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The moons of Jupiter: Networked institutions in the productive transformations of Europe

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"Whether they spoke with a
couple of friends or at a public
meeting it felt like they were
weaving a web. Both were
tireless web spinners but the
difference was that while
one was interested in catching
flies to strengthen his own
position, the other saw webs
as instruments for connecting
the world of insects" (Nanni Balestrini).

In order to consider the idea of the networked institution as an emergent form of cooperation between movements, this article will address a number of questions regarding the innovative forms of

organisation, the transformations and instances of crystallisation that have characterised movements over the last decade within the context of an emerging common space at European level, both in terms of domination and the organisation of struggles. In particular I will focus on the connections and contamination between different political memories that have led to a continual (re)invention of organisational practices. The aim here is not to define a totalising picture that reconstructs the multiple geography of movements, but rather to situate a number of events and social processes and to identify certain mass crystals in order to suggest routes that enable us to navigate through the complexity without being overwhelmed by it (Braidotti, 1994).

As Raul Sánchez argued in a recent article in this webzine, "the theme of institutions is of crucial and extraordinary relevance in its relationship with the problem of social and thus political counter-powers, with the project of a network of counter-powers able to bear a discontinuous and unpredictable dynamic of constituent exodus from the complex dispositive capitalism – *governance* – war" (Sánchez Cedillo, 2007).

I will therefore propose a working definition of the networked-institution as a synchronic institution of cartographies that evolves situation by situation, changes according to variable geometries and produces common concepts, at the same time in which the intense levels of participation and convergent time scales and perspectives shared by social movements, different from one another but nevertheless "composable", begin to emerge. I shall juxtapose this concept of the synchronic institution in opposition to the party institution that defines its course in diachronic and consequential terms and assigns its development to a programmatic teleology. This does not mean that I am claiming that the problem of a programme disappears in networked institutions, rather that in this

context the problem radically changes; whereby the reflection upon the issues of organisation and actualisation assumes priority. The technical possibilities of close social cooperation – through legislative dispositives (transnational associational opportunities and sources of funding), information technology resources (wetware and netware; Moulier Boutang, 2001) and mobility infrastructures – enriches the repertoire of actions which movements draw upon to construct of horizontal forms of institutional practices, in other words practices that formulate sophisticated programmatic frameworks for articulating a common process of self-organisation .

Situating the issue

First of all, it is worth summarising the new forms of governmental mentality that seek to reduce the heterogeneity of European political space. Why was it that at a certain moment we felt the need to shift our attention to projects that were occurring in other places? Is there a link, and if so in what way, between the recent widespread debate among movements about the need – or not – to reconfigure political action within a continental dimension of government, and the crisis of the forms of regulation of social production and political representation of society?

1. If on the one hand a project of multiscalar governmentality has emerged in recent years (Dark, 2002; Agnew, 2002) that permeates European space and levels national public policies, on the other this same process develops by incorporating differentiated geographical areas and subjects, polarising pre-existing power relations and building transversal alliances as well as relations of domination and dependence (Sassen, 2006). “To articulate radically heterogeneous geographic, political, legal, social, and cultural scales in the global dimension of current accumulation circuits is one of

the most important tasks that confronts contemporary capitalism" (Mezzadra, 2007). In this process, the asymmetric constitution of Europe – manifest in the north-south dynamic and the inclusion of Eastern Europe – is mirrored in the permanent polarisation of urban areas. It is therefore possible to read how the political production at a European level, from integration criteria (Maastricht: debt, deficit, inflation, interest rates) to new education, labour market and immigration policy regimes (Bologna, Amsterdam and Bolkenstein, Schengen), goes hand in hand with contemporaneous urban policies in European cities: gentrification, the precarisation of the labour market, social multiculturalisation and the valorisation in productive processes of human faculties such as language, affections, cooperation, difference and knowledge. This new governmentality segments social space, so as to "generalise the "enterprise" form in the body and the social tissue [and] to retake the social tissue [in order that] this can be pulled apart, subdivided and broken up, not according to the grain of individuals, but according to the grain of enterprise" (Foucault, 2004).

2. Perhaps, or at least from a personal point of view, it is through a series of widespread experiences of changes from the 1990s onwards that triggers in individual militants, long before the *movements* themselves, the need to meet with other subjects at a European level: not so much to build a common *political* project, but above all to uncover the memories of resistance and the multiple forms of life (of organisation and action) which arose in European cities during the 1990s.

If a crucial moment for the possibility of imagining a new beginning of history is surely represented by 1st January 1994, it is important not to forget the memories that began to mobilise across Europe, finding their own ways of being and building new and

shared experiences that intersected and tracked each other down. A number of events can help to orient us. In 1991 in Venice, the International Meeting 'against the Europe of Bosses' was one of the first moments in which militants and activists met to discuss the links between the processes that were taking place in different parts of the continent, while over the following years the first mobilisations against the G7 would mark both the personal and collective biographies of movements that had emerged from the Winter Years. Certainly after 1994, with the Zapatista uprising, and in the wake of the first mobilisations organised at a global level (Madrid94) and the resurgence of a far-reaching debate among movements, in reviews and fanzines and also aided by the social use of the BBS network (Scelsi, 1994), the networks that crisscrossed Europe began to thicken.

An event that marked a turning point at a European level for the movements was the demonstration against unemployment in 1997 in Amsterdam where the squatter movement, social centres, 'European' Zapatism, the nascent alterglobal movements, grassroots trade unionism and the movement's countless heretical forms brought together thousands of people in a journey across the borders of Schengen.

And Amsterdam represents a turning point that can be connected to the subsequent cycle of mobilisations of London, Prague, Nice, Davos, Gothenburg, Genoa, etc.

Notions and discontinuities

Rather than continuing with a dubious genealogy and providing an incomplete list of the networks of the last few years, I shall attempt to probe at the margins, to suggest some common notions that

have been created through these *networked* experiences, and to also signal various *terrae incognitae*, points of discontinuity, where it would seem necessary to build new laboratories of political invention and experimentation.

1. The first margin is located in the places of autonomy of the last decade: the invention of new forms of organisation at local level across Europe (such as social centres, info shops, union organising campaigns and other forms social unionism) have represented lively laboratories that have been in permanent expansion. It is worth here mentioning a couple of examples. In the debate about the organization of sexual labour there is an interesting point of discontinuity within the movements: while for many comrades in Europe (ISWU, Licit, Hetaira, Committee for the Civil Rights of Prostitutes, MAIZ, Doña Carmen), the inclusion of sexual labour within the broad statute of labour protection is a necessary struggle for social rights and a way out of social exclusion, in contrast Sonia Sánchez, from AMMAR Capital in Buenos Aires, and María Galindo, of Mujeres Creando (La Paz), argue that it is impossible to define prostitution as labour because of the sexual violence (both physical and symbolic) that weighs heavily on the shoulders of women who practice it (Galindo & Sánchez, 2007). Yet this distinction arises from common methods of analysis of the existing situations. If the former position in fact originates in a context of exclusion from welfare and stigmatization (by unions, state structures, and labour and catholic morality) and from the need of sex workers to assert an autonomous and public voice, the position of Galindo and Sánchez comes from the Latin American context (AMMAR in particular) but at the same time also from a need to break the power relations within unions, to reiterate the autonomy of prostitutes, and to smash exclusionary relations and the monopoly of representation. Equally diverse are the types of

rapport between various movements in Europe and the structures of the state, in cases where the opportunities for relations, incursions, cooperation and financial resources depend upon local institutional geographies. For instance, in Italy the differentiation of powers at local level and the distinction between politics and administration have forced the movements in recent years to reflect upon and act around institutional relationships particularly at a local level (city and provincial councils and the network of new municipalities). In contrast, in the United Kingdom academic institutions and trade unions occupy a more significant role in the debates and strategies of the movements both in regards to their historic role and to a clear segmentation of British institutional forms.

These two examples demonstrate how searching for absolute trends or affixing coherence to diverse processes of constitution often overlooks the possibility of reading other common inflections that are not necessarily coordinated. Interpreting such links synoptically rather than synthetically enables us to recognise resonances not only between different projects, but between these projects and social transformations, of which movements can be a motor or simply a mirror. Reading the flexibility and compositionality of the ethics of autonomy is fundamental for thinking about how a networked institution is constructed, because it is through the articulation that is established between these ways of *doing* things that is possible to construct alliances between singular processes in every geographical area, and to elaborate tactical cartographies that facilitate the everyday interventions within the impervious structures and the shifting micro-politics of *governance*.

2. A second process to focus our attention upon is the construction of common forms of organisation, which have invented new paradigms of connection and translation of languages and practices.

As I have already noted, the continuity of European space is strongly marked by an exercise of governance that attempts to recompose heterogeneity and redirect the complexity of this space of social cooperation towards the logic of value.

The "heterolingual" production (Sakai & Neilson, 2004; Mezzadra, 2007) of movements can be understood as the attempts to devise languages situated at the root of the antagonistic dimensions of the real, which are able to shift from subject to subject and to be translated from context to context. This process means necessarily recognizing a plurality of languages that unfold in every situation and territorialising practices and discourses in heterogeneous social spaces, "even in those that are normally thought to be 'monolinguistic' [settings]" (Solomon, 2007).

The multiplicity and complexity of these networks, with their successes and limits, eludes the sense of a definitive solution of conflicts and the smooth social-democratic rhetoric of the European Union. Instead it allows us to recognise the internal borders, the subjective differentiations, the global asymmetries and the emergent practices and subjectivities, or in other words the combination of conflicts, antagonisms, twists and turns that comprise the European networked space.

However, as has come to light in recent discussions between militants and activists from different parts of Europe, if we try to locate the discursive fields of the initiatives of the movements from 1994 onwards, it is noticeable how intervention has concentrated around the classic terms of social regulation and labour which have increasingly been connected to the spheres of communication and knowledge. Despite the theoretical attention to the dimensions of social cooperation beyond labour, the language (and the practices) of the movements are still deeply tied to these areas of

intervention. It would therefore seem useful to try to rethink, deconstruct and reconfigure the "imaginary figure" of the movements within the material complexity of the shift of production from work to life, which rejects the fatuous identification of social processes of antagonism exclusively within the realm of production, and assumes the multiplicity of existential domains that are today implicated in production and therefore the shift of the conflict over the attempts to subsume emergent life forms *into the language of value*.

3. Finally, a third margin to consider is the contamination between different forms of political organisation. Over recent years, many innovative organisational forms have emerged out of the encounter between historical roots and different subjects, which have given rise to significant changes. The mobilisations in Spain following the racist attacks of El Ejido (Almería), and later with the wave of *encierros* of migrants demanding regularisation in 2001 and 2005, the innovation of union forms through the introduction of the model of union organising in London or through the emergence of intermittents in the culture industry as social protagonists in France, or the advent of *flash mobs* like VdeVivienda (in particular in Barcelona) have all been processes which have not only overwhelmed the protagonists themselves, but the debates and contexts in which the movements are situated. Other situations, despite being considered significant in the analyses of movements, have instead struggled to create a process of deeper contamination. This is perhaps the case of the *afectados* networks linked to the Madrid bomb attacks of 11th March 2004, who, unless having attempted to elaborate an autonomous reflection about the social dimension of the pain in the anti-war movement, have not achieved to be tied to the movements and are more constrained to classical frames of reference such as right/left and conspiracy/

justice. Another case in point are uprisings in the Paris *banlieus*, where the absence of recognizable and 'representative' voices has meant that contamination, beyond analysis, between the urban revolts and the innovative forms of action of the European-wide movement has become difficult.

As such, thinking about the networked institution as a synchronic form of organization of movements means reaching into the indecipherable, into languages that are still unknown and pinning our hopes on the accumulation and connection of memories that circulate Europe, refining methods of translation in order to produce new social compositions able to dislodge the rigid forms of politics, especially those at grassroots level, and to unleash a wave of micro-political tremors in society. At this level it appears that many things are beginning to move and that a surge of imperceptible forms of politicisation are spreading across many areas. Some of these forms can be detected in the network of the Ferrocarril Clandestino project (www.transfronterizo.net), where collectives and associations of migrant activists are opening up spaces of debate not only about how to claim rights within an institutional dimension, but also about how to produce institutions and to share instruments of self-organised welfare and *commonfare* (Rodriguez, 2003) (the sharing of legal information, self-management of spaces of cooperation and so on). At the same time, the recent reflection in Madrid about the dimension of care and the sexual social contract has stimulated an interesting connection between the *Agencia de Asuntos Precarios*, a self-organised space that came out of the experience of *Precarias a la Deriva*, and the self-organised forum *Vida Independiente*, consisting of people with disabilities, about the link between care, control and autonomy. Moreover, other imperceptible processes have produced critical memories all over Europe: from the oral history networks

that have led to the excavation of anonymous remains of victims of the Spanish civil war and to the creation of a counterpart to the *Ley de La Memoria* (ARMH http://armhcuenca.org/armh.html) to the co-research on the antiracist movement of the 1980s in England which problematises the current dimension of multicultural governance in the United Kingdom and the project of the 'Erased' in Slovenia that has critically worked around the question of the disintegration of the Yugoslavian project. This set of projects materially constructs a synchronic dimension of networked cooperation which mobilises diverse and molecular memories in political processes and builds a jagged front of struggles to counterpose a multilayered narrative to what is taking place in the present, to the constitution of a Europe with a molar and asymmetrical memory, undisputed in the old West and accepted without question on the other side of the borders (including those that have 'fallen').

To conclude…

This debate has already commenced in movement spaces – in the latest issue of Posse (The class to come) in a number of recent issues and separate articles in *transform*, as well as in debates, meetings and discussion around Europe. To conclude, let me return to the notion of imperceptible politics as a key of action and conjunction of a variegated space "in relation to the imperceptible experiences of the possibilities and oppressions pertinent to living labour" (Tsianos & Papadopoulos, 2006). The political forms that are currently emerging in European society, can not proceed along ready cut paths and it would be unproductive to rely on the *civil* forms of representation, on a relation with institutions *from the outside*. These new forms of life must move ahead by adapting their intelligence to the variegated forms of power in a direct and

conflictual relationship with government, by trying to create autonomous spaces, by building their strength around their own particular characteristics, by translating their different experiences among themselves, by devising hypotheses in diverse languages, and by mobilising and producing living memories that are able to oppose the imaginary figure of a smooth and resolved Europe. Observing Europe in recent years we have often noticed a social dynamic trapped within the logic of capital, in which movements appear unable to rouse themselves and regain strength. And yet, while at times imperceptible like Galileo's moons, they are on the move.

Anecdotes and reflections contained within this text derive from various people's accounts and their discussions with the author. Many comrades will recognise their own words, and will not always agree with the way in which they have been used here. I would like to thank in particular Barbara Beznec, Marcelo Expósito, Amador Fernández-Savater, Tomás Herreros, Sandro Mezzadra, Marta Malo de Molina and Maia Pedullà for their discussions, criticisms and patience.

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