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The Political Form of Coordination

Maurizio Lazzarato

Translated by Mary O'Neill

Based on the model of "coordination", the struggle of the "*intermittents et précaires d'Ile de France*" * is a veritable laboratory that could well highlight the demise of the political schema born of the socialist and communist tradition. Where this tradition places the emphasis on a logic of contradiction, of the political representation of an injustice that brings remarkable identities into play, the political form termed "coordination" is meant to be resolutely expressive, transformist, attentive to the unstable dynamics of post-identitarian identities, of which the reality of our world is woven. Coordination is aimed less at the formation of a common collective that seeks its members' equality, at all costs, than it is at the becoming of the singularities comprising it within an unstable, networked, patchwork-loving multiplicity – defying all theoretical definition as well as trade-union or state identification. It is a politics of experimentation that lays aside prior knowledge and opens up to the unknown, without which no new life can be envisaged.

Contemporary political movements are breaking radically with socialist and communist tradition. They are deployed not according to the logic of contradiction but rather to that of difference, which

does not mean that there is no conflict, opposition or struggle. Rather, these are radically altered and deployed on two asymmetric levels. Political movements and individualities are formed according to a logic of "refusal", of being "against", of division. They seem, at first sight, to reproduce the separation between "them and us", between friend and enemy, which characterizes the workers' movement or indeed politics itself. But this "no", this assertion of division, is expressed in two different ways. On the one hand, it is directed against politics, and it expresses a radical break with the rules of representation or of the staging of a division within the same world. On the other, it is the precondition for opening up to a becoming, to a bifurcation of worlds and to the way these are created, in a confrontational manner, not a unifying one.

On the first level, the struggle is represented as a flight away from institutions and the rules of politics. People quite simply escape – they walk away as the "peoples of the East" walked away from real socialism, crossing the borders or staying in situ to recite Bartleby's formula: "I would prefer not to". On the second level, the individual and collective singularities that make up the movement deploy a process of subjectivation, which involves both a composition of common platforms (collective rights) and the differential assertion of a multiplicity of practices for expression and for living. Flight, politically elusive practices on the one hand; creation, strategies of "empowerment" on the other. This new process renders the behaviours of movements and singularities opaque and incomprehensible to political scientists, sociologists, political parties and trade unions.

In France, one of the most interesting devices that movements employ to hold both levels together is that of "coordination". The coordination of the "*intermittents et précaires d'Ile de France*" is the latest and most accomplished of the coordinations that, since the

beginning of the 90s, have organized all forms of struggle of a certain scale (coordinations of nurses, students, railway workers, the unemployed, teachers, etc). The refusal, the "no" ("we're not playing any more") is what has pushed the intermittent workers from an ambiguous yet always individual relationship to the organization of the culture and communications industry into a new relationship to themselves and to the power that comes through the "power of us". Instead of being subjected to appropriation and exploitation by industry, all the characteristics of the intermittent workers' cooperation operate as drivers of the struggle.

Coordination is what the event of the struggle has made possible. In this event, we see what is intolerable about an era and at the same time the new possibilities for living that it enfolds. The destructuring of what is intolerable and the articulation of new possibilities for living have a very real existence, but they are first expressed as a transformation of subjectivity, as a mutation of the mode of sensibility, as a new distribution of desires in the "souls" of the intermittent workers engaged in the struggle. This new distribution of what is possible opens up to a process of experimentation and creation: experimenting with what the transformation of subjectivity involves, and creating the devices, institutions and conditions capable of deploying these new possibilities for living.

Speaking about 1968, Deleuze and Guattari said: "Society must be capable of forming collective agencies of enunciation that match the new subjectivity, in such a way that it desires its own mutation."[1] When we consider political action in the light of the event, we are faced with a twofold creation, a twofold individuation, a twofold becoming (creating a possibility and bringing it about) that is confronted with the dominant values.

This is the point where the "conflict" with what exists manifests itself. These new possibilities for living come up against the organization of governments in power and the manner in which these actualize this same constituent opening.

Coordination has developed the struggle on the two asymmetric levels in an exemplary fashion: refusal and constitution, destructuring what is intolerable and deploying new possibilities. Destructuring what is intolerable, by taking a step alongside the codified and conventional forms of the unions' struggle (the meeting, the demonstration), will find expression in the invention of new forms of action, whose intensity and reach will increasingly open up towards harassing and unmasking the command networks of society-as-business. Deregulation of the labour market and social rights is being countered by a deregulation of the conflict that is following the organization of power right into the communications networks, into the expression machines (interruptions in television programmes, recovery of advertising spaces, interventions in press editorial offices, etc.), something which those involved in the conventional union struggles ought not to ignore.

Coordination has coupled (not opposed) a diversifying of actions (by the number of participants, by the variations in objectives), using the "just-in-time" method (by the frequency and speed of their planning and execution), to the unions' monumental mobilization tactics (strikes), which are concentrated in time and space. This gives some indication of what effective actions can be in an organization of mobile, flexible capitalist production, where the expression machines (television, advertising, press, cinema, festivals) are constituent elements of "production".

If destructuring what is intolerable has to invent its modes of action, the transformation of modes of sensibility implied by refusal is only the precondition for opening up to another process, a "problematic" one, of creation and actualization in relation to multiplicity. "Problems" are what characterize the life and the organization of coordination. The subjectivities engaged in the struggle are caught between the old distribution of the sensible, already defunct, and the new, which is not yet in existence other than as methods for transforming sensibility and changing modes of perceiving the world. Coordination is not a collective but a mapping of singularities, composed of a multiplicity of committees, initiatives, forums for discussion and planning, political and union activists, a multiplicity of trades and professions, friendship networks, "cultural and artistic" affinities, which form and break up at different rates and with different aims. The process of constituting multiplicity that is initiated here is not organic; it is, rather, polemical and confrontational. There are, engaged in this process, individuals as well as groups clinging desperately to the identities, roles and functions modulated for them by the organization of industry, and also individuals and groups involved in a radical process of desubjectivation from these same modulations. There are conservative forms of behaviour and expression and other, innovative, forms distributed among various individuals and groups, or coming through a single individual or group.

The word "precarious", added to the name "intermittent workers" of the *coordination d'Ile de France*, is the word that has caused passions to run highest and provoked the most vocal reactions. There are those for whom the term "precarious" denotes a fact, an assessment (there are as many non-indemnified intermittent workers as there are indemnified ones, if not more; at any rate,

35% of indemnified workers are transformed into precarious workers by the new draft agreement). Others happily embrace it, seeing it as a reversal of the terms under which power is assigned (like "unemployed person", "*errèmiste*"**, "immigrant", etc.), and as a rejection of the categories into which they are forced. Still others, paralysed by the vague, negative terms of this attribution, demand the reassuring identity of "artist" or "live-performance professional", which are also categories but, in their minds, "positive" ones. One can identify with the artist or the professional whereas "precarious worker" is a form of identification by default. There are those too for whom the word "precarious" is sufficiently ambiguous and polysemous to open up to multiple situations that go beyond "live performance" and [for whom] it allows enough possibilities for becomings that elude the categories assigned by power. And there are yet others who demand "existential precarity" and denounce "economic precarity". There are those for whom the term "precarious" denotes the point where categories, attributions and identities become blurred (artist and at the same time precarious worker, professional and at the same time unemployed, alternatively within and outside, on the edges, at the limits): the point where relations, since they are not sufficiently codified, are – at the same time and in a contradictory manner – sources of political subjection, of economic exploitation and of opportunities to be grasped.

"Precarious" is the very model of "problematic" naming, which poses new questions and seeks new replies. Lacking the universal impact of names like "worker" or "proletarian", it plays the role – as these once did – of that which defies, and it can only be named negatively by power as a result. All are in favour of neutralizing precarity as a weapon of political subjection and economic exploitation. Where division occurs is on the means by which to

bring it about and on the significance of this achievement. Do we take the unknown aspects of problematic situations conjured up by precarity back to what is known in established institutions and their forms of representation: wage earning, the right to work (employment), the right to state benefits indexed to employment, the joint democracy of employers' and trade union organizations? Or do we invent and impose new rights encouraging a new relationship to activity, time, wealth, democracy, which exist only virtually and often in a negative way, in conditions of precarity ?

We see that the economic questions, those affecting insurance and representation schemes, immediately pose problems of political categorization, which relate back to different processes of subjectivation. Fitting into the pre-fabricated mould of the capital-labour relationship, by viewing art and culture as their "exception", or analysing the transformation of the concept of work and the concept of art, and opening up to the becomings these very questions imply, by defining the "artist" and the "professional" in different terms. Or else bringing the "precarious", that which has not yet been codified, back into the institutionalized conflict, which has already been standardized (and also includes the revolution of a great many revolutionaries !), or seizing the opportunity to develop struggles for identities still in the making.

The post-feminist movements have already wrestled with the knotty issue of becoming, the problem of the relationship between difference and repetition, through the "aporetic" concept of post-identitarian identity: shifting identities, fractured identities, eccentric identities, nomadic subjects, where identity is both asserted and stolen, where repetition (identity) is in favour of difference, where the assertion of rights is not an assignment or an integration but, rather, a precondition for becoming. Here this

same question takes over the more traditional field of law and of the institutional forms regulating social issues.

Different modes of behaviour and expression are represented in coordination, as they become widespread like skills or “collective bodies of expertise” (as the intermittent workers put it when referring to their activities), each time revealing the political “objects” and “subjects”. These skills and expertise, as soon as they are in operation, trigger a proliferation of problems and responses.

The production of an alternative model to the one proposed by the government is one of these skills that questions the organization of our societies generally, using the specific practices of live-performance professions as a basis. By analysing the legitimacy of the division between experts and non-experts, the modes whereby the new model is constructed also put the division between representatives and represented to the test. The action of coordination may be extended to experimentation with devices for being together and being against, which repeat codified political procedures and, at the same time, invent new ones but which, all of them, also take great care to encourage the meeting of singularities, the arrangement of different worlds and universes.

The general form of the organization is not the vertical and hierarchical structure of political parties or trade unions, but that of the network in which different organizational and decision-making methods operate, which co-exist and are coordinated more or less felicitously. The general assembly operates on the principle of the majority vote without, however, selecting elites and vertical, directive or permanent structures. But the life of the coordination and the committees is based on the model of patchwork that allows an individual or a group to launch initiatives and new forms of action in a more flexible and responsible way. Organization in

the form of networks is more open to learning and the appropriation of political action by all. The network favours the development of minority politics and decision-making.

The coordination has adopted a strategy that operates transversally within the divisions instituted by politics and the majoritarian models (representatives / represented, private / public, individual / collective, expert / non-expert, social / political, audience / spectator, employee / precarious worker, etc.). The opening of this instituting space fuels a tension between the assertion of equality proclaimed by politics (we all have equal rights), and the power relations between singularities which are always asymmetric: (in a meeting, a discussion, a decision-making process, the circulation of speech, of places and roles is never based on equality).

"Collective" rights are what define the conditions for equality; rights are for everyone. But this equality is not for itself; it is not in itself a goal. It is for difference, for everyone's becoming; otherwise, it is nothing more than a levelling out of multiplicity, an averaging out of subjectivities and an average (majority) subjectivity. The differences imposed by power are rejected, but the differences between singularities are arranged (on this second level, equality can only be the possibility for everyone not to be separated from what he/she is capable of, [for everyone] to be able to fully realize his/her potential). The hierarchy of the cultural industries is rejected and there is an arrangement of the asymmetric relationships between singularities that cannot be measured one against the other, "as it is in the worlds of artists, where there are no ranks but a variety of sites".

Coordination makes it possible to cross borders, to blur the divisions, categories and assignments into which intermittent workers, all of us in fact, are forced. The space of coordination is

located transversally vis-à-vis the logic of equality and that of difference (freedom) by constructing their relationship as a problem, by trying to analyse the limits within which socialism and liberalism had separately considered and practised them. Coordination is the contentious site for transforming multiplicity: from the subjected and enslaved multiplicity to a new multiplicity the outlines of which cannot be measured in advance.

More generally, we can say this: the form of political organization of coordination relates back to invention, experimentation and to their modes of action, not to a new form of warfare. We are currently living in conditions of "planetary civil war" and a permanent "state of emergency", but I think that the response to this organization of power is only possible if the logic of war is turned back (invaginated) into a logic of co-creation and co-implementation. The logic of war is the logic of conquest or of the distribution of one sole possible world. The logic of invention is one of creating and bringing different worlds into being in the same world; it hollows out power and at same time makes it possible for us to stop being obedient. This deployment and proliferation means extending singularities within the vicinity of other singularities, drawing a line of force between them, rendering them temporarily the same and making them cooperate for a time towards a common goal, without necessarily denying their autonomy and independence, without reducing them in a process of totalization. And this action is, in turn, an invention, a new individuation.

Coordination is set up according to modes that relate back to the unpredictability of propagation and distribution of the invention (by reciprocal capture, based on trust and affinity), rather than to the realization of an ideal plan or of a political line aimed at raising awareness. It succeeds only if it expresses a power in which

singularities exist “one by one, each one for itself”. It takes shape only if it expresses a “sum that is not reduced to a total of its own elements”. The transition from micro to macro levels, from the local to the global, must not take place in a process of abstracting, universalizing or totalizing, but through the ability to hold together, to coordinate networks and patchworks gradually.

Compared to these dynamics of coordination, the instruments and forms of organization of the workers’ movement are largely inadequate since, on the one hand, they refer to the cooperation of the Marx and Smith factory and, on the other, political action is not conceived of as an invention but merely as a revelation of something already there, the main operator of which is awareness and representation. Turning what is potential into something present, current, is an entirely different matter from representing a conflict. The political action of what remains of the workers’ movement (in its institutional or left-wing form) is dominated as ever by the logic of representation and reductive totalization, which means exercising hegemony in one sole possible world (whether it is a question of taking power or sharing it), whereas coordination is a politics of expression. The deployment of the political form of coordination calls first of all for the neutralization of these methods of operating and expressing politics. Where there is a hegemony of the organizational forms of the workers’ movement, there can be no coordination. Where there is coordination, these organizations can be a part of it, but only by abandoning their claims to hegemony and by adapting to the constitutive rules of multiplicity – (we can also see this co-existence at work in the forms of organization mobilizing against neo-liberal globalization !) Coordination alone represents a public space that includes differences.

The activist in a coordination is someone who is committed and at the same time elusive. Contemporary political movements do not develop according to the "mystical" modes of the transition from the individual to the collective. All creative activity stems originally, from singular initiatives (by a group or individuals) that are more or less small in scale, more or less anonymous. These initiatives cause an interruption, introducing a discontinuity not only in the exercise of power on subjectivity, but also and especially in the reproduction of the mental habits and the corporeal habits of multiplicity. The act of resistance introduces discontinuities that represent new beginnings, and these beginnings are multiple, disparate, heterogeneous (there are always multiple foci of resistance).

Rather than relating back to the position of warrior or to religious commitment, the activist in contemporary movements takes on the attributes of the inventor, the experimenter. The activist is committed and elusive as these are, since he/she too must escape for his/her action to be effective in the chain of "prevailing habits and imitations" codifying the space of political action. The fascination that the figure of Subcomandante Marcos exercises is the result of all the elements present in his way of conducting and expressing himself. In a situation that is restrictive in a different way from our own, he asserts himself as a warrior, as a political and military commander; at the same time, using the same gestures and the same words, he immediately eludes the warrior identity, rids himself of the assigned role of commander, of military and political leadership. The situation that is appropriate for the action of beginning something new is expressed in the aporetic definition of "subcommandant": subjectivation and at the same time desubjectivation, each presupposing and relaunching the other reciprocally.

In contemporary militancy, the warrior dimension must be turned into an inventive force, into the power to create and realize arrangements and ways of living. The activist is not the one in possession of the movement's intelligence, who sums up its strength, who anticipates its choices, who derives his/her legitimacy from an ability to read and interpret the movements of power; rather, he/she is the one who, by introducing a discontinuity into what exists, facilitates an increase in the power of arrangement and connection of cooperation, the flows, the networks and the singularities that comprise it, according to modes of disjunction and coordination that are non-totalizing, non-homogenizing, non-hierarchical.

The intermittent workers say: we do not know what it is "to be together" and "to be against" in conditions where different worlds proliferate within a single world; we do not know what the institutions of becoming are, but we raise these questions by means of devices, techniques, arrangements, statements, and in this way we analyse them and we experiment. The traditional modes of political action are not on the way out, but are dependent on the deployment of this power of coordination. The constitution of the self as multiplicity is not sacrificed to the struggle against the imperatives of power. The activist continues to put forward initiatives, to be the originator of new beginnings, but not according to the logic of realizing an ideal plan, of a political line that sees what is possible as a readily available image of the real. [He/she does so] according to an actual understanding of the situation, which obliges him/her to put his/her very identity, his/her world view and methods of action at stake. In fact, he/she has no other option since all attempts at totalization, at homogenizing generalization, at creating a relationship of force exclusively oriented towards representation, at instituting modes of

hierarchical organization, lead to flight and the breakdown of coordination (of multiplicity).

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* Translator's Note: intermittent and precarious workers of the Ile de France

1 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, "May 68 Did Not Take Place", http://illogicaloperation.com/textz/deleuze_gilles_guattari_felix_may_68.htm, title in french : Mai 68 n'a pas eu lieu , in: Les nouvelles, 3 mai 1984 - page 75 et 76.

** Translator's Note: person living on *RMI* = *Revenu minimum d'insertion*, a form of income support.