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Praise for the “monster institutions”

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Raul Sánchez Cedillo’s *Lo absoluto de la democracia* (*The Absolute of Democracy*) stands out among recent books of social and political essay, and it is accompanied by a prologue no less beautiful and heartfelt by Toni Negri. What a joy that this book inaugurates the new Malaga publishing house subtextos, connected in turn to a recently opened bookstore in the same city called Suburbia. A gush of new thought and open culture for this city and for us all.

The book brings together political articles by Sánchez Cedillo published in the last decade, the first from 2007. It discusses reflections developed around the 15M movement, interpreting these through concepts elaborated by Félix Guattari and Gilles Deleuze in the second half of the last century and accompanied always by the guiding wisdom of Toni Negri. And it does not shy away from complex themes linked to technopolitics or theories of indetermination and probability. To read politics through this new lens is daring.

In contrast to those who see in 15M a moment of politicization of middle-class youth whose cycle is now bygone, Sánchez Cedillo understands the movement as a process of politicization and

political agency that managed to create its own ecosystem of in-person assemblies and virtual nodes. 15M creates a network system or, in Sánchez Cedillo's own words, a transdividual network system that leaves the lonely figure of the "individual" as the ultimate atom of the social behind and inaugurates the path of the transdividual network system of human beings who support and care for one another. It is a matter of an "agency of bodies and machines" whose eruption is situated in the revolts of the Arab Spring and the squares and streets in 2011.

The concept "body-machine" plays a fundamental role in this agency, as "what is fundamental about the operator in the network is not the individual with its labor-power, but the bodies, which is to say, the brains, the emotions, the rationalities, the uses of language, of gesture…", as Sánchez Cedillo said in an interview. Unheard-of violence is exercised over it, for which reason Raúl speaks of 15M as an "insurrection of the body-machine."

This network equipped itself with an information-generating point that was distinct from the generators of mainstream opinion:"it went on constructing an expansive, appropriative 'we', a kind of body without organs, which has an existential, affective territory that is its own, a singularity full of multiplicities," which expresses itself autonomously and for itself and has no interest in representation.

This transdividual network system is fitting when it comes to fighting against the abstract capitalist and informatic machine that extracts surplus value from all human relationships, these being for their part the basis and medium of human life. Following Negri and other authors of Italian autonomia, Sánchez Cedillo shows that precisely these actions and exchanges, parasitized by the capitalist machine, are the pillars of anthropogentic production, which is to

say that which reproduces and supports the very living of humans and of the planet. The living labor of interconnected populations is the life substance of the capitalism itself, that on which it feeds, and which it promotes and depletes in similar proportions.

These considerations propel the communist passion of the book. A communism that does not revolve around communist parties, as Toni Negri highlights in the prologue. If for the latter, born in the 1930s, it was natural to tilt workers' struggle towards the model of workers' parties, despite the critique of the parties that already existed in those years, Sánchez Cedillo's generation looks to other experiences, including the new composition of living labor in the capitalist centers, the immanence of the general intellect in all productive and reproductive processes, and the emergence of a new subjectivity traversed by new conditions of life: generalized precarity, the deterioration of life at planetary scale, and the emergence of cognitive and affective networks that sustain us. This would be the new horizon of communism.

This "new" communism does not spurn the institutional dimension because it knows that it should take on capital and the state. But it aspires to the creation of institutions of counterpower, which Sánchez Cedillo calls "monster institutions" in response to the dynamics of self-organization that create organizing environments capable of hybridizing themselves with "respectable" institutions. Spaces in which people fight by living or live by fighting, spaces in which shared forms of life are invented, spaces in which the mere fact of continuing to exist is already itself a political wager. Spaces that themselves attest to the extraordinary level that productive cooperation has reached in our society, even as the hegemonic discourse insists on privileging the figure of the "winner" at all costs in the jungle of the market.

To theorize these new existential and political territories, Sánchez Cedillo situates himself in the context of the most radical and innovative experiments of 1968, such as the occupied and self-managed centers, the creator networks of free software, the research-action groups or the cooperatives of hackers...

Sánchez Cedillo takes up "Deleuze's notion of the institution as an invention, an artifice, a creation to satisfy new needs that the naturalized structure in a social environment does not allow for. Here we see that we need a new form of union, a new definition of the political enterprise and of the party, etc. And to this extent, institutional invention is always correlated with an emancipatory moment, a new political creation." To say that we need "new institutions" amounts to saying that we need to construct these artifacts.

From this perspective an analysis takes shape of 15M as a polyhedral and autopoetic movement that has nothing to do with melancholic gaze and nostalgic celebration, but rather situates it as, perhaps, the first irruption of the movements to come. Polycentric structures and open networks that escape the rigid forms of the party-form territorialization.

This part of the book closes with a further analysis of the situation, centered on the adventures of the party Podemos and the municipalist cycle, without ever losing view of the European dimension of our location in the south of that region. The need grows from here for a network of European counterpowers that can put an end to the dynamics of the European oligarchies.

The new concepts and the analysis as a whole have an extraordinary valence in the face of hegemonic neoliberal discourse, which takes the individual and the traditional family as its primary references.

The primacy of these categories when thinking about the current situation and their preservation as naturalized concepts block the capacity for political innovation that requires us to experiment with institutional innovations capable of embodying this constitutive transdividual dimension of our present. This is why concepts are important that are not so new, despite being quite unknown among the larger public.

These are just a few notes about some of the topics treated, with their gaps and variations. It would not be honest, Sánchez Cedillo says, to give a collection of articles a coherence that they do not have, as they have been written over a long period of time and from different angles, but it is obvious that in their variety they offer us clues for thinking a communist future in the exacerbated capitalism of our days. This is a most welcome breath of fresh air, from one of the finest political militants of our time, from a very subtle and original intellectual of the new generations. Do not stop reading it! Even if the terminology is novel for those not initiated in the thinking of Deleuze and Guattari, I am sure the reading will leave no one indifferent, and it will allow all readers to think the political with categories adequate to the twenty-first century, far beyond the banalities of so many talk-show guests.

El Salto Blogs, 19 Sept 2021
https://www.elsaltodiario.com/laplaza/absoluto-democracia-raul-sanchez-cedillo

Raúl Sánchez Cedillo
Lo absoluto de la democracia
Contrapoderes, cuerpos-máquina, sistema red transdividual

Subtextos, mayo 2021
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Das Absolute der Demokratie
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