Be Network, My Friend

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IN EUROPE a new form of governing emerged. Government today acts on different levels at the same time: it permeates urban spaces and rearticulate borders in the everyday life of cities, it polarise pre-existing power relations, building new dependences in the contemporary geography of Europe. As a result the asymmetry of former Europe have not disappeared at all, but ruptures and fringes emerge every day and marginality and centrality exist one along the other.

This is the way in which contemporary capitalism is constituting a global market: playing on asymmetries for multiplying labour regimes and fragmenting social struggles. This proliferation of modes of exploitation stems in the crisis of unions, parties, welfare state and more in general, we would say, in the crisis of those political institutions which legitimacy is based on belonging and representation, in times when belonging has blown up and representation has become the impossible attempt to discipline social heterogeneity, reducing difference and social life under the command of capital.

The asymmetric constitution of Europe towards the outside – manifest in the differential inclusion of Eastern Europe, as well as in the permanent production of outsides to reproduce European power – involves a becoming- asymmetric not only in the colony, in the outside, but also in the metropole itself. This is the everyday life of European urban areas: the models of integration defined in Maastricht, Bologna, Amsterdam, Schengen dictate policies of exclusion and valorisation, of control and discipline, imposing a process of general precarisation of social life and urban production. Following Mezzadra and Neilson (2008), the development of gentrification, the proliferation of internal borders and the securitarian obsession of urban governance display novel procedures of government aiming to multiply labour regimes and exploit every segment of society as much as possible, depending on the vulnerability of each subject, on her fragility, we would say, on her precarity.

Our question here is what social strategy of organizing can escape this multiplication of modes of exploitations not by recomposing unity, identity and homogeneity, but permitting difference, precarity, vulnerability to become a departure point for radical politics? For this we will focus just on one facet, an ongoing experimentation that, we think, has been relevant in the development of autonomous social struggles during the last decade: network not only as a tool, but as a plane of consistency for contemporary autonomous practices, in the invention of new forms of social cooperation
among differences, for constituting new institutional forms able to reinvent social cooperation in the crisis of classical institutions, in the constitution of what we called monster institutions.

This is in our view a productive take on the recent history of social movements in Europe that since the early 1990s started to striate the European spaces, weaving webs and nets to transform the forms of organisation and open new territories of struggle. This is the case of the movements against unemployment from 1994 to 1997 where basic income became a claim to develop practices on social rights outside the strict dimension of labour; this is also the case of struggles for mobility, that challenged on the European level the violent and ambiguous link between citizenship and rights (Sans Papiers, 1996, kein mensch ist illegal in Documenta, 1997), going beyond issues of culture and inscribing citizenship in the diagram of the governance of labour and in labour struggles. From 1997 to 2001 these practices of network allowed to organise the cycle of mobilisations against global capitalism and have been crucial to invent political spaces for naming and constituting new rights. Freedom of movement, basic income, care-ship (cuidadania) as concrete goals of a new set of institutions: the institutions for the commons. In this sense, we state, movements invented ‘network-institutions’, as transversal assemblage of new institutional forms that attempt to fight the governance of life and to open new spaces of autonomy and emancipation, where the question of programme – what is to be done? – radically collapses into the present.

Network institutions have therefore to be analysed in their everyday functioning, in their proceeding as social machines. As social practices and social constructions, and not as instituted and crystallised spaces. If cut through this optic, networks appears as sites for the production of critique as gesture that challenges the procedures of governing from a critical inside, opening the space to constitute norms and institutions for a ‘new’ community. Let us for this recall once more Foucault’s words: If governmentalisation is […] this movement through which individuals are subjugated in the reality of a social practice through mechanisms of power that adhere to a truth, well, then! I will say that critique is the movement by which the subject gives himself the right (le sujet se donne le droit) to question truth on its effects of power and question power on its discourses of truth.

But how can a practice of critique challenge and reinvent the functioning of social institutions? How can critique be an instituting practice if not by contrasting crystallisation and by permanently displacing the production of organisation out of disciplined and instituted spaces? This is what we refer to when we write on the ‘extradisciplinary’ and ‘extra-institutional’ address of autonomous political practices: the everyday practice of translation and excess happening in the weaving of networks, aiming to produce assemblages beyond the instituted spaces, and constitute new commonalities.

To exceed the institution, to exceed the discipline: this is the task of the political practices that explore possible escapes from the forms of contemporary capitalist governance. Nonetheless to exceed does not mean to leave behind, forget or refuse: it means to go beyond, overflow. Exceed as a practice for composing new sites for the production of situated knowledge and social cooperation able to open breaches where statements emerging in social mobilisations can proliferate.

Extra allow us to deal with the beyond, both in the physical meanings of the term – beyond the bureaucracies, beyond the walls of the institutions, in the open space of the metropolis – and in theoretical terms, exceeding the borders of discipline as canon of knowledge, as authority in the social production of knowledge. Possible practices for exploring such extraterritorialities are appropriation and transversality, as practices to trigger collective assemblages, occupying the street, the university, the social imaginaries, and to transform public spaces in common and hybrid spaces, subverting the norms and letting social conflicts blow up.

Autonomy is not enough. If we want to constitute dissident spaces for the production of subjectivities that do not respond to the order of government and to the command of capital, we need to constitute new hybrid ecologies for dissident socialities. We need to move on the margins, in and out institutions, in order to overwhelm and overcome them, in order to develop monstrous political practices, able to break the false coherence of representation and to challenge the discipline of major sciences (the royal sciences of the state) through the molecular acting of minor sciences (nomadic sciences), where knowledge becomes a situated process of production, that concretely modifies social reality, not formally, but in its everyday functioning.

This is why we think the most problematic task is not how to escape towards the outside, the outside of the hegemonic representation, but how to break the representation from the inside: how do we escape inside
and challenge the functioning of the contemporary rationality of government? How do we invent a subversive and monstrous institutionality that interacts with existing institutions and traditional disciplines? This movement of subversion indeed needs not only to reappropriate the social values produced inside institutions and disciplines, but also to show the limits, the crises and the dramatic finitude of the contemporary institutional assemblages.

Practices generate contradictions and our experience is not an exception. But inside the privatization of the public and in the reduction of social autonomous production to the rules of capitalist accumulation, monster institutions wants to be an attempt to constitute new textures that tie life and politics: to produce new territories of social existence, to permit excess to avoid to become surplus, to claim and construct dissident and alternative life-forms where freedom, solidarity and life itself can gain new meanings beyond market regulation and political representation. This is for us the institutional generative principle of the processes in which the Universidad Nómada participates.

Social centres, Oficinas de derechos sociales and networks for militant research, as spaces where to reinvent the forms of cultural production, the relationship between life and labour, as attempts to reconfigure social struggles in the enlargement of production from the factory to the social life, and finally as sites for the production of autonomous knowledge, to demystify the functioning of contemporary capitalism but also to problematise the strategies of social movements. However this same institutional generative principle calls us to problematise and engage with constituted institutions like Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Centro de Arte Contemporáneo in Murcia (CENDEAC), with Spanish Universities and so on, to open hybrid spaces to critique and investigate the procedures and the rationalities in the contemporary governance of social production.

In this process, extra is a constitutive prefix for the invention of monstrous institutions: extra as viral practice against the permanent attempt of normalisation and abstraction carried on by capital. Extra as constituent practice that explores the emergent territory of the right to the commons. Mending on these margins, exceeding and exploring, network institutions emerge as spaces of invention to actualise these commons, to loot and reappropriate the social values circulating in the instituted spaces, and at the same time making possible the invention and proliferation of radically democratic processes of organization for social production.

notes

1 http://transform.eipcp.net/transversal/0508#redir
2 Cuidadania as a term plays with words: from ciudad (city) to cuidado (care), from ciudadanía (citizenship) to cuidadania. It resulted from a typographical error and has been useful to define the practices of feminists networks working on care labour, especially in problematizing the link between citizenship and transnational care.
3 (Foucault, 1997:32).
4 See Brian Holmes, http://transform.eipcp.net/transversal/0106/holmes/en/#redir and more generally to http://transform.eipcp.net/transversal/0106
5 http://transform.eipcp.net/transversal/0508/lopezetal/en