what not.

The dominant logic, not so much by design as a result, has been that of trying to use ICTs as a mechanism to allow greater adaptability of the political system to a shifting environment, without a change in the functional paradigm. The types of applications arising from the new ICTs (websites, electronic newsletters, mailing lists, information systems, small consultations, electronic voting, etc.) have been devoted to relegitimizing and reorienting political and government institutions, through sophisticated methods of information management, segmentation of the public, and marketing and political communication.

We could definitively say that this type of instruments in the service of objectives such as those described contribute to reinforce the most elitist aspects of the representative democratic system (strengthening the capacity to process and control information flows, becoming nodes of resources and information, strengthening horizontal and vertical interrelations, with non-public players and with other political institutions and organisms …), while the more strictly democratizing aspects of the system (ability to respond and to account for themselves, transparency, channels of citizen involvement, etc.) remain in the background. Once again we wish to emphasize that we should go beyond the use (as gadgets) of ICTs in democratic systems, and before speculating about what procedural, electoral, parliamentary or control aspect we can use these new technologies in, think about what conception of democracy we are putting them in the service of.[155]

We could say that in the two strategies of using ICTs we have mentioned, consumerist and elitist-democratic, there is no desire to go beyond a conception of democracy centered on procedural rules and a very strict vision of the principle of representation, without much willingness to experiment with forms of relation between elites and citizenry that would mean altering traditional hierarchical positions.

> The two strategies we will now analyze in a necessarily schematic manner
> relate to ICTs from a different conception. Here it is not a matter of improving

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[155] Barber, B., "Democracy and Technology: Endless Frontier or End of Democracy?", in *A Passion for Democracy*, Princeton University Press, Princeton.

relations and communication between representative elites and the citizenry. Nor is there a concern much centered on improvement of the capacity to provide services or on expansion of choice for consumers/citizens. In the two strategies we will analyze lies concern for quality of participation and capacity of involvement of people in collective affairs at the micro political level as well as the macro. The starting hypothesis is that of an active citizenry, involved in collective affairs not only as a necessary way to defend their interests, but also as a way of understanding democracy, a relational and participatory democracy.

8. THE FABRIC OF CIVIL SOCIETY

One of the most significant characteristics of the new societies in which ICTs are gaining ground and developing is the growing opening and existence of spaces of autonomy and new relational networks, where plural communities flourish, which make difference, their micro- or macro-identities their point of reference. The explosion of communication that has come with ICTs has facilitated and now facilitates this continual emergence, and allows a reconstruction of politics from parameters different from the usual ones.

We are witnessing the birth of a society in which relationship forms an intrinsic part of communication, and is not a mere result thereof, or a communicative subproduct. The two key elements are the growing subjectivity of the players and the great ease of communication provided by ICTs. In this context, there is a great demand for autonomy (which goes beyond the traditional freedom-control scheme of modern society),[156] alternative markets emerge, new social networks and groupings appear, and new cultures emerge that make difference their added value. In the traditional perspective (which covered the strategies examined above), public institutions started from a concept of freedom very much bound up with the freedom to vote, while control was related to obeying laws that emanated from the people's will and were expressed through the representative mechanism. In the new social context we are describing, freedom is based on an idea of reciprocal exchange, while control is entrusted to the rules of associative exchange themselves. These two spheres, state and social, interact with the spheres of the market and the family and other informal networks, generating multiple possibilities of relationship and communication.

> In this context, ICTs are simultaneously one of the fundamental factors with which to explain this new reality and the natural framework allowing its development, autonomy and constant possibilities for innovation and articulation. Thanks to ICTs it is possible to begin to speak of reticular pluralism and the promotion of social autonomy able to generate inclusion and cohesion outside means of uniformity and the abstract rights of citizenship. The welfare mix is not, in this framework, an instrumental response to problems of sustainability of welfare policies, or a simple

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[156] See Donati, P., 2000, *La cittadinanza societaria*, Laterza, Bari.

organizational adaptation to better implement citizenship on a state or public-institutional basis. Rather, a specific form of social citizenship is emerging that finds its values in the associative and civil fabric being woven, a communitarian citizenry, territorialized or not, which has great potential and advantages to develop in the ever better established framework of the communication society.

Politics is becoming more diffuse, acquiring different characteristics in each sphere, and can no longer be considered a state monopoly or the private preserve of public organisms. Political institutions no longer occupy the center or vertex of the conditions of citizenship and welfare but are increasingly founded on relational goods. It is precisely this autonomous and relational aspect that characterizes this new social fabric. And these same characteristics are those that, at the same time, give it its fragmentary character, of multiplication of isolated groups, in which it can be difficult to articulate or recognize a 'society' as such. In this fragmentation, full of potential and possibilities, it may be difficult to reconcile pluralism with justice, diversity with belonging, and democracy with difference.[157] Furthermore, it should be remembered that the weight of public and commercial organizations on the network is very significant, and generates new hierarchies. In spite of this, the civil and associational reality and weave grows ceaselessly in the shadow of ICTs, creating new real and virtual communities, developing new identities, new spaces and public spheres, and increasing political reflection and new social autonomies.[158] What does all this have to do with democracy and its dilemmas? It is still somewhat early to draw too many conclusions, but it seems indubitable that new forms of 'cyberdemocracy' are taking shape.

9. IS DIRECT DEMOCRACY A NEW ALTERNATIVE?

Another of the possible strategies in the use of ICTs before the current dilemmas of democracy is recovering the old ideal of direct democracy. This is not the time or place to survey democracy and its historical traditions,[159] but perhaps it should be remembered that throughout the nineteenth century, discussion of democracy, from the liberal conception of the state, developed principally from Constant's famous

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[157] See Bellamy, Ch., "Modelling electronic democracy", in Hoff, Horrocks, and Tops, op. cit., p.49.

[158] See Poster, M., 1997, "Cyberdemocracy: the Internet and the Public Sphere" in Holmes, D. (ed.), *Virtual Politics: Identity and Community in Cyberspace*, Sage, London;

Webster, F. (ed.), 2001, Culture and Politics in the Information Age, Routledge, London; and

Burbach, R., 2001, *Globalization and Postmodern Politics*, Pluto Press, London.

[159] See Norberto Bobbio, the entry under "democrazia" in Bobbio, Mateucci, and Pasquino, *Dizionario di Política*, TEA-UTET, Milan, 1990, pp.287-297.

discourse on the freedom of ancient peoples and that of modern peoples. The former, understood as direct participation in public decisions and in the formation of laws through the political body expressed by the assembly of citizens, is understood as not only no longer possible due to expansion of the *demos*, but also perhaps even counterproductive. The freedom of modern peoples implies the recognition of fundamental political rights, with political participation understood as one more political freedom, manifested in the rights of free expression, assembly, and organization to influence a country's politics, as well as the rights to elect their institutional representatives and to be elected as such. Against Rousseau, de Tocqueville and Mill defended the idea that the only form compatible with the liberal state is representative and parliamentary democracy. The so-called democratization of the state, though it expanded the right to vote to more and more social sectors and multiplied representative organs, did not imply any essential modification of this liberal and representative conception of democracy.

Representative democracy has always been defended as a 'viable' (Mill) and 'efficient' (Dahl) alternative to direct democracy or democracy by assembly. The fundamental reasons adduced are, as we know, the size of the population called to gather and participate and the nature of the problems to be dealt with, which go beyond what small units of population can take on. In spite of this, it is recognized that representative democracy has its 'dark side',[160] a price to pay: the enormous discretionary power on very significant decisions that citizens delegate to their representatives. We know that the representative elite must move within the institutional and procedural limits proper to democratic regimes, but we also know that these limits are usually wide, and as the mechanisms of control and popular participation are not very robust or constant, the fact is that the elite's latitude to interpret its mandate of representation, even in decisions of strategic content or great significance, is quite notorious. Therefore once the principle of representation is accepted, the emphasis is on establishing the necessary checks and balances to control this latitude as much as possible and to fix periodic renewal of confidence and clarification of responsibilities through elections.

What changes can the appearance of ICTs produce in this scenario? While it is still true that all the citizens of each country cannot meet face to face, it is now possible for them to communicate at a distance through the networks offered by ICTs. Therefore, with all the necessary caution, and conscious that the forms of deliberation in an assembly are different from those that take place by telephone or in a virtual forum, one may at least think about to what point we are beginning to see the conditions to advance towards forms of electronic democracy in which it is possible to approach the old ideals of Rousseau without the stumbling block of the size of the *demos*, and seeking efficiency in decision-making.

But what direct democracy are we talking about? We do not think it necessary to insist on the problems generated by a conception of direct democracy by referendum, based on instant decision-making, without deliberative or institutional

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[160] See Dahl, R., *On Democracy*, Yale University Press, 1998, p.113.

mediation. In a provocative work, the magistrate of the Italian Constitutional Court, Gustavo Zagrebelsky,[161] points up the discrepancy between the deliberative precepts of democracy, and the haste, not free of demagoguery, surrounding referenda of the 'Barrabas or Christ' type. The extensive literature on deliberative democracy[162] shows the extreme importance deliberative and participatory processes have in a full conception of what a liberal democracy is. Following Habermas, it is said the decisions in a democracy take on value and meaning more on the basis of the transformation that follows deliberation than from the simple aggregation of preferences. All incorporation of ICTs into public decision-making processes should therefore bear in mind this profoundly deliberative character of democracy; otherwise these decisions could be notably inconsistent among themselves, or too affected by passing emotional situations. We should make it possible or imaginable to use the potential for communication and collective decision-making presented by ICTs (already tested in private or organizational contexts[163]), without losing deliberative capacity and quality throughout the new decision-making process inspired by an approach to the values of a direct democracy that has always been seen as theoretically preferable, but not feasible.

If we combine the potential of ICTs to advance towards heretofore unexplored forms of direct democracy with the need for mechanisms that assure deliberation and channel opinions and debates towards pragmatic and efficient ways of making decision, we should rethink our current democratic institutions. Parliaments, governments and parties are today central elements in the democratic system. From our point of view, it is the political parties who now play the key role of mediation and control between the population and the government —with the constant amplifying collaboration of the communications media— and who supply the content and are the protagonists of parliaments.

From these premises one can imagine a system[164] in which the government would be elected through mechanisms similar to those now in place, a system in which the decisions now made by a parliament and others considered significant enough would be subjected to direct referenda by all the citizenry with the right to vote, using those instruments offered by ICTs and their future developments. These decisions would be concentrated on certain dates, and public debate would be held

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[161] See Zagrebelsky, G., 1995, *Il «Crucifige!» e la democrazia*, Einaudi, Turin.

[162] Elster, J. (ed.), *Deliberative Democracy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1998;

Bohman, J. , Public Deliberation, MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1996; Nino, C. S., *The Constitution of Deliberative Democracy*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1996.

[163] Experiences vary, but in Spain one of the closest at hand is that of the student co-operative at the Open University of Catalonia, or the election of the president of the Instituto de Ingenieros Eléctricos y Electrónicos. See "La votació electrònica: un debat necessari", Debats Aula Provença, Fundació Jaume Bofill, Barcelona, May 2000.

[164] See Budge, I., "Direct Democracy: Setting appropriate terms of debate", in Held, D. (ed.), *Prospects for Democracy*, Polity, Cambridge, 1993, pp.136-155.

in the previous periods, animated by political parties who should orient their functions toward 'brokerage' and articulation of interests and alternatives, backing off their current emphasis on occupying institutional spaces. Thus we are sketching a system in which direct voting would not take place without mediation or deliberation. We are therefore not talking about a simple plebiscitary democracy. Direct voting would have the indispensable mediation of parties, configuring a pragmatic option that would allow alliances with the current leaders of processes of intermediation and representation of the people's will.

It is important to bear in mind that heretofore-existing institutions have tended to use and model ICTs as mechanisms for reinforcing their positions of power. It is thus not surprising that political and democratic institutions have sought to apply ICTs to their routines without breaking previous paradigms of communication and power. In this strategy, there is a recomposition of the prevailing correlation of forces, with an indispensable relocation of political parties as a key element of continuity between one situation and the other.

Now it is obvious that political parties should change significantly their current modus operandi. Their work would become less sure, and it would probably be necessary for them to substantially modify their functions and the type of recruitment they now engage in. Parties are now organisms or entities which are relatively closed and very much caught up in the occupation of institutional spaces, their predominant vision centered on the presence in the media of their leaders, who constantly communicate messages to party members, voters, sympathizers and the citizenry in general. The kitchen work is done with little transparency, centered on the elites, the political cadres and the organization, together with the interests channeled or represented. In a scenario such as the one we were sketching, parties should network much more, with more flexible organization, with an emphasis similar to the current one on the communications media, but with a much greater capacity to articulate interests and opinion on the ground. The role of ideas, of the capacity to convince the immediate social network would be essential, and the role of party discipline and the organized activists would be reduced.

It seems clear that in this strategy, in which ICTs would play a central role in the configuration of a democratic system based on the direct vote of the citizenry without the intermediation of traditional representative institutions, there are significant problems. One of the foremost would be the role of parliaments in this new scenario, although some already speak of postparliamentary democracy.[165] But if we refer more concretely to the problems that can crop up in the implementation in the proposals for direct democracy we have reviewed, some of the most significant are the lack of continuity and defined strategy in the opinion of the citizenry, the lack of information and sufficient debate, without assumption of responsibilities for the

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[165] See Holmes, D., 1997, *Virtual Politics, Identity and Community in Cyberspace*, Sage, London; and
Tsagarousianou, R.; Tambini, D.; and Bryan, C. (1998), *Cyberdemocracy: Technology, Cities and Civic Networks*, Routledge, London.

effects of the decisions made, the danger of lack of participation that would permit control of the vote in certain decisions by minorities with very definite interests, excessive complexity in the policies or decisions to be made, and problems deriving from the very use of ICTs, their control, guarantees, etc.

The point that alludes to the citizenry's lack of preparation to confront the complexity of the issues that feed legislative debates is probably the most telling. Schumpeter and Sartori[166] have stated that the citizenry does not have enough interest to follow debates closely or to get involved in topics not very connected to their most immediate interests. They also argue that the technification of many of the debates on alternatives to concrete problems distances the citizenry from their possible involvement in decisions, which could only affect the quality of the result negatively. This argument seems difficult to maintain in moments when although the unequivocality of technical responses is ever more in doubt, one hears more talk about the social construction of risk or about technology assessment, alluding to the need to incorporate lay opinions in questions of significant technical complexity but which are difficult to resolve without the visions of non-experts.[167] One is left thinking that arguments against direct democracy based on citizens' lack of sufficient education for making decisions could serve just as well for arguing against democracy itself, generically defined.

The problems deriving from the form in which ICTs have been developed (very much linked to business and economics perspectives), control over the network and over software production, inequality of access; and the possible problems of control and guarantees posed by their use, are clear and are going to be with us for some time to come. Much more concretely, there are problems with the very way in which electronic voting should be developed.[168] None of this can be denied. However, returning to the first paragraphs of this text, it is still important, in spite of all of that, to ask ourselves what democracy we are advancing towards and what democracy we would like to approach. The picture of seemingly extending democratic disaffection argues for advancement, even if experimental, to detect strengths and weaknesses.

10. CONCLUSIONS?

At the beginning of these pages, we said that we were interested in analyzing the real difference that might be generated by the use of ICTs on what were considered problems or deficiencies of democratic systems. We also said that our reflections were not free of normativism, since from the premises set forth we are interested in what reinforces democracy and broadens its spaces of civil

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[166] Schumpeter, J., *Capitalismo, Socialismo y Democracia*, FCE, Mexico; Sartori, G., 1987, *Teoría de la Democracia*, Alianza, Madrid.

[167] See López Cerezo, J. A. and Luján, J.L., 2000, *Ciencia y Política del riesgo*, Alianza, Madrid; and Mironesco, Ch., 1997, *Un enjeu democratique: Le Technology Assessment*, Georg editeur, Geneva.

[168] See the text from the Fundació Jaume Bofill mentioned in note 28.

participation. All this has been done trying to carry the debate into the European context of parliamentary democracies, with relatively well organized, centralized parties, with a strong presence in intermediation of interests and with well established and notably hierarchical administrations.

We started from the idea that the new forms of communication and information furnished by the technologies influence and can influence still much more the current processes of restructuring and redefinition of the principal variables of European political systems. New models of democracy, of processes of innovation, or simply of the improvement of democratic systems' functioning are spoken of. In this work, we have tried to simplify the many alternatives and tendencies being sketched in relation to these issues, establishing four broad strategies or discourses of change, which in this context coexist with or counteract one another. The first criterion we have used is taking into consideration the degree of strategic ambition or ambition to modify the system in its essential parts each discourse may have. The other criterion, much more substantive, refers to willingness to use ICTs within the limits of representative democracy (improving its functioning or the relationship between the citizenry and representative institutions), or exploring new ways of understanding citizenship and democratic politics based on the potential that ICTs offer.

We have seen how, in the first two strategies analyzed, consumerist and demo-elitist, which are situated in the framework of representative democracy, the communicative elements proper to ICTs take precedence over the relational aspects also present in the new technologies. Improved communication between institutions and citizens is sought, whether to make them more loyal consumers of public services or to legitimize more intensely the representative system as a whole. In this vision, the use of ICTs does not seem to give rise to new ways of relating, of approaching the relations of hierarchy or representation, or of promoting new mechanisms of participation. Assuming that the representative mechanism is the basis of the only possible democracy, all that is sought are improved communication and reciprocal information, always making clear the responsibilities and roles of all parties.

In the other two discourses or strategies analyzed (civil and direct democracy), the components that are alternatives to the representative status quo appear as the most significant. We believe we see that in these discourses the relational elements take precedence over the strictly communicative ones when referring to the potential uses of ICTs. The relationship, the new ways of understanding the interests and responsibilities of each party, and the effects of the new technological opportunities have a value in themselves that goes beyond the communicative or informative aspects, which obviously are also present. When we refer to these discourses or strategies, we have referred to the emergence of new communities, new forms of conducting politics, another way of understanding collective responsibilities and the construction of citizenship. We have also referred to the new demands on political parties, which would generate a situation in which mechanisms of direct democracy would function. Political

parties take shape as indispensable instruments for the construction of networks, social relationships and new groupings around the issues.

It is obvious that the questions posed when we refer to these two strategies in the use of ICTs are much more abundant and profound than those that can be posed when we refer to ICTs as a potential way of improving what already exists. A no less important question is whom we are to ask to take responsibility for the decisions that will be made.

There is no doubt that a superficial examination of what is underway indicates that the greatest intensity of efforts and concrete experiences (with the growing interest of businesses and consultants) is in what we have called consumerist discourse. One also notes growing attention to aspects of improvement of the representative democratic system as a whole. Attempts to work in what we have called civil or direct democracy are much more scarce, contradictory and inconsistent. Only on the local level is it easier to find experiences and cases that allow more-horizontal or -comparative analyses. All this is normal, given the initial parameters. What is most worrisome is the apparent disconnection between the two logics. While groups, communities and individuals are increasingly disaffected and disconnected from representative democratic institutions, seen as alien to their lives and life stories, these institutions and their elites are still worried about improving and taking advantage of the old and new communications and information media. New political identities and communities emerge, outside a political system understood as traditional and ever more obsolete. But what seems less clear is that in any of the scenarios analyzed ICTs hold a central role. This could be a point of connection to keep exploring.