ORGANIZING NETWORKS: NOTES ON COLLABORATIVE CONSTITUTION, TRANSLATION, AND THE WORK OF ORGANIZATION

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ABSTRACT   The return of political ontology and its critique of representation contributes to a retrieval of the antagonistic registers of "the political." A corresponding interest in processes of collaborative constitution has explored alternative modalities of the (conflictual) production of (political) subjectivity. Because such efforts necessarily attend to the status of a principle of the actionable, this essay suggests that the question of a "beyond" as it relates to a politics of the actionable calls for a conceptual elaboration of "organized networks." The

essay argues that a broader analytical perspective is opened by reengaging the practice of translation.

TRANSLATING THE WORK OF ORGANIZATION

> The return of political ontology and its critique of representation contributes to a retrieval of the antagonistic registers of "the political." Marginalized in liberal accounts of politics and political agency, the conflictual dynamics that underscore social-political practices have amplified in a world grappling with an intensification of transversal border relations. The tensions immanent to transversality multiply the political into territory usually excluded from political theory. Such tensions can be understood as border conflicts that occur at the level of institutions, culture, disciplinarity, and affect, to name just a few. The logic of networks and their capacity to organize relations are key to understanding this multiplication of the political. A corresponding interest in processes of collaborative constitution has explored alternative modalities of the (conflictual) production of (political) subjectivity. Because such efforts necessarily attend to the status of the actionable, we want to suggest that the question of a "beyond" as it relates to a politics of the actionable calls for a conceptual elaboration of "organized networks." What, for instance, are the conceptual-technical peculiarities of nonrepresentational politics operable within network cultures? And how might such an investigation further the understanding of organized networks as new institutional forms?

Such questions are, and can only be, raised from within an ever-expanding archive of how a "will to connect" (Hall 1996) has initiated the creation of networks, the joining of forces across movements, and the elaboration of visions of the movement of movements across the political field. Our analysis holds similarities here with Saskia Sassen's research on nonstate political actors whose practices are frequently "rendered invisible in the space of national politics," while serving as "institution-building work with global scope that can come from localities and networks of localities with limited resources and from informal social actors" (2006: 375). It makes sense to think about "the political" today by way of browsing this transdisciplinary, transcultural archive as bricoleurs rather than historians. Such an approach enables us to better frame the current conjuncture and identify the conflicts that structure it.

From the perspective of organizing networks, another key question to retrieve relates to the status of a principle of the actionable, which we understand in terms of the constitution of agency – a capacity for intervention – and corresponding modalities of subjectivization. Today, the injunction to organize remains the signature statement

of a politics of the actionable and tends to be framed according to a principle of identity, whether at the grassroots level of social movements or across "civil society" networks elaborating new models of cosmopolitical governance, both of which strive to conceptualize organization as the production of a collective capacity to intervene. Here, the work of organization involves the production of collective identity that assumes to be somehow coherent, unified, consensual, and representable, above and beyond the creation of specific institutional forms.

If the project of elaborating the concept-metaphor of "organized networks" takes seriously the crisis of representation, as well as the corresponding return of political ontology and interest in the means of the production of subjectivity, it also needs to reengage the question of "the political" and its multiple registers. The concept-metaphor of "organizing networks" is, then, less an attempt to create yet another theory of organization than an attempt to think ways of engaging the political *beyond* a politics of the actionable. Such a "beyond" has become a major theme in contemporary political ontology and its critique of representation. According to Maurizio Lazzarato's "brief phenomenology of action," for example, the very concept of action is in crisis since "[t]he modern distinctions between instrumental action (action to attain a certain result) ... political action (action in response to the action of others) and artistic action (action in the resultant work remains linked to the open and indeterminate creative process) have ceased to exist" (2005). The category of the actionable can no longer be taken for granted as a referent of organization and social mobilization without an account of how action – or labor, as Lazzarato argues – has been transformed. When we speak of a politics beyond the actionable, we insist on the centrality of this critique for an understanding of the work of organization. And while this attention to the work of organization necessarily includes shifts in specific *dispositifs* of labor, we wish to maintain a broader sense of work as social production, of collaborative constitution, of creating new technologies of the common.

Organization is, over and against liberal theories of subjectivity, an existential condition from which specific instances of political subjectivity are abstracted. Because it is on the terrain of the common that organization occurs, organization does not have to follow a principle of identity. To think of organizing networks is not to negotiate different modalities of interest aggregation or lubricate the machines of consensus building, but to invent new modalities of subjectivization. And if the terrain of organization is a common that makes possible works of collaborative constitution, the practice of organizing is perhaps best understood in terms of a translation. Through recent approaches to the practice of translation we want to relate the concept and practice of translation to the social-technical and geographic situation of networks. In these writings, translation does not involve a commitment to a politics of equivalence but points

beyond consensus, correspondence, and commensurability, involving a process of identifying and mobilizing conflictual capacities. Such a notion of translation offers a heuristic device with which to approach collaborative practices within network cultures.[1]

NETWORKS OF COLLABORATIVE CONSTITUTION

Political thought has long insisted on the variability of democracy as a form of government, recalling its constitutive openness to historical transformation in general and the historical specificity of the coupling of the practice of democracy with the logic of representation in particular. Any critique of representation necessarily involves the status of this coupling, and this is also the case for the perspective of organizing networks.

This perspective focuses on practices of collaborative constitution, the social technologies – protocols and models of governance – involved in the autonomous production of subjectivity. Such practices are processes of translation, of translating the work of self-organization, but often remain within a nonrepresentational logic of relations; they do not always complete the work of organization and are therefore rarely acknowledged as elements of a democratic process from within the horizon of representation. In considering translation as the key social-technical practice in the relation between organizing networks and collaborative constitution, this essay foregrounds the conflictual element that underscores these processes and insists that their capacity to produce material effects is misunderstood when the work of organization is subsumed under a logic of representation.

Because networks consist of heterogeneous subjects and technical actors that frequently operate across subnational and transnational scales, it does not follow that such relations necessarily engage in communicative ways. Frequently enough noncommunication, "communication without ends," or an "irreducible idiomaticity" (Spivak 2001) characterizes the culture of networks. This is the "not-working" dimension of networks (Lovink 2005). But it is a mistake to assume such instantiations of conflict as somehow empty or without force. Conflict holds a generative power that shapes the social, technical, and political field. The concept and practice of translation, we argue, provide an analytical device suitable to the politics of adaptation required of organizing networks. Translation thus presupposes contingency as a constitutive dynamic in the organization of networks.

In order to address these various hypotheses we return to the work of Chantal Mouffe, counterposing her reluctance to venture beyond a politics of conflictual consensus achieved through articulation with what we see as the constituent role of nonrepresentational politics that define organized networks as emergent institutional forms. There is a prevailing crisis of visibility, in other words, for nontraditional modes of organization, which Mouffe does not address. We intend

to radicalize Mouffe's sense of disaffection, which she relates to the institutional mechanisms of representative democracy. Organization understood in terms of the subsumption of political desires to existing institutional and political forms necessarily implies such disaffection, which should be more adequately understood as a form of translation. What must be called into question are the assumptions regarding translation that underlie and inform the practice of organization.

THE PASSION OF AGONISTIC DEMOCRACY

Antagonism never went away. Yet the infatuation with the rise of an information (knowledge, network) society appears to have relieved a certain type of political theory from the responsibility of engaging the conflictual constitution of the social. Instead of an acknowledgement of incommensurability and the ineradicability of antagonism as political expressions that cannot be contained by the aggregative or deliberative mechanics of political participation, we have risk management and the assumption of an ultimate negotiability of claims and concerns against the foil of self-regulating markets that appear to affirm the legitimacy of a separation of the economic from the political.

Yet the governance of anger, hatred, and political passions continues to constitute a central challenge for a range of institutional forms. It is no wonder that "antagonism" has become the key point of reference for leftist political theory seeking to rethink the political in contemporary settings. In her own contribution to this exchange, Mouffe takes the "disaffection" with democratic institutions as her conceptual point of departure. Exemplified by the rise of right-wing populisms as well as al Qaida–type terrorism, Mouffe (2007) considers such "post-political" formations as holding, paradoxically perhaps, an opportunity for political institutions to reengage the disaffected. If only in an adversarial manner, the disaffected illustrate the extent to which political passions are left unaccounted for in assumptions that have placed the institutions of liberal democracy at the end of history. For Mouffe, the inability of the current mechanics of liberal-democratic institutions to engage these political passions is not simply a failure, but the consequence of affirming a specific sense of the post-political, whose generalization she attributes to the influence of Ulrich Beck and Anthony Giddens. Despite her focus on these sociological perspectives of a third-way beyond left and right (and her anger at their widespread acceptance as the exemplary mode of neoliberal governance), Mouffe agrees with Carl Schmitt that this failure is fundamental and constitutive of a liberal-democratic vision unable to acknowledge the specificity of the political as the distinction between friend and enemy.

The capacity to engage, now defined as a central concern of political thought, is directly related to the way the mechanics of democratic participation address antagonism. Mouffe sketches the

conflictual practices of an "agonistic" democracy that transform antagonism in a way that maintains its conflictuality as an alternative to the consensus-oriented processes of aggregation or deliberation that define liberal democracy as we know it. Mouffe takes the availability of "the people" as a subject of democracy as a given, if not for granted, and then examines the choices following this premise, noting that the liberal dichotomy of aggregative versus deliberative democracy doesn't exhaust the spectrum of available positions.

What she does not do is call into question the presupposition that democracy has to start with "the people," whether in the Hobbesian terms of a transition-to-civil-society based on the always-already retrospective alienation of natural rights in exchange for sovereign security, or in the contemporary sense of a biopolitical articulation of a population as people. This is all the more surprising given the central role or burden of "civil society" having to signify the entire sphere of agonistic democratic practice outside the state. Mouffe frequently refers to civil society when she describes the sphere of a conflictual politics that established institutions of liberal democracy cannot engage, and introduces the convergence of individual civil society efforts into a "movement" as the aim, if not the telos of an agonistic politics. And while Mouffe imagines such a convergence to be enriched, even facilitated, by the entry into agonistic publics of "people who are engaged in the entire field of culture at large ... because they provide different forms of subjectivities from the ones that exist at the moment" (2007), the question of how such alternative subjectivities may be produced, or organized, does not figure in her account of the rise of agonistic democracy.

MOVEMENT AT THE LIMIT OF DEMOCRACY

A common critique of the "crystallization" of civil society into the official cultures that drive nongovernmental institutionalization is that something essential (presumably democratic) is lost in the transition or rearticulation (or what we prefer to call translation) of a grassroots social movement into civil society organizations. Hence the debate on accountability, which from our point of view serves primarily to make this loss visible as it cannot, by definition, compensate it.[2] According to this discourse, NGO accountability cannot recuperate the democratic privilege attributed to practices of direct democracy of the grassroots.[3] Here, it seems to us that the standard reference to "movement" – as quasi-ontological ground of direct and nonrepresentational forms of democracy – is what needs to be investigated. It is on the conceptual as well as ethicopolitical terrain of "movements" that the organization of networks occurs.

In contemporary political ontology, the departure from the subject as a priori of democracy theory has occasioned a shift to other dynamics of constitution and self-organization. The "movement" figures as a liminal dynamic on the borders of democracy, and Mouffe

(2007) acknowledges the danger involved in attributing an active role to this border when she dismisses Hardt and Negri's multitudinal vision as desire for "a pure movement of civil society," i.e. a dynamic outside the sphere of representation. The establishment of an equivalence between civil society and movement is misleading, however. Where Mouffe sees "civil society" in the fairly traditional role as mediator between movements and the institutional mechanics of a politics of representation, we see "civil society" as antithetical to the nonrepresentational logic of movements.

We might say, provisionally, that movements are the "vitalist" (Lazzarato 2007a, see also Olma 2007) ground of nonrepresentational democracy, whereas the nongovernmental dynamic of civil society is already articulated according to the logic of representation. Nonrepresentational democracy foregrounds the relational as distinct from procedural dimension of politics. Relations within nonrepresentational democracy are figured through social-technical networks of communication. The heterogeneity of sociality within network settings puts nonrepresentational democracy at odds with related notions such as "popular democracy," which is predicated on the unity of "the people" and the power of the sovereign. Nonrepresentational democracy is both anterior and posterior to the state. Consisting of relations of affect, desire, and conflict that comprise the power of self-organizing forms that exist beyond statist forms of social constitution, nonrepresentational democracy refuses subsumption by the state. Social movements continue to figure as a reservoir of democratic experimentation across different planes of social formation, exploring the limits of a politics of representation through practices of collaboration.

But this does not mean the problematic of governance disappears. The urgency to raise the question of governance arises from the depth to which new forms of proprietarization reach into new forms of communication and social relation. Collaborative constitution is thus at a highly vulnerable moment in its brief formation within contemporary media environments and informational economies organized around affect (think, for instance, of the economy of data-mining invested in social networking applications). Power has not ceased to be productive of new relations. Just as we see the expression of political agency accumulating in diverse forms, the current intensification and extension of intellectual property regimes into all realms of life raises the question of the ownership of the means of relation.

The corporate and governmental techniques of control include the management of affect, involving a constitution of political subjects distributed across a vast range of institutional forms. The expansion of the institutional idiom of governance has already been acknowledged in analyses of a new logic of nongovernmentality (Feher 2007). New disputes involving the call for accountability in the corporate sector and within civil society organizations are expanding

– and severely testing – the reach of representation as a conceptual framework to contain this dynamic within politics as we know it.

Translation, when understood as a practice of collaborative constitution, suggests the term governance must be reclaimed. Such a reclaiming acknowledges three key factors at work in the shaping of network societies: first, the impact of neoliberal techniques of regulation and control, especially those of accountability, participation, and transparency; second, the development of research governance to frame the institutional transformation of higher education as an engine of "creativity" and "innovation" geared toward market application; third, the incorporation of nongovernmental actors into intergovernmental institutions (UNEP, ITU, UNCTAD, etc.). Governance is commonly distinguished from government, and understood as a form of political management above and below the state that, while complementing its institutions, is not regulated by its political constituencies (hence the debate on how to democratize supranational institutions and the desire to extend the means of democratic control to this supra-state level). Governance within a liberal-democratic idiom is concerned with the management of citizen-subjects within the framework of the nation-state; governance in organized networks involves the coordination of collaborative capacities as they traverse social-technical systems. Governance is thus a meta-term of organization and operates as a translation descriptor for transversal relations where the "organization of organization" in its trans-scalar dimensions comprises collaborative constitution.

Configured along multiple axes of communication, governance becomes a key problematic within nonrepresentational democracy. Collaborative practices within network cultures run the risk of reproducing managerial personas similar to what Bishop (2004) notes as the curatorial status derived from "stage-managing" artist-designers and their refashioning of cultural spaces as service economies. In the case of collaboration within networks, hierarchies will always prevail with system administrators, project facilitators, concept initiators, frequent contributors, the uneven geography of information, IT infrastructures, etc. Where external funding exists, accountability of expenditure will likely exert a governing force as well, creating an administrative layer to networks that compromises their ability to sustain alternative modalities of subjectivization. We begin to see here the production of subjectivity within the organization of networks. The movement of cultural and social production within and across networks, however, destabilizes the organization of identity within networks and hence operates as a force of renewal through processes of adaptation and recontextualization. Movement comprises the work of translation. The tensions that ensue with the translation of technocultural practices constitute the political of networks.

TRANSLATION AND THE WORK OF ORGANIZATION

If we acknowledge that articulation is best understood as a form of translation (Mezzadra 2007), along with the reorganizing of capital, then we also need to consider the ways in which organization engages the work of translation. While these two modes of social practice operate in a combinatory fashion, it is crucial to distinguish the work of translation from that of organization. We tend to assume that agency and the availability of effective means of intervention are the exclusive prerogative of a very limited array of institutional forms (political parties, unions). The problem of organization – the work of organization – has been to establish and maintain social systems specific to these institutional forms. What has received less attention are the modalities of subjectivization and its differential registers attending such transposition of the preindividual to the social-political subject per se. Yet even "organized" labor (wherever it continues to wield significant power) has been forced to acknowledge that the capacity to act within corporatist regimes has come at the high price of rank-and-file disaffection. We do not believe that this can easily be remedied since the maintenance of such institutional capacities depends on the ongoing disarticulation of political desires that are generally believed to mandate institutionalized intervention in the first place. And as indicated by the decrease in membership in these institutional forms, fewer actors are willing to issue such a mandate and delegate the work of organization. Moreover, these institutional forms cannot – if they ever did – accommodate the complexities of contemporary sociality, including the transformation of *dispositifs* of contemporary labor. They can no longer offer the effective leverage associated with a politics of representation. But perhaps more importantly, they no longer offer the means of political identification to stabilize collective subjectivities beyond individual interventions, which in themselves are highly circumscribed.

This critique of the weakness of traditional institutional forms and methods of organization is not new. It has often been observed that the neoliberal injunction to self-actualize (intensified by a tremendous increase in the experience of precarity) takes advantage of this state of affairs to reestablish the individual actor as central political subject and reaffirm a definition of subjectivity derived from neoclassical economics. Yet while this weakness has fed into the philosophical reaffirmation of a liberal politics of the subject, it seems obvious to us that collective subjects have neither disappeared nor ceased to engage the political. What is less apparent, however, are the institutional mechanisms and geopolitical scales through which collectivity is translated into political address.[4]

While liberal defenses of democracy have been reluctant to see in these practices a renewal of the commitment to democracy, we insist that an acknowledgement of the creative dimension of the defection from traditional political institutions, a defection that is itself constitutive of new possibilities, can be situated as

a contemporary trajectory within the historical transformation of democracy. Unless the constituent dimensions of defection and exodus are acknowledged, there can be no rethinking of organization – a fundamental element of any political system. A "symptomatic" reading of defection, however, is unlikely to lead to a return to existing forms. Mouffe's vision of a "conflictual consensus" maintained by agonistic expression remains framed by liberal-democratic institutions and cannot accept that the work of organization cannot be fully subsumed under the protocols of representation. Moreover, the scope of analysis is truncated in that she does not register political organization outside the sphere of state-bound politics. The rise of political populism, as useful as it may be in drawing attention to the inability of existing political forms to engage the affective registers of politics, is arguably not even the key transformation that makes visible the crisis of representation.

With the structural decoupling of the state and its political organs under regimes of privatization and the outsourcing of services, the increasing importance of civil society organizations to fill the void created by the state's retreat from the social signals more immediately the decline of representational politics. Set against the increasingly transnational and "virtual migration" of labor (see Aneesh 2006) and aging of populations (Neilson 2006), the primary institutions of organized labor (specifically unions) have proven largely ineffective in their appeal to labor (albeit with some notable exceptions of migrant workers' unions in the US and Europe). It is within this framework and set of conditions that we see the emergence of new institutional forms created through organizing networks. While constituted through practices of collaboration, the governance of organized networks is largely underinvestigated. The "multi-stakeholder" model characterized government, business, and civil society relations at the UN's "World Summit on the Information Society" (WSIS, 2003–5). Much celebrated by academics, civil society representatives, and policymakers alike (Padovani and Tuzzi 2004; Kleinwächter 2005), this model bears little resemblance to, and indeed relevance for, the governance of networks as they undergo processes of institution formation (see Rossiter 2006).

THE PRIMACY OF PROTOCOLS

In his analysis of the *Revolutions of Capitalism*, Maurizio Lazzarato invokes Mikhail Bakhtin to contend that "[t]he relation between self and other must be understood neither as a relation between a subject and an object nor as a relation between subjects, but rather as an event-like relation between 'possible worlds'" since "[t]he other is neither an object nor a subject; it is the expression of possible worlds" (2007a: 102). To reconceptualize the relations between the living, resistance, and power on the basis of such an event-like relation between self and other rather than an ontology of the subject, Lazzarato turns to the "techniques of government" initially

introduced by Foucault (1982) as elements of a comprehensive definition of power.[5]

What intrigues Lazzarato about Foucault's definition of power is the latter's sense that power is primarily to be understood in terms of the capacity to control – constitute and define – the ways in which subjects may conduct themselves. Foucault surveys the constitutive elements of such a capacity often subsumed under a single definition: strategic relations, techniques of government, and relations of domination. Strategic relations are the means – "infinitesimal, mobile, reversible, and unstable power games" – of modifying asymmetrical power relations in an ongoing process. Relations of domination arrest such a process, crystallizing "the freedom, fluidity, and reversibility of strategic relations" by inscribing them within specific institutional forms (such as the trade union, the party, or state institutions) (Lazzarato 2007a: 103).

Technologies or techniques of government are situated in an "intermediate region" between these two dynamics. Defined as an "ensemble of practices" for the governance of relations – to the self as well as others – these technologies decide whether or not strategic relations remain "open to the experimentation of subjectivations that escape states of domination" (ibid.: 104). "Political action," Lazzarato concludes, "must therefore concentrate on techniques of government," and stress the creation of new techniques to govern strategic relations. It is the invention of new rules that "increase the liberty, mobility, and reversibility of power games" that lies at the heart of political action. Constructed collectively and cutting "across strategic relations and states of domination transversally" (ibid.), these rules are the preconditions – the conditions of possibility – of "resistance, creation, and the experimentation of relationships." They offer relations "a reversibility assured not by the transcendence of the law and of right, or by categorical statements on equality, but by the action of mobile and nomadic institutions such as coordinations" and create a space "'between' the microphysics of power and the institutions of domination [that] is propitious for a politics of becoming and creation, for the invention of new forms of subjectivation" (ibid.: 105). Translated into the conceptual idiom of organizing networks, these rules are the protocols of organizing networks.

It is perhaps remarkable that Lazzarato considers this definition of power "definitive," even though it does not indicate what is at stake in shifts from disciplinary to biopolitical practices, or, as is more often the case, a combination of the two.[6] While Lazzarato's description of new rules as "new rights" (ibid.: 104) seems to affirm the proximity of his analysis to an idiom of representation that transforms desires into judiciable claims and subjects into rights-bearing individuals, we believe that this usage signals the extent to which even some of our most "common" terms – rights – already point toward the possibility of reappropriation that is involved in the creation of new institutional forms.[7]

We invoke his discussion of Foucault here primarily because it leads us to insist on the primacy of protocols and establishes the conflictual process of their creation and recreation as key antagonisms at the heart of the network society. From our perspective, the insistence on the primacy of protocols points beyond a Castellsian network theory that has very little to say on how the protocols that govern the network society at large are defined. Protocols structure cultural, economic, and political processes across the space of flows, and facilitate the transformation of the network state. In his engagement with Castells, Felix Stalder (2006) has emphasized the work of Peter Drahos as exemplary in illustrating the extent to which the definition of such protocols (and the new governance regimes they define, enable, and sustain) can, after all, be mapped.[8] Despite his interest in the rise of the network state (and a passing reference to the fact that networks are *programmed* by actors and institutions), Castells has never explored new governance regimes organized around the World Trade Organization (WTO) or the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), and he says little about the cross-sectoral (education, medicine, software, etc.) struggles for access and against proprietarization that are arguably the defining conflictual dynamic of the network society.

It is on this terrain, however, that new forms of subjectivation have become most visible. Yet Lazzarato (2003) makes clear that resistance to proprietarization is only one register of developing alternative techniques of government. For him, a new type of political event occurred in Seattle, an event that illustrated the extent to which "media" and its creative usage by a multiplicity of collective actors pointed beyond the idiom of representation. These organizing efforts, triggered by the resistance to proprietarization, illustrated and involved a reaffirmation of the capacity for collaborative constitution. The sociality of expression is multiplied in this (albeit nostalgic) retrieval of a process-event, though collaborative constitution is equivalent to not unity or even consistency but rather a proliferation of differences. Such registers of expression are also dissimilar to the cyber-libertarian critiques of corporate media control, which reduce limitations to the freedom of expression to the freedom of speech. Lazzarato offers a much wider sense of expression, which inspires our reformulation of techniques of government as technologies of the common – the techniques of self-organization that are involved in processes of collaborative constitution.

There is a strong resonance here with Hardt and Negri's definition of the common: "The common does not refer to traditional notions of either community or the public; it is based on the *communication* among singularities and emerges through the collaborative social processes of production" (2004: 204). The common, in other words, is a constituent process of collaborative creation. The advent of social networking technologies in recent years makes this process even more pronounced. For Lazzarato Seattle was key, but since then

the reworking of the well-established distinction between constituted and constituent power has been given new relevance because of the proliferation of a new generation of networking technologies. These technologies need to be understood as social technologies in a very deep sense. The thought of collaborative constitution assists in opening related historical enquiries into the autonomous production of subjectivity. There are obvious lineages here, from Guattari's experiments in micro-radio to today's independent online TV stations, podcasting, peer-to-peer film and music distribution, and so forth. The question of shared infrastructure – radio frequencies in the days of micro-radio, net-neutrality today – shows how intensely such dynamics of constitution remain enmeshed in broader economic and political processes of transformation. It's at this level that a direct clash between horizontal modes of communication and vertical regimes of control comprise the political of network societies. Just think, for instance, of the ongoing battles between internet and intellectual property regulators such as WIPO and pirate networks of software, music, or film distribution.[9] Collaborative constitution thus emerges precisely in the instance of confrontation. In this sense, the horizontal and vertical axes of communication are not separate or opposed but mutually constitutive.

TECHNOLOGIES OF THE COMMON

At a time when the commercialization of the "participative web" (OECD 2007) is considered the next phase of economic development, a politics of defection signals a different dynamic of collaborative constitution. The autonomist "strategy of refusal" (Tronti 1980) and its echos in the network-cultural principle of "not-working" (Lovink 2005) offer figures that describe the shift away from participation as a movement that is itself constitutive of new institutional forms. In the opening pages of *Metapolitics*, Badiou (2005) turns to the French Resistance as an instance of a nonidentitarian collectivity, of what we might, retrieving historical events from within the conceptual horizon of organized networks, even call distributed agency *avant la lettre*, a loose coordination of singularities whose effectivity and capacity to intervene in the political are based on risks. Thought itself is, in fact, defined as risk, as a willingness to take risks, and thought must ensure that these risks are not obscured by the return of an animal humanism that has come, at least for Badiou, to limit the task of political philosophy. Such seemingly anachronistic examples take us out of the compulsive contemporaneity of a theory of the network society that reduces networks to specific sociotechnological forms, and opens up the question of organizing networks in ways that leave room for the constitutive role of different idioms of self-governance that we will call technologies of the common.

Just as the "space of flows" extends far beyond the web, organized networks are translated across a broad range of political registers. Technologies of the common are a way to give shape to

the proliferation of democratic forms. Technologies of the common, as we understand them, are specific instances of techniques of government that mediate between strategic relations and states of domination, and in mediating contribute to the reconstitution of the common as a distributed field of potentialities.[10] Such a notion of social technologies needs to be affirmed because the hype around Web 2.0 is displacing a key point: technology is not social because it supports the organization of social movements, but because it affects the constitution of the social. Nor, in case this point is not clear, are technologies of the common inherently democratic.

Social technologies, in other words, consist of devices and capacities that are brought into play in transformative ways. The social-technical manifestation of form lends expression its potential communicability. Form enables a structure of expression just as expression defines the borders of form. This is not to reproduce what Badiou identifies as a kind of "simplification" of form, as found in the aesthetics of Mondrian or Malevich, the politics of Marxism-Leninism and "modern algebra and general topology" (2003: 116; 2007). For Badiou, the "movement of radical formalisation" held a "relation of complementarity" with the twentieth century's "passion of the real" (2003: 116). Perhaps this is no less the case today, only the conditions within which labor and life are instituted are vastly different.

The movement of form no longer corresponds to the institutional settings of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Not that form was ever strictly reproducible in any case. While imperial expansion and the maintenance of rule of colonial empires was predicated on the reproducibility of institutional forms, this was less due to the logic of similitude than the twofold features of capitalism and culture: variation and adaptation. Form corresponds less with the Fordist system of reproduction than the relational situation of contingency and practice without guarantees. The former held a "passion for the real" whose content was "the will to arrive – at all costs – at a real validation of one's hypotheses or programmes" (Badiou 2003: 115). A relative certainty of institutional form in such an idiom accentuated the experiment as the primary mode of practice. The experiment, predicated on stability, consistency, and certainty in order to produce results and outcomes that conform to prior hypotheses, is radically different to the nonteleological dimension of experience (Neilson and Rossiter 2006).

The experience of movement supplies organizing networks with both formal properties and expressive capacities. Together, these comprise a technology of the common. Crucial, however, is the question of the borders of form. How are borders to be discerned in social-technical milieus governed by the fluctuating rhythms of movement and phenomenologies of experience? How are the limits of the border revealed within networks that seem to refuse borders as we tend to understand them, i.e. linguistically, territorially,

epistemologically, etc.? Actually all these procedures of deduction are still operable within networks, only they take place within a media environment underscored by fluctuation, relations, complexity, and contingency. These nonrepresentational components in turn fold back in contested ways upon the composition of disciplines, space, time, and expressive capacities. The borders of networks are thus revealed as a limit-horizon via antagonisms of the political.

Again, it is not as though the political did not figure within the formal setting of the party-state, etc. But as Mouffe maintains, such spaces of the political have in recent years been excluded or delegitimized as an agent of change from within.[11] To this end, the institutional form of the party-state enters a "postrevolutionary" period. "The word 'Revolution'," for Badiou, "designates an historical form of the relation between politics and the state. This term first of all sets the relation politics/state – or politics/power – in a logic of antagonisms, contradiction or civil war" (2003: 119). Badiou then notes how these relations conditioned the possibility of transformation, of a "new state" and corresponding emergence of new subjectivities for the masses. Dialectically, the figure of the individualized, self-governing neoliberal subject – albeit one with geocultural variations – is the telos of this sense of Revolution. Yet the question remains: where, now, has the political migrated? And what are the organizational forms that mediate the borders of subjectivity and institution?

Within a post-Fordist paradigm, the "passion of the real" (expression) is mobilized through what Régis Debray (1996) terms a "network of vectors" (form).[12] While references to the process-event of Seattle run the risk of creating an ahistorical narrative of origins for the "alter-globalization" movement, "Seattle" was nonetheless indicative of a mutually constitutive relationship between form and expression. Yet a limitation of Seattle and others since has been the conformity principle that guides them: the responsive mechanism they adopt to the spatiotemporality of decision set out by their adversaries, the global institutions of finance and governance.

Badiou considers such insurrectional models as "absolutely archaic and sterile" (2003: 120). For him, such "undifferentiated 'movementism' integrates smoothly with the necessary adjustments of capital, and in my view does not constitute any really independent political space" (ibid.: 121). Yet while we agree that autonomy requires a move beyond a merely reflexive response to current events, we see many examples of organizing that do constitute autonomous political spaces, especially in the area of nonuniversity, activist, and civil society education projects. The activist event on self-organized education in Berlin in May 2007 – "Summit: Non-Alignment Initiatives in Education Culture" – marks one end to the Seattle model of "antiglobalization" and is related to the process of organizing networks. Among many things, the summit was notable for its decision to determine its own time and space and, most importantly, discourse of assemblage. To be clear: it is

this aspect of self-definition that distinguishes the summit from alter-globalization events such as Seattle.

Referring to the G8 meeting held in Heiligendamm, one of the summit organizers Florian Schneider (2007) made the following comments in his welcome address:

> SUMMIT is taking place less than two weeks before the heads of governments of the eight most powerful nations of this world are going to meet in a rundown luxury resort a two hours car-ride north of here. We have chosen this moment explicitly not in order to protest, not in order to lament, and not in order to propose alternatives. We are meeting here and now, since we feel the urge and desire to open up new fields.

The time and space of the summit signals an important departure. This is no longer a movement of "our planet's idle petite bourgeoisie" that Badiou scathingly criticizes as "a somewhat wild operator (and not even that wild, after all) of capitalist globalization itself" (2003: 125), a movement without discipline fascinated in "capitalist activity itself, its flexibility and also its violence" (ibid.: 126). In determining their own time and space, the movements gathered around the nonaligned summit of education culture sought to decouple the dynamic of movement from "the logic of state" (ibid.) and stage encounters and experiences without reference to statism.

At the summit, a range of problematics and idiomatics of expression on the topic of autonomous education were identified and worked through over a period of weeks leading up to the event and during the course of the event itself. There was no instantiation of what Badiou calls "discipline" in the form of "statements or directives" predicated on "unity" that enunciate the arrival of a new politics proper. While gestures were made to the discursive mechanisms of legitimacy common to "civil society networks," "communication without ends" (Virtanen 2005) might work as a more adequate approach to the culture of the summit. With a privileging of the processual dimension to organizing networks, the summit is open to criticism for its lack of "discipline" and the romantic vision embodied in nonaction, indecision, horizontality, potentiality, etc. We invoke the example of the summit primarily to suggest that the thought of the political beyond representation already exists in emergent institutional forms that foreground the effectivity of encounters and experience over the productive politics of representation that may have yielded no more than yet another manifesto or plea for special treatment.

ALEATORY ADDRESS AND COLLABORATIVE CONSTITUTION

What is the encounter, the contingency, the materiality of things, subjects, affects precipitated by the form of organizing networks?

Moreover, how does the encounter with contingency, to borrow from Althusser (2006: 170), give organizing networks their form? Herein lies the passage, the movement, of translation. "Any translation is open to the future. It is future-oriented" (Sakai in Lau et al. 2001: 355). If we schematize the distinction between movement and civil society as that between two logics of governmentality, one based on principles of autonomy and collaborative constitution, the other based on principles of representation, the question of organizing networks becomes one of the possibility of a mediation-translation between these two.

Mouffe proposes that the linking of individual organizing efforts occurs via the establishment of a "chain of equivalence" (2007). This implies a notion of translation based on a *"schema of co-figuration"* that is itself tied to the political project of modernity (Sakai 2006: 72). While we also believe that translation is possible (if for no other reason than the involvement of actors in multiple dynamics of constitution across different planes of social formation), such a translation is unlikely to succeed by way of a logic of correspondence, articulation, or equivalence. If participation in the politics of representation remains the telos of political organization, organizing networks implies the acknowledgement that multiple forms of the political coexist, and that the same people – singularities – are involved in multiple forms that may in fact be mutually exclusive from the point of view of liberal democracy theory.

We also observe the disaffection diagnosed by Mouffe, but suggest an interpretation different from her own: the movement of people, ideas, and practices across such a network of institutional forms, whose multiplicity remains incomprehensible if we cling to the sociological matrix of state-vs-civil society, is itself constitutive of a "common" that is broader and more comprehensive than a public sphere where a politics of representation is expected to assume its rightful place. By incorporating multiplicities into a "chain of equivalence" something essential is lost: the logic of translation cannot be based on principles of equivalence, co-figuration, or correspondence.

If agonistic struggle is defined as the struggle between different interpretations of shared principles, these struggles cannot affect these principles but instead reintroduce a distinction *within* the notion of antagonism: while the ever-present possibility of an ineradicable antagonism is how Mouffe defines the political, agonistic democracy assumes that only minor antagonisms can be translated. And while the transformation of antagonism into agonism is the crux of her theory, Mouffe does not offer an account of how this translation occurs, beyond suggesting the establishment of a "chain of equivalence" as a practice of linking separate efforts. For our purposes, then, Mouffe's passion for conflictual consensus introduces no more than a placeholder for a concept that brings affect back into politics, an affective politics-to-come developed and

maintained within an ensemble of institutions organized according to the principles of agonistic democracy.

It is no accident that the social movement dynamic in the context of the "World Summit on the Information Society," for example, frequently referred to itself as "uncivil" society, rejecting the incorporation of elements of "civil society" into the intergovernmental fold as a charade of democratic participation in a process whose very definition failed to take into account the inadequacy of the network theories that underscored its analysis of the "information society." We stress these efforts rather than the nostalgic retrieval of Seattle because the intensification of regimes of proprietarization over the past years has clearly identified that these struggles are not only illustrative of a new type of conflict, but are in fact constitutive of the terrain on which new forms of governance are produced.

While Mouffe employs a term – "disaffection" – that is not part of the idiom of representation but invokes the language of the political passions that also inform her political practice, this term is not developed into a nonrepresentational conceptual register. Yet the "disaffection with democratic institutions" should not just include a critique of institutions but insist that disaffection necessarily raises issues of affect(ivity) and places these issues at the heart of what democracy is. Here, we refer to forms of attachment and feeling that do not necessarily have much to do with the political mechanics of representation. Affect composes constituencies, or what we think are better understood as networks of relations, in ways that are antagonistic to the apparatus of representation. To speak of the relation between affect and democracy thus requires locating not "ontological concerns [with] the very way in which society is instituted" through the "ontic" level of "manifold practices of conventional politics" (Mouffe 2005: 8–9); rather, it requires a serious examination of those emergent institutional forms whose constitutive practices hold power precisely because of their refusal to be subsumed under the contemporary logic of representation.[13]

What we are speaking of, in other words, is the idiomatic variation that constitutes democracy as that which translates beyond the sphere of conventional politics and the practice of representation (see also Lazzarato 2005). To remain focused exclusively on parliamentary styles of politics is to foreclose the myriad ways in which democracy is undergoing transformation and reinvention. If democracy cannot be defined in terms of a single juridicopolitical form, what is required, then, is attention to the movements of form in relation to the constitutive force of affect.

In their organizing capacity, networks engage in social-technical processes of translation that constitute the antagonism of the political through nonrepresentational relations situated within emergent institutional forms. It is this relational aspect, in other words, that preconditions conflict, which in turn may be precipitated by affect. Herein lies a major departure from consensus models

of representative democracy, which seek precisely to disavow or eradicate the "heterolingual" (Sakai and Solomon 2006) and multi-idiomatic registers of expression and action. Certainly, such disavowal amounts to a violence of sorts, but it is of an exclusive order. Through the politics of externalizing difference, the terrain of the "visible" operates as a "partition of the sensible" (Rancière 2004, 2006). This takes us back to the border that institutes the "'non-democratic' element of democracy" (Balibar and Mezzadra 2006),[14] a space whose expressive regimes can only ever be revealed through the work of relation, fraught with tension, ambivalence, and a "failure" to communicate.

TASKS OF THE TRANSLATOR

What we enjoy in Badiou's writings is the idea that what we need is a thought of "organization" (to get yet another rally off the ground, etc. we have plenty of concepts and protocols, the impressive World Social Forum [WSF] circuit is evidence of that). But what comprises a thought of organization that takes seriously the return of political ontology? Mouffe's ensemble of practices that define (and circumscribe) agonistic democracy almost read like a didactic primer on the-joy-of-conflict, a Guide to the Disaffected. It is noteworthy that Mouffe speaks of political anthropology, i.e. a thought to which the subject is indispensable and thus no account of its constitution needs to be provided. What is of interest to us here instead of the return of such an *I'm-Loving-It* to political philosophy is the passion of this thought, not the question of its correspondence with a particular political project.[15] So if we say that organizing networks is the practice of articulating technologies of the common to translate the "irreducible idiomaticity" (Spivak 2001) of networked socialities into new institutional forms, what, then, could the task of the translator be?

The task of organizing networks is not a political project, and if there is a figure for the organizer, it would perhaps be the bricoleur rather than the "affective engineer" of social movements envisioned by social technology efforts. For Claude Lévi-Strauss, the bricoleur is engaged in a contingent practice of *finding* or *discovery* rather than a project per se:

> The set of the "bricoleur's" means cannot therefore be defined in terms of a project (which would presuppose besides, that, as in the case of the engineer, there were, at least in theory, as many sets of tools and materials or "instrumental sets," as there are different kinds of projects). It is to be defined only by its potential use or, putting this another way and in the language of the "bricoleur" himself, because the elements are collected or retained on the principle that "they may always come in handy" … They each represent a set of actual and possible relations; they are "operators" but they can be used for any operations of the same type. (1966: 17–18)

There are obvious affinities between the performance of the bricoleur and the thought of "virtuosity" (Virno 2004), but we find the latter idea too close, in the end, to the tradition of expert rule and its contemporary managerial manifestations in education as well as the professionalization of social change, aided by the all-too-popular juridification of social claims. Rather than following authoritative instructions, we enjoy the ignorance that defines the practices of a different kind of mastery. If you are troubled by the term mastery, keep in mind that sometimes it is best to maintain a proper name only to show that its referent has been altered beyond recognition; monstrosity, if you will, is what emerges in the space reopened by a rejection of a certain kind of humanism, including that of the politics of the actionable, after all. Jacques Rancière has defined such ignorant mastery in the very simple terms of someone who educates without teaching, of someone who does not know what she teaches, of someone who teaches without transmitting knowledge. Someone, in other words, who engages in the practice of relation – or organization, of the production of a "capacity without ends." Rancière is adamant that this not be understood in terms of the simple antiauthoritarianism of many approaches to alternative education, where ignorance is feigned to provoke knowledge without calling into question the capacity of the master to interrupt the infinite regression of explanation, which he understands to be the infinite verification of a basic axiom of inequality that is the cause of a future equality. To be ignorant is to ignore the assumption of inequality, to oppose "the bare act of intellectual emancipation to the mechanism of society and of progressive institutions" because "all that emancipation can promise is to teach people to be equal in a society governed by inequality" (2005). The disassociation that fascinates Rancière implies that "emancipation could never be a social logic." What Rancière offers is another iteration of the strategy of refusal, framed as a commitment to the common.

Organizing networks is thus not about better tools or best practice; while we certainly believe that such techniques and standards establish ways of accounting for the historical depth of contemporary social movements by giving them proper names (the labor movement, the environmental movement, etc.) and continue to enrich our sense of how deeply rooted collective action is in common socialities, we also believe that such separations end up obscuring the many ways in which these efforts of collaborative constitution have always-already intersected. So why not approach this history without them? If "ignorant masters" don't want you to go to school anymore, this does not discount the impact of worker academies, direct action training centers, autonomous universities, etc.; we simply maintain that for the type of politics we teach each other in such places we don't really need a thought of organizing. What we don't know, it seems, is what the impact of immanence holds, but sense that this requires a certain amount of ignorance regarding the "value" of political education.

ENGAGING THE PUBLIC BEYOND THE ACTIONABLE

By way of adopting organizing networks as an iterative process of elaboration that enables an analytical practice immanent to a certain type of political praxis rather than a "systematic" framework, we no longer pass historical experiences through the filter of self-identity and find, surprise, that perhaps our anxiety regarding the disjunction between collectivity/identity is rather recent. Organizing networks as a process of collaborative constitution wants to suggest something untimely instead. Our return to predigital forms of mobilization perhaps parallels the "neomedievalism" in other areas of political thought, where the transformation of state/sovereignty no longer induces anxiety about the "loss" of sovereignty but has given way to a more flexible approach to a simultaneity of political forms that coexist in ways not easily (or at least not exclusively) grasped by the notion of antagonism.

As these notes suggest, there simply can be no standard political education-type approach to organizing networks. We have excellent examples on how to build networks, join forces across movements, and so forth to work from already. But perhaps more importantly, the notion of organizing networks is also an attempt to think ways of engaging the political *beyond* a politics of the actionable. What we see around us is not only the disaffection with the institutions organized on principles of representation, but – in this collective defection – also the inspiring optimism of the general intellect. Multiple forms of political expression continue to coexist as collectivities based on nonidentitarian terms and modalities of relation. Our argument throughout this essay has been to posit the emergence of new institutional forms translated through practices of collaborative constitution immanent to the processes of organizing networks.

NOTES

We thank John Armitage and Ryan Bishop for their interest in and patience with this essay. The comments of referees prompted us to refine this essay in ways we hope clarify our central arguments. We thank them for that. Julene Knox did a fine copy-editing job, for which we are grateful.

1. While this essay may give the impression of "endlessly talking about organization," we intend to go "beyond" organization understood as a politics of the actionable. Such a move requires an invention of new institutional forms, where institution is not reducible to bureaucratic sclerosis typical of the state, firm, union, etc. Our position, by contrast, considers the semiopolitical territory of institutions as vital to reclaim and reconfigure in order to address social-political complexity in the age of network socialities and informational politics. Representational politics are insufficient to address the multiple registers of conflict that constitute the political. The practice of translation understood

as the labor of "heterolingual address" (Sakai 2006) offers a conceptual tool that elaborates the multiplicity of the political. If there is a so-called "radical" element in such a proposal it can only be developed once the failure of representation (as a way of framing the political) is fully acknowledged. It should come as no surprise, then, that the politics of translation does not conform to the nostalgic-defeatist desire for political "content" – or "counterhegemonies" – organized around "contestations employing common terms, points of reference or demarcated frontiers" (Dean 2005: 53). Our argument is that the political long vacated the circumscribed arena of consensual, liberal-democratic politics. Moreover, "communicative capitalism" and its fantasy of action, as elaborated by Dean, is an insufficient analytical rubric precisely because it circumscribes politics *as action* rather than relation. How, then, to account for a politics *beyond the actionable*? Such work requires a conceptual constellation that foregrounds translation as a conflictual dynamic and social practice immanent to networks of collaborative constitution.

2. An additional point on the politics of accountability needs to be made here, namely that accountability for NGOs within a neoliberal paradigm also results in forms of visibility amenable to technologies of control, surveillance, and management. As Sassen (2006) notes, it may be preferable for NGOs to remain "invisible" and thus refuse the call for accountability and transparency.

3. The poorest understanding of this dynamic can arguably be found at NGO Watch, http://ngowatch.org (accessed October 1, 2007), a project by the American Enterprise Institute and the Federalist Society hell-bent on limiting the undue influence of "liberal" civil society organizations. On the "democratization paradox" – democratization of institutions and processes initiated by nondemocratic actors – see also Claus Leggewie (2002). Leggewie summarizes his NGO critique as follows:

> The possible contribution and significance of the NGOs can be discussed against the background of these reflections: ... first that they frequently, formally or informally, take part in decision-making processes, without submitting to any control by those affected by the decisions, second that they rarely conduct a representative internal survey of views of members and supporters of movements or organisations and that their spokespersons do not as a rule have a mandate and third that they often carry on their work without reference to such institutions, which can present a claim, as national representative bodies or as interest groups, to articulate the will of the population as a whole or of parts of it. These evaluation criteria remain as standards of assessment; even if it is not possible to operationalise them in line with classic representative

organs, they certainly provide criteria for the self-evaluation of NGOs, which cannot restrict the public and common good claim of their interventions to moral appeals and cultural self-presentation.

   We don't disagree with this critique but are astonished that its approach to the logic of nongovernmentality refuses to venture beyond the idiom of representation.

4. The possibility of a disjunction between actor and address is where the thought of organizing networks opens itself up toward a geopolitical (i.e. historical) reengagement of cybernetics as well as chaos and systems theory – an endeavor beyond the scope of this essay.

5. Interestingly, in Foucault's definition we find the adversarial stance sought by Mouffe: "In effect, between a relationship of power and a strategy of struggle there is a reciprocal appeal, a perpetual linking and a perpetual reversal. At every moment the relationship of power may become a confrontation between two adversaries" (1982: 794).

6. See also Foucault (1981).

7. Balibar (2004) and Virno (2004) have used the term "rights" in a similar way, i.e. to describe constituent as well as constituted power.

8. Stalder specifically mentions Drahos (with John Braithwaite) (2002); see also Drahos (2003). A similar kind of cartography is pursued by the Bureau d'études/Université tangente (2003).

9. What the politics of *Steal This Film II* (2008) make clear is that piracy (unauthorized reproduction) was one of the very conditions of possibility for the emergence of the common. As long as such a common is understood exclusively from within histories of the public sphere, the historical range and depth of peer-to-peer cultures (and their contemporary resonances) remain obscure. See http://www.stealthisfilm.com (accessed October 1, 2007).

10. It might be argued that our use of the term "distributed field of potentialities" is apolitical, but such distribution is underscored by multiple registers of the political and the conflictual dynamics that attend collaborative constitution.

11. For an account of the process of "depoliticized politics" as it occurred in China, see Wang (2006).

12. For a much more finely elaborated account of media vectors and politics, see Wark (1994).

13. We insist (obviously) on the contemporary sense of representation since this obviousness obscures the historical transformation of democratic representation from an oxymoron into a pleonasm. See Rancière (2006: 51ff.).

14. Étienne Balibar offers another variation on the role of border as an instituted divide vis-à-vis democracy: "Borders have been

the anti-democratic condition for that partial, limited democracy which some nation-states enjoyed for a certain period, managing their own internal conflicts..." (2002: 85). See also Balibar (2004: 109–10, 117), Balibar and Mezzadra (2006), and Mitropoulos and Neilson (2006).

15. The slogan "I'm-Loving-It" is the first *global* marketing campaign by McDonalds, developed in 2003 by the German agency Heye & Partner, member of the DDB Worldwide Communications Group, Inc. It might serve as complementary example to Lazzarato's case study of Benetton, where he explores the social construction of markets across federated franchising networks and the solicitation (and exploitation) of specific modes of subjectivation. Commercial communication – marketing – is what "the media" have become for political theory more generally, i.e. constitutive rather than merely representative of social relations and values. This is why for Lazzarato "no code 'external' to the logic of money-capital can overcode and integrate the relations of power," and a politics of representation offers no way of responding to a type of capitalism whose ultimate horizon is on "an absolute immanence of the forms of production, constitution, regulation, legitimation and subjectification" (2007b: 94). The engagement of immanence is not a Deleuzian detour, a Spinozist sideshow to the hard work of social change, but – quite simply – prompted by the transformation of state and market.

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