09 2016

Confluences

The molecular-revolutionary force of the new municipalismos in Spain

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Something is rotten in the municipalities of Spain. In a Europe marked by institutional racism, new fascisms, and an aggressive middle frantically shifting to the right, the developments of the past five years in Spain seem strangely out of time, place, and out of joint. Anomaly, aberration, adumbration of change. The social protagonism of the 15M movement, the occupations of the squares, the *acampadas*, the *mareas*, the assemblies, the successful care practice of the Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca (PAH), the movements that flow into *confluencias* for various elections, mostly at the municipal level – this all seems unprecedented. With the local elections in May 2015, the breakthrough occurred of a movement that had been taking shape practically and theoretically in the years before: in all its varied forms, throughout Spain, emerged a new *municipalismo*.

One year later the new city governments have gathered initial experience, some, as in Barcelona and Madrid, even under the leadership of movement platforms with names such as Ganemos, En Comú, Compromís, Ahora, Participa, etc. Whether governing or in opposition – there is much to do for actors struggling in and around the city halls for a non-hierarchical relation between movement and institution. As expected, many problems arise in the toils of the political, problems that, if the classic grid of political theory were applied, appear to repeat the usual mechanisms of "taking power," "the march through the institutions," the separation of movement and organization. From this traditional perspective it would appear that the force of the transversal intellect of 15M has receded. But even in the glut of difficulties and contradictions, the text machines and revolutionary machines do not cease to mutually actuate one another. Struggling, thinking, questioning goes on, going on goes on, not just in the sense of shifting hegemony, but as a constant struggle against normalization and totality, against compliance and compliability. Not time alone, but also its space being out-of-joint, this struggle emerges in the molecular immanence of the municipalisms, in their incompliancy, in their dissemblage, in their new assemblages.

Three problems of municipalismo

1. **Problem: linear imaginaries of political organization and taking power**

Just as linear imaginaries of history and progress in general tend to erase the complex ruptures and leaps of political histories, so is the linear portrayal of the genealogy of social struggles from their origins up to the seizure of power always problematic. In the case of the Spanish movement this applies to its simplistic deduction from the squares occupations of 15M, insofar as these were limited to a traditional founding myth. Genealogy is not a straight line from a historical origin to a heroic future, it is produced in now-time. In the here and now it twists and turns into anarchistic history, into the "Arab Spring," into the translocal practices of the antiglobalization movement, the social forums and the university occupations, into the Paris Commune or into thousands of various concatenations of postcolonial translation processes, especially from and to Latin America.

It would be equally inadequate to describe the relation of the movement of municipalisms to the municipalities as a subject/object relation, as revolutionary subject that captures its object of desire. Not simply seizing the vessels emptied by representative democracy, corrupt parties and state apparatuses that have become obsolete, the municipalisms change the institutional form itself, the modes of subjectivation and instituent practices that begin not only after the capture of the state apparatus, but before and beyond linear imaginaries of development. The new institutionality is already *before and before* every form of capture. And it is, as Stefano Harney and Fred Moten conceptualize this "before and before,"[1] a spatial *and* temporal before, withdrawing itself from the double compliance with a linear spatiotemporal order – as municipalism will in other spaces and at other times have had its traces, opened its breaches, drawn its lines.

2. Problem: Economies of obligation

In the Roman Republic, *municipium* first characterized a Latin city dependent from Latium and later from Italy, whose citizens (*municipes*) were required to assume the same obligations (*munus capere*) to Rome as the Roman citizens. Thus, a *municipium* was by rule a place that had to subject itself to the Romans. This inequality was increasingly evened out over the course of Roman history, but even after the *municipia* assumed formal equality to Rome, the *munus* as same rights continued to also mean the same obligations: to have to hand over a tax, a duty, remained the condition for being part of the community (*com-munitas*). The *munus* here is less gift than duty, obligation, tax – participation is thus not becoming-more, but becoming-less.[2] The new municipalisms start from the question how a radical turn can be introduced against the etymological and historical burden of the *municipium*: How can they turn away from the economic-legal obligation of the municipal duty as a condition for exclusion and inclusion in the community of citizens, in citizenship (*ciudadanía*)? How can this mechanism of economic communalization-by-duty and legal-political individualization-as-citizen-individuals be broken? How can new forms of dividuality and care economy emerge, modes of radical inclusion and *cuidadanía*[3]?

3. Problem: Localism as closure

In all representations, reflections and theoretizations of *municipalismos*, the emphasis of the local is in the foreground. Instead of pushing decisions to the all too abstract levels of the nation-state, the EU, the globalized capitalist economy, the politicization of the proximate spatial context is prioritized. Terms such as *cercano, proximo, vecino, local, territorio, directo, immediato, endógeno* are lexical indications of a specific, locally-focused reterritorialization.[4]

The problem I see here does not lie in a presumed limit of the micropolitics of horizontal practices, of politics from below, of a horizontality that lacks its vertical component, but rather in the threat of fencing, limiting and enclosing the local practices. Today this is not only a problem of the classical nationalisms known above all in Catalunya and the Basque country, which enjoy new popularity thanks to new outfits, but also a danger of communitarian enclosure against current flows of refuge and migration. New forms of reterritoralization are doubtless necessary, but not as substantialization and closure of territory, but as multiplicity and multiplication of subsistential territories, confluent in a constituent process in Europe.[5] Surely beyond Europe these fluxes do not primarily depart from it, creating translocal abstract machines in many worlds.

1 Barcelona before and before taking power

New institutionality is always before and before. It begins not with or after a seizure of power, a takeover of the apparatus, after the founding of a new state that succeeds another. And this is so even if it is a takeover

that is achieved not through domination but through hegemony and populism or by normalization of the previously abnormal. The platform, the *mareas*, the assemblies in the neighborhoods were already there, as new forms of subsistential division, dividuality, whose lines were and are drawn on the plane of immanence of Europe in crisis. In Barcelona, Ada Colau was elected mayor in June 2015 as a central activist of the PAH[6]. This became possible because Barcelona en Comú received 11 of 40 mandates in the city parliament and thereby became the largest faction. That some months later En Comú Podem also became number one in Catalunya in the national parliamentary elections is an astounding success, but not as the "actual goal" of a movement that always wanted to become a party, but simply as one of many effects of the *municipalismos*. What resonates with the phrase "before and before" is surely not the *pre*dominance of the *pre*figured image of a party, towards whose electoral success everything was and is oriented.[7]

Before and before these astounding electoral successes, a new institutionality had been developed: *before* the offices, on the streets, in the squares, in the assemblies and *before* taking over the offices as a test of new molecular modes of organizing radical inclusion. Pre-location and future perfect, also and above all in the heart of the state apparatus: Barcelona en Comú did not simply want to take over the municipality after the election in June 2015, as a timelessly constant container whose contents could be assumed or exchanged.

In the middle of the electoral movement of spring 2015, along with numerous assemblies, micro-political practices, and diverse actions, they began a militant research amongst the municipal employees in Barcelona. Not only were the activists of Barcelona en Comú interested in investigating the state apparatus – the employees also proved to be willing to question their institutions.[8] In a series of discussion rounds, a total of 60 researchers (activists, academics and employees, some of whom were all in one) met in small groups. The research questions related to the power relations amongst city employees, their working conditions, the relations of the employees to citizens as well as to elected representatives, and the political structure of the municipality. The investigation showed that contrary to the image of the secure state employee, the transformations of machinic capitalism and the precarization that accompanies it had not left the organization of work in the state apparatus untouched: after the end of Francoism, activists from neighborhood organizations had entered the public administration in the 1970s and 80s whose engagement was soon appropriated and neutralized. Instead of involving them in the construction of concrete politics, the "technical knowledge" of the employees was marginalized. In a rising tide of corruption, the majority of civil servants no longer understood their power as autonomy, but as "loyalty" to "political families" and parties who decided how new positions would be dealt out and careers developed. The precarization of labor conditions resulted in different forms of isolation: horizontal isolation between individual departments and vertical isolation from citizens. In the departments dealing with minority issues in particular, employees have been increasingly precarized and marginalized since the 1990s.

To transform this situation of general corruption and precarization first meant to return to the specific intellect, the "technical knowledge" of the administrators as experts. Those who know the apparatus, who know how it functions, also have a particular competence when it comes to changing it. Thus, in the militant investigation, participants formulated documents, protocols and positions that were to be the foundation for changes in their activities and institutionality. Of course the investigation also had the effect that Barcelona en Comú gained legitimacy through the early institutional intervention, and in so doing also gained knowledge from which actors who now work "in office" at various levels of administration and politics benefit. The most important effect, however, consisted in the dis/semblage of subjectivations, which was able to be set into motion precisely *between* identifiable actors such as Barcelona en Comú and "the administration." Herein lies also the potentiality of a new incompliant institutionality – always before and before taking power, as a transformation of modes of subjectivation and institutionality. No uninterrupted functioning of the apparatus is needed in order to invent and probe new instituent practices within the *municipalismos*, even when the apparatus believes to be working in the service of citizens or towards a good end. Much more, precisely this dis/semblage is needed, an institutional and instituent machine, which does not close itself in its structure,

but rather permanently produces breakdowns and breakthroughs, bifurcations and confluences.

2 Málaga: Beehives and subsistential territories

Málaga has been governed by the Partido Popular for decades, which steadfastly responds to the problems of the economic crisis (youth unemployment, housing emergency, child poverty, and much more) with a single and simple plan: investment in tourism. In a highly symbolic manner mostly instruments of cultural tourism get forged: While the sociocultural infrastructure of most neighborhoods falls apart, conservative cultural policy aims to settle large and sleek institutions in the city center and on the harbor. For example, the CAC, which calls itself *Museo y centro de arte contemporáneo*, but which simultaneously, according to its website, wants to be "based on the model of the German 'Kunsthalle'." This *Kunsthalle* has a barely exciting program and at the same time the barely concealed aim of the gentrification of its direct environment: the Ensanche Centro neighborhood, located directly on the harbor, should be valorized with the help of art under its new name, Soho. The project, which mostly supports decontextualized graffiti art, has for years accompanied the emigration and evacuation of old (layers of) inhabitants and the sluggish settlement of the area by *nouveaux riches* with the brand "Málaga Arte Urbano Soho."

Another example – here relating less to the new rich than to the old aristocracy – is the Museo Thyssen, a provincial museum that was opened with municipal monies in 2011. Much more striking than its collection is the extensive branding of the area surrounding the museum: a large part of the center of Málaga is prettied up by small flags on stores, restaurants and galleries that identify the neighborhood as "Entorno Thyssen." The three terms that adorn the flags beyond the name of the noble patron are appropriately *comercio cultura turismo.* Recently the City of Málaga even bought into the franchise of the Parisian Centre Pompidou for five years. As a conservative copy of the problematic gentrification of Barceloneta, backland Málageta was converted into a plastic-luxury area for going out, at the beginning of which a costly new construction re-uses exhibitions planned and organized in Paris. No involvement of local forces, not even during the construction of the cultural center, let alone in curating or programming.[9]

Participation in this form of economically overcoded *com-munitas* limits itself to consumism of tourists and the upper crust. While the *munus,* the duty, affects all, the advantages only apply to the few. A false imaginary of *municipium* as the hierarchical administration of exclusion and inclusion, as compulsory community of legal obligation to pay a duty, can be best countered with new social and economic experiments: In Málaga these depart since 2007 from the Casa Invisible, an occupied and disputed Centro Social y Cultural de Gestión Ciudadana in the middle of Málaga's center. In this center, most of the founding meetings of the political platform took place that – similarly to Madrid – gave itself the name Málaga Ahora. In May 2015 four representatives from Málaga Ahora were voted into the city council, as the third-largest of five factions.

Instead of spending the money officially designated to that end on a party headquarters, Málaga Ahora began at the end of 2015 to found social centers, centers of sociocultural practice, of a new politics of affects in the neighborhood.[10] The social composition of Colmenas ("Beehives," as these centers are called) differs from classic social centers and occupied houses with subcultural influence. The slogan *confluencia* here, too, means the flowing together of different actors, a streaming territory that is not easy to control, diffuse, overflowing. The beehives are foremost neighborhood centers, low-threshold meeting places, self-managed sociocultural centers whose infrastructure is supported by the municipality via the redistribution carried out by Málaga Ahora. But even when the infrastructure is made available by the municipality, the management of the beehives remains fully in the hive. Up to today, three beehives have been established in three different districts outside of the city center (El Palo, Carretera de Cadiz and Puerto de la Torre), with diverse programs that reflect the various interests of the protagonists.

The beehive is the subsistential territory of the bees. But these "bees" are different than their relatives from the animal kingdom. There is no bee-people. Málaga Ahora does have a speaker, the attorney and activist Ysabel Torralbo, but her role is not that of the bee queen. The politics of affects, of steadfast listening, of *confluencia real*, that Málaga Ahora represents, does not function in a populist manner, nor is a bee-people interpellated by a central actor. On the other hand, it does not mold sovereign individual citizenry, but rather founds territories of dividual care, always before and before sovereignty. When I speak of subsistential territories in this context, the idea of patriarchial forms of subsistence economy does not sound along with it, but rather of a queer, feminist form of care economy that departs from the subsistence of wild care in the neighborhood. To each care relationship its specific subsistence. Territory is not substance, but the open terrain of relationships of care. In and through the beehives *cuidadanía* spreads, as multiplicity of care relationships that does not function in a clientelistic, top-down, individualizing manner, not based on tax and debt of the *munus*, but as a new *municipalismo* based on sharing, care and mutual indebtedness, bad, wild, rotten debt that is not repaid, not repayable.

3 Sevilla – Abstract machines and the pending technopolitics of municipalismos

The *municipalismos* begin in the social middle of the local, the neighborhood, the territory. Yet this localism runs the risk of tending towards closure, if it does not place forms of deterritorialization against it. "Somos enjambre," says Málaga Ahora,[11] therefore no bee-people, but a swarm. And when the swarm swarms out, it can also rot. The municipalist swarm is not rotten because it lazily perches in the beehive, but also not because it does not sufficiently develop itself towards the idea of a uniform, subservient, hardworking bee community. The swarm is rotten because of the fraying, uncontrollable effect of its desire-production. Flowing in and from the local, neighborhoodly context, flowing together in *confluencias*, overflowing its limits, the swarm in swarming-out produces over-swarming.

The new platform in Sevilla is called Participa Sevilla, it won three mandates in the communal elections, and here, too, the leading candidate is a woman, the curator Susana Serrano. In Sevilla, too, there is a plan to found social centers, but the real spaces in the neighborhoods are not the only subsistential territories. Particularly with respect to the question as to how the flows of *cuidadanía* could flow together, flow over and beyond the boundaries of the local, technopolitical aspects become relevant. Susana Serrano recounts, for example, that specific Circulos as basic assemblages of Podemos achieved their legitimation by creating Facebook pages, not by, for example, proof of a first meeting with minutes taken on paper, or the predomination of a certain group put in place through Podemos' national leadership. But Facebook is surely not the adequate medium of molecular revolution. There was already a technopolitical dispositive in Spain, under the name *n-1*, which wanted to expand the possibilities of mediality and sociality in a self-organized manner. Counter-information, activist research and dissident knowledge production were to be provided with a different quality of data protection, but also with other technical foundations of social intercourse. That meant simultaneously more privacy and tools for social exchange, more control over one's own data and more technical reliability than the commercial service providers of Web 2.0 can offer. *n-1*, however, never came close to the membership levels of Facebook. Around 15M the number of participants rose to 40,000 in 2011, but in its wake the social network imploded.

New technopolitical spaces, machine-spaces that enable translocal *confluencias* will be needed for the new *municipalismos*. These abstract machines are not simply to be thought of as networks that link existing points, existing territories together. Much more it is a matter of invention and recomposition, stagnations and confluences, dispersals and assemblies, dis/semblages. The abstract machines emerge together with the concrete social machines, the multitude of technopolitical streams together with the swarms in the neighborhoods, just as rotten, brittle, divided, out-of-joint, incompliant.

Thoughts for this text developed during an extended journey in January and February 2016. I would like to thank friends and activists in Barcelona, Málaga and Sevilla, who in conversations and discussions laid its ground, as well as Isabell Lorey, Kelly Mulvaney and Manuela Zechner for additional impulses.

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1 Stefano Harney, Fred Moten, *The Undercommons. Fugitive Planning and Black Study*, Wivenhoe / New York / Port Watson: Minor Compositions 2013, 17ff.

2 The *munus* is a *minus*. On this issue, see Isabell Lorey, *Figuren des Immunen. Elemente einer politischen Theorie*, Zürich: diaphanes 2011 181-227 und Gerald Raunig, *DIVIDUUM: Machinic Capitalism and Molecular Revolution, Vol. 1*, 82-84.

3 On their neologism and the minimal shift from *ciudadanía* to *cuidadanía* cf. Precarias a la Deriva, , *A la deriva por los circuitos de la precariedad feminina*, Madrid: Traficantes de Sueños, 2004.

4 See for example the pertinent publications, including Observatorio Metropolitano, *La apuesta municipalista. La democracia empieza por lo cercano*, Madrid: Traficantes de sueños 2014 or Angel Calle Collado / Ricard Vilaregut Sáez, *Territorios en democracia. El municipalismo a debate*, Barcelona: Icaria 2015.

5 See Antonio Negri / Raúl Sánchez Cedillo, „For a constituent initiative in Europe", http://transversal.at/blog/For-a-constituent-initiative-in-Europe and Marisa Pérez Colina, « Convertir la apuesta municipalista en palanca democratizadora », https://www.diagonalperiodico.net/movimientos/28424-convertir-la-apuesta-municipalista-palanca-democratizadora.html: Pérez Colina understands municipalism as « lever » for a democratizing tranformation of Europe.

6 Cf. http://afectadosporlahipoteca.com/ and Ada Colau, Adrià Alemany, *Mortgaged Lives*, transl. by Michelle Teran, The Journal of Aesthetics & Protest 2014

7 Only at the end of January 2016 did Ada Colau call for a constituent assembly to found a Catalunyan party that should serve the *municipalismos* and radical democratization. The inverted sequence of events was important to her: not founding a party first, in order to take power, but to understand the party as a secondary vehicle of *municipalismo*.

8 For facts and interpretations of the militant investigation I am gratefully indebted to Francesco Salvini.

9 This explains the placard script ¡menos museos mas empleos!, which could be seen at many demonstrations in Málaga in February 2016.

10 See Javier Fernández Cruz, Curro Machuca, « Málaga Ahora como enjambre »,https://www.diagonalperiodico.net/la-plaza/28532-malaga-ahora-como-enjambre.html; Raúl Sánchez Cedillo, Juan Díaz Ramos, Pablo Lópiz, « Retos de los municipalismos II: federalismo municipalista, herramientas de organización, comunes », https://www.diagonalperiodico.net/blogs/funda/retos-municipalismos-ii.html.

11 See Vgl. Santi Fernández Patón, „Somos enjambre", http://www.eldiario.es/andalucia/desdeelsur/enjambre_6_391670880.html and Fernández Cruz / Machuca, « Málaga Ahora como enjambre ».