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Flatness instead of Depth. Against the New Praise of Verticality

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It seems, there is nowadays an accumulation of diverse voices, who push the call for verticality. For example, the tendency to describe (pseudo)horizontal post-Fordist modes of production, and their valorisation of affects, cooperation and communication, as ubiquitous; and subsequently denunciating any form of horizontal exchange. And when once again the lack of depth in contemporary cultural thinking is emphasized, it is mostly to recycle an old topos. The recurring lamenting of the superficiality of the world, which makes us mediocre and produces new forms of assimilation, is nothing other than the boring repetition of a cultural-pessimistic figure, which consistently affirms the old elites or the desire for new elites.

The valorisation of participation and inclusion is, especially within the terrain of post-Fordist production, first of all a strategic moment of producing subservience in work-management as well as in city politics: Let-Speak, Make-Speak, Speaking-for-the-Sake-of-the-Speech's-Will. Calls for cooperation and participatory citizenship as governmental-securing resources have insofar little

(not much) in common with the attempts of consensual decision-making processes and basis-democratic self-organisation. On this background, a different reterritorialisation of the streams of social cooperation on the surfaces is needed, different to the constraints of contemporary production, but also different from the "old times": reterritorialisation not as an occupation of a homogeneous space, not as a deep drilling or high flight into an exclusive sociality, not as a recuperation of sovereignty in form of an old community or a majority within a territorial state; rather as a flat recomposition of the common. Flatness instead of depth. Multiplicity rather than sublime elevation.

The vertical is always thought of from top to bottom, like the line, which the string extends with a plummet. But how about, if there are no *vertices*, no tips and peaks, no heights, no depths; what about imagining in this case not the planet, but our sociality, as flat – the world as a field of consistency of flat multiplicities? What about imagining these multiplicities haunting the surfaces as flat entities? What if everything happens on the surface level, with nothing below? What if there is no more depth of the soul, no more depth of the state?

The question is not, how to teach "postmodernity" its lacking depth, how to return to the elevation and sublimity of the old civic public sphere, how to restore verticality within a world of seeming assimilation and relativism. Rather we have to face the problem, in what way horizontality – on the background of the modes of post-Fordist production – can insist on its emancipatory potential or can recuperate its emancipatory figure.

Even in the analyses of new left movements in Europe, one can notice a call for verticality. There is a double impatience driving the

ones claiming it. Impatience with the sedate speeds of horizontal negotiation, and also impatience with the moves of searching, which aim for reterritorialising social movements within and beyond traditional politics – be it in/with new parties, or in new institutional forms of organisation, which extend the party form. This impatience can on the one hand reveal itself as molecular-revolutionary impatience of driving for instituent practices, for new forms of persistent self-instituting; on the other hand it can enclose itself in old (established, familiar) forms of institutionalization. If some discourses from within the movement assume a new emancipatory potential in the promises of acceleration of vertical decision-making processes, and the question of political representative responsibility is articulated as a "historical chance", then the power of self-instituting can vanish, and with it the resistance to being instituted.

If therefore a further vector, a further direction is needed, to add to horizontality, then it is not verticality but rather transversality, the line that queers separated models of basis-democracy and representation. Occasionally overlaps, interrelations, mutual reinforcements of instituent practices and institutions of the common take place. Instituting the common can be driven on from both poles – in conflictual complementarity, in the creation of a plane of consistency of flat multiplicities, advancing towards immanent horizons rather than expecting verticals oriented towards a centre, a unity, an author.

And even when the modes of subjectivation and the forms of temporality are manifold, overlapping, sometimes contradictory: there is no easy way out of horizontality, which is significant for staging the complex asymmetries of social movements. This is not a question of powerlessness and power, but rather of perpetually transforming power relations. Continuous discussions about

asymmetries of these power relations and about the danger of their repression and concealment are needed, also and especially through terms such as horizontality or radical inclusion. Yet besides molecular-revolutionary impatience we need placidity, slowness, forms of pauses in horizontal practice and an inclusion tendentially encompassing all. To what extent the (new) left parties simply embrace the "majesty mass"–be it as venerable "proletariat", as "people" or in the slogan of "99%"–and via populist constructions try to become majority, or if there will be counter-logics of representing and governing within parliamentary European democracies, will have to manifest itself.

And even the new parties are not always devices or agents of acceleration, but rather, almost vice versa, brakes. Syriza is to be understood as an (emergency) brake, which with a new government tries to slow down the high-speed crushing of all public social institutions and attempts to retard the general break up of the cultural, social and physical environment, by the threefold European top caught in its high-flight and vertigo of power. Syriza is meant to be the wedge, in the decisive moment to be plugged in between the gears of the European finance politics. However at stake here is not primarily the wedge as such, but the stopping of the gears, to begin developing another Europe on governmental level, one that is capable of opposing the constantly re-produced and reinforced North-South slope within Europe, and its excessive austerity. Resistance is tied to the invention of this new Europe, understood as emancipatory project.

The strength of the social movements of the last centuries reveals itself precisely where they managed to achieve a transnational dimension, without disputing its Eurocentric character (especially in the German-speaking context). Like the much criticized "event-hopping" of the "summit hoppers" or the No-Global-protests

before and after, particularly in Europe, could not be imagined without the non-European spark of the uprising in Chiapas or the activists of the Indian peasant movement, the occupations of the M15 and the Occupy movements could not be thought of without the revolts in the "Arab Spring". The recent Kurdish struggles equally stand for attempts of transforming social relations, circumventing national state demarcation, and proving alternative forms of living together. The history and practice of emancipatory social movements is in such emphasis also a modest attempt to provincialize Europe and to counter the left reinvention of Europe with different and extra-European alliances.

The (supra)national frame bears the danger of the "social question" being transformed via politics towards a national question. It is justifiable to focus the fiscal policy of the EU, identified with Germany's power, to criticise the financial top, the frenzy of the recent debt system. At the same time exactly here it becomes clear that the question of how to organize production, reproduction and distribution cannot be regulated via the financial markets. Benevolently accompanied by state politics, and often in contradiction with these, it is about self-organizing everyday needs and desires, inventing new forms of living together, allowing time for continuous work and developing instituent practices of the common; at least occasionally escaping capital relations and the modes of state governing. Solidarity economies, assemblies in the barrios, self-organisations of reproductive labour beyond family- and gender relations, but also occupations of companies, factories and theatres.

Obviously it is not only about resistance as such, but indeed about inventing a different Europe to the one associated with the North-South slope and excessive austerity. Although a party (if radical

enough) can collaborate on such projects, contents cannot come "from above", from the plummet of verticality being dragged down. They do not grow spontaneously in the minds of a few clever party strategists, who will then list them in a nice, coherent programme. These contents, needs and desires, and the forms of potentially new institutions emerge repeatedly (from with)in the transversal, persistent and continuous work, the slow assemblies, the multiplicities of social movements.

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