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The Crossed Place of the Political Party

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In the outline of the congress, the term transversality is described as "a new, a-hierarchical praxis of networking, which has been developing increasingly clear contours since Seattle, Göteborg and Genoa in the heterogeneous protest against economic globalization". In addition to the *transnationality* of these practices, the outline refers to "their trans*sectoral*, interdisciplinary quality between political activism, theory production and artistic intervention". Here the transversal thus glides between the nations, the various tribes of globalization criticism, and various sectors of society, and links them together. At the same time, the question immediately arises: Who is drawing these transversals? Who or what conjoins the sectors of activism, theory and art? How can they be conjoined at all? And how can the "new, a-hierarchical" movements be "crossed" with one another?

The problem with a term like transversality is that it acts as though it were already the answer to this question, whereas it is actually what raises the question: namely the question of the *form of organization*. This is at the root of all the problems: networking can be wonderfully evoked, but how can it be organized? In the works we would feel compelled by theory fashion to consult,

namely by Deleuze/Guattari and Negri/Hardt, we do not find a single answer to the question of the form of organization: with the aged hippies Deleuze and Guattari, transversals proliferate in quasi natural abundance (which is why Deleuze/Guattari especially liked to use botanical and geological metaphors) and do not need to be organized. The case is similar with Hardt and Negri, even though their bestseller *Empire* is generally (mis-) understood as an answer.

Hardt and Negri see the new revolutionary subject - which would purportedly be linked by the transversal lines - in the intellectual proletariat of immaterial work. However, this "proletariat" is not organized, and it is certainly not politically organized, but rather consists solely of grinning monads at your service ("service with a smile") or IT specialists with a happy shareholder consciousness, which Hardt/Negri euphemistically invoke as *multitude*. With Hardt and Negri there is a secret automatism that turns this "mass intelligence" into a political subject with no further ado. Yet no one knows how that should work in reality. How isolated immaterial workers are linked and thus organized into a political force is not even investigated and conceptualized, but only celebrated with the poetic concept of the *multitude*. The theme of our conference is similarly articulated: transversal is purported to be a line that does not have to conjoin anything. Once again, the problem of the form of organization is let slide, and it is said that nothing has to be organized anyway. The problem with theoreticians like Deleuze, Guattari, Negri and Hardt is that none of them argue, they just sing: they become entangled in poetic allusions and suggestions, in a poeticizing evocation of a new political subject. As Katja Diefenbach aptly says: "unbelievably kitschy, but charming." Instead of charming, one could also say well meant. And the good will of any of these superstars could hardly be disputed, but it is indeed astonishing that an entire

politically militant scene takes bible courses in such hymns that are more poetic than political (on the other hand, this is not at all surprising, when one takes into consideration that this scene in particular generally rejects institutionalized political forms of organization).

The logic of Hardt and Negri's argumentationless argument runs as follows. They state a problem: we live in post-fordism, everyone becomes his or her own little self-exploiting monad, which leads to a breakdown of solidarity, to individualization, etc. Yet instead of responding to this problem with suggestions for solutions, they cleverly maintain that the problem *is actually the solution*. In other words, the new little self-exploiting, everyone-is-an-entrepreneur-of-themselves monads *are the new revolutionary subject*. Very elegant. The problem was already its own solution. Now of course the revolution is assured.

There is only one flaw in this. The problem is not the solution, but instead the problem is the problem. The displeasure, or even incapability, which is typical for the market individual, of overstepping the position of one's own interests, is repeated at the political level in the incapability of overstepping one's own individual position of opinion on one topic or another (which is sometimes transformed into one's own individual position of indignation) and integrating it in a world view that is less inclined to shop around intermittently for convictions, but rather to integrate and universalize convictions. Instead, one lives in the fantasy of the market individual being able pick and choose specific political opinions on this or that issue and become politically active when one feels like it. The entrepreneurial and the consumerist self now becomes the model for the political self, in the sense of shopping for convictions and an intermittent, occasional willingness to become engaged.

Contrary to this is the traditionally leftist and not necessarily wrong conviction that politics is collective and not individual. Lenin's statement that there is no politics without the masses could be understood in this sense. Note: Lenin did not say there is no politics without multitudes or transversal lines of flight. Nor did he maintain that there is no politics without subjectless singular crystallization's of desire with deterritorialization effects. Nor is there any mention of a transversal liberation of the line from subjugation to the point (rather, it is the masses that are to be liberated, which are thus both subject and object of politics). In short, Lenin did not say there is no politics without multitude and transversals, but rather: there is no politics without the masses.

This is an extremely unpoetical assertion and not particularly charming. And yet this statement does not necessarily mean surging marches of the masses, but rather something far more prosaic, at least in the following interpretation: politics, if it intends to be effective as politics and lead to something, must fulfill two conditions: it must a) be collective (not individualistic) and b) to the extent that this collective is a collective and not just a crowd (specifically not multitude, not a mere throng), it must be organized. Otherwise, one does not conduct politics, but only trusts in economic laws that conduct politics for us and guarantee, so to speak, that the problem is already the solution, as with Negri and Hardt.

In short, with the theory composition of Hardt/Negri and Deleuze/Guattari, every meaningful idea of organization - and ultimately of capacity for action - is lost from sight. For the "multitude" of anti-globalization groups and clusters will not have any political impact by itself, but rather only by organizing, i.e. through the construction of a "collective will", in Gramsci's words. For spontaneists like H/N and D/G, however, this means that the

writing is already on the wall. Because for Gramsci, what is behind this concept is nothing other than *the party* - and the social movements once set out specifically (and for good reason) to *oppose* the classic party form with all its cadre obedience, its bureaucracy, its self-institutionalization, etc. I would even maintain that it is the classic form of the party that concepts like *multitude* and transversality implicitly oppose. It is the party, underlying them as a kind of negative foil, from which they distance themselves, even where this is not specifically addressed.

Therein lies the problem of approaches of this kind, because in rejecting the party form of organization, they simultaneously reject *every* form of organization. Whereas the party form was oriented along the "party line" according to the model of unity, today the counterproposal consists of the celebration of the multitude along no line at all: now there are only countless little dots left. This means that every individual is their own favorite party, knows everything best themselves and operates politically *à la carte*, composing their own personal party line from the offerings ranging from Amnesty International to Tute Bianche.

Naturally, "the party" in its Leninist or even bourgeois form is not to be salvaged. For emancipatory politics today, the place of "the party" is vacant - but it has *not vanished as a place*, because the question of an enduring form of organization capable of universalization, overstepping mere single-issue politics and bringing people together who share a world view and not just an intermittent love of whales or baby seals, is and stays on the agenda (even if it is repeatedly and almost endlessly postponed). One might even say: the place of the party is crisscrossed by social movements, but it is not crossed out without remnant and does not vanish completely. And perhaps it is this kind of crisscrossing

that crosses the form of the party, but without completely rejecting it, that is a more apt definition of transversality.

Applied to the Austrian situation of a paralyzing party opposition, "transversal" would then mean "crossing" the party politics of the so-called opposition parties SPÖ (Social Democratic Party of Austria) and the Greens. It should be noted, though, that "crossing" is different from opposing. (Anyway, it would not make much sense to oppose an opposition that is already its own worst enemy.) In fact, "crossing" would mean something different: it would mean confronting the opposition parties with themselves and their own temerity and accommodation policies ("zero deficit in the constitution"), to put them under pressure from outside, as far as possible. It would mean reminding the ÖGB (Austrian Association of Unions) that it is a fighting organization according to its own bylaws and not the wagging tail of a barking government - nor is it a sub-organization of the national business association. And it would mean keeping the place of "the party" itself vacant, but finding more permanent forms of organization *at the same time* for a free opposition that is specifically not subsumed by the established parties.

The kitsch rhetoric of the Deleuzians and Negrists - which unfortunately seems to be hegemonic in radical political discourse now - overwrites the place of the absence of the party today and glues it shut. It does not hold it vacant, but rather makes it invisible: it acts as though the form of organization were not a problem, as though the problem were already the solution. However, the problem *remains* a problem. For a capacity for action depends on organization. And organization is not just some get-together, but rather implies a number of specifiable, definable criteria. In conclusion, I would like to name four of these criteria, which are necessary for a politically effective organization:

1. *Universalization*. What this implies is the organization of particular positions and interests in a universal political project. Let us take Attac as an example. What the left usually criticizes about Attac is the tendential mainstreaming of economic demands. The real problem, though, consists in the self-limitation to economic demands, which turns Attac into a kind of Greenpeace for the economy. Admittedly, at the start of a broad movement capable of universalization, concentrating on certain thematic fields might be necessary, but at some point, the question of the form of organization arises. At this point, a choice must ultimately be made between two models (ideal-typically portrayed here): union or party. This means that one is either limited to the particular, corporatist representation of group interests in a certain field of politics, such as the economy (with all the appropriate and available means, but usually through negotiations), or one goes beyond particular interests to a universalist perspective based on a world view. This is a perspective that can and does take positions on the most diverse problems in society (and that is specifically what distinguishes the party form). There is nothing that Attac is more wary of than the step to becoming a political party - and yet in the logic of the political field that Attac move in, this step seems hardly avoidable, if the pressure on this field and the other parties is to be maintained. That brings us to point

2. *Synthetization*. The age of ideology has had a bad press, but what has, in fact, been jettisoned is *any* capacity for synthetizing political positions. What the party form was able to achieve was to give an organizational form to a political world view. Since this form has disappeared, the concept of the world view has vanished along with it. A world view is a political positioning that synthetizes the most diverse problems that arise, inscribing them in a common horizon. This naturally always holds the danger of oversimplification, if

problems are not inscribed in a horizon, but are instead reduced to a single cause. Yet the positive achievement of world views is *de-individualization*. Of course the party is not always right, but the bourgeois reverse conclusion, which also predominates today on the left, that the individual opinion (exaggerated to individual "conviction") is always right, is just as wrong. Thus if universalization means that it is made possible for particular positions to be joined by other people, whose problems may lie somewhere else entirely, then synthetization means that this does not result in an arbitrary patchwork, but rather in a more progressive horizon, which correlates very different positions (on economy, equality, culture, etc.) in a meaningful way, thus inscribing them in the horizon of a world view.

3. *De-Individualization*: The orientation to a party line, to which individual party members subordinate themselves, is regarded as dreadfully unreasonable under post-fordist individualization conditions, by the left as well. If this subordination takes place under coercion, then skepticism is justified. Today, however, we are far removed from that. A Stalinist apparatus of power of a one-party rule is nowhere in sight. And yet there is nothing that arouses the ire of today's polit-monads more than the image of the apparatchiks, for whom "the party" is more important than their alleged "individual conscience". The fact that political engagement can be at the service of a world view that transcends the chimera of the "individual conscience" is understood as a totalitarian threat. In fact, though, organizing goes hand in hand with de-individualization, it cannot be done otherwise. Although a party-like version of de-individualization may not seem as possible today as it was in the 50s, actual developments contradict this (Hardt and Negri's analysis is right in this respect); conversely it is also not possible to imagine a form of political organization, in which all

the members insist on their own individual opinions (the grassroots democratic or self-organizing idea of the plenum is also problematic, to the extent that it follows the crypto-Habermasian idea that a valid overall opinion would somehow consensually emerge at some point from an endless dialogue of individual opinions). Thus, it is necessary to search for new (organizational) forms of progressive de-individualization. For this search, too, the party must remain present *specifically as the absent party*.

4. *Permanence*. What is ultimately an essentially pragmatic argument for stable forms of organization is their permanence - which is not least of all an effect of de-individualization. An individual becomes a little bit engaged and then returns to his or her professional or private life. An organization continues to last, even when individual members take time out. This gives its work a continuity that cannot be maintained through the engagement of individuals that is not linked or only intermittently linked or only in conjunction with specific occurrences. Unlike individuals and self-organized small groups, it continues to function when single persons need to take a break or when success is not immediately forthcoming. The appropriate form of organization thus prevents a loss of universalization and the transformation of the organization back into mortal monads. It poses lasting politics.

Even though these may not be entirely sufficient, they formulate necessary conditions for thinking about forms of organization. And what other use could the concept of "transversality" have, if it is not an impulse for thinking about forms of organization and the capacity for action?