

Double precarisation of labour and reproduction – Perspectives of expanded (re)appropriation

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Privatisation of so-called public goods and services transfers the responsibility for conditions for reproduction onto the level of individual consumer preferences – dependent on respective individual incomes. Simultaneously, on the one hand altered forms of labour lead to a decline or stagnation in wages for large parts of the workers (in particular for the working poor); on the other hand they lead to labour intensification and flexibilisation and therefore to increasing requirements of high-quality public services (from urban transport, education or child care to professional trainings ect., to the most basic needs for individual reproduction like water provision) . The contrast between rising requirements of reproduction and erosion of their general conditions conducts to a process of precarisation of individual and collective agency and a decline in the quality of life. This double precarisation of labour and reproduction is less and less only a problem of a small group of underprivileged, but a contradictory generalising social phenomenon, including the so-called high potentials in the IT- and other sectors. This double precarisation is associated with struggles to establish a transnational mode of production under neoliberal hegemony. And it is associated with a new composition of class, gender and ›racial‹ relations, with deep divisions between the subordinated. It is associated with decomposition and transformation of subjectivity and agency. The task is to examine the contradictions *and* the common in the struggles to reinvent diverse collective agency in a perspective of re-appropriating self-determined modes of production and living.

1. Precarisation of labour

One of the most important phenomena since the 1970ies establishing of a new transnational mode of production based on informational technologies is the decomposition and recomposition of the working classes. Socio-technical alterations and transnationalisation of production have lead to new labour relations and work activities. This process is bound to a dismantling of fordist labour relations, to new developing professions and branches, structural shifts and in particular to new divisions between the different groups of working people, on national and international level.

The field of the so-called ›standard employment‹, that means the long-term, full-employed, mostly ›white‹ male employee, equipped with extensive social rights, often organised in trade unions, – well, this ›standard employment‹ is restricted from in- and outside, from the employees as well as from the workers themselves. Beyond that quantitatively still important torso once called ›proletariat‹, two new groups of labour are emerging: On the one hand a group of highly qualified, flexible

individuals, working in short-term projects, is rising. They take off the old working class habitus, they are sceptical towards unionism or refuse it, and their activities are marked by operating/dominating informational technologies – we could call this group the modern ›cybertariat‹ (Huws 2003, Candeias 2001). On the other hand under the pressure of growing unemployment a sub-proletariat in insecure labour relations and with low income is increasing – we could call this group the modern ›precariat‹ (Bourdieu 1998; Castel 1996, 2000; Candeias 2001).

Both groups or class fractions have in common a de-formalised and individualised form of negotiation and micro-regulation of labour relations; but they occupy very different positions in the production process. Both are part of a general flexibilisation and precarisation of labour, that no longer is a side issue but an integral part of economic restructuring and precondition for ongoing ›flexploitation‹ (Bourdieu 1998, 101), combined with increasing polarisation of income. Precarisation is not limited to the field of so-called ›simple‹ services in the households, commerce, catering, transport or care, but is deeply inscribed in the field of advertising agencies, the media, of web-designers and scientists; and it has deep consequences for the modes of living (for instance time regimes, family life, modes of consumption etc.). However, the borders between the spheres of service labour, for example between a cleaning woman and a computer programmer within the same enterprise, are so fierce, that the different activities are no longer perceived as cooperative relations (PAQ 1987, 61); communication between them hardly takes place.

Simultaneously the feeling of uncertainty breaks into the core of protected standard employment. This is particularly marked when regular employment is replaced by flexible, temporal, low paid labour – then this precarious labour force is perceived as the real danger, not the new strategies of capital to squeeze out labour power. Moreover gender, racial, national and other social ascriptions are rearticulated. This way divisions between the working people are deepened. All these transformations are associated with a worried individual and collective agency.

2. Precarisation of individual and social reproduction

But good old and new forms of accumulation by exploitation and the redistribution of the surplus from bottom to top are no longer enough. Increasingly, ›accumulation by dispossession‹ (Harvey 2004) is the mainspring of enrichment. While new forms of labour, intensified work, and generally accelerated time regimes increase the requirements for the reproduction and constant qualification of labour and society itself, privatisation is undermining the general access to high-quality public services. Although this has been contested by the public, neoliberal actors, however, have reacted with a radicalisation of the same: more privatisation and more liberalisation. Despite growing dissatisfaction, governments are accelerating the policy of dispossession by privatisation, targeting the last – already eroded – bastions of the Fordist welfare state and failed ›developmental regimes‹: the provision of general public services, of a basic infrastructural supply, and any and all forms of a social security systems. The objective is to make the neoliberal project an irreversible one – over the growing resistance of the people. For an increasingly aggressive neoliberalism, these measures are necessary in two respects: first, given the ongoing situation of overaccumulation, privatisation and the establishment of new property rights serve to open up new domestic and external spheres for capital valorisation. Second, in view of the growing difficulty of implementing neoliberal politics, they exempt essential areas of social production and reproduction from political control and democratic influence by parliaments and the population.

Commodification makes mere customers out of *citoyens* who once had citizens' and social rights. The societal participation of these ›customer-citizens‹ is proportional to their financial capacities. Atomised individuals who confront each other as seller and buyer have come to replace democratic participation, collective political negotiations, and struggles. This is bringing about a sharp intensification of social inequalities. Privatisation always means exclusion of the majority for the exclusive use of a few. The resulting restriction of the public sphere as a legitimate (albeit power-structured) space for social struggles is leading to de-politicised social relations and an erosion of social cohesion.

There is, the story goes, no alternative to privatisation. In times of slim budgets, we are told daily, the state is no longer able to provide public goods and all-round social security. In fact, the active consensus for a broad public sector is fading as a result of the general deterioration of public social services over the last 25 years. Because nothing is said about the reason for that deterioration – namely, the erosion of the state's fiscal base – privatisation appears as the sole means of ensuring better provision of these goods and services. Substantial investments are required, and neoliberals argue that only private capital owners can supply the sums they call for. Especially in so-called developing countries, the argument runs, it is better to provide education, water, and electricity in the form of commodities than not to provide them at all. But while social achievements are dismantled, corporations and the wealthy owners of money capital are, again and again, relieved of the burden of financing public goods and social security systems.

This undermines the general conditions of reproduction for increasing parts of the population. A double precarisation in daily work and daily life, not only limited to the increased needs for new social services (like the indispensable social organisation of child care to enable woman to take part in the labour market, or the right for constant further re-qualification to keep pace with technological and social trends and as a medium for individual development), furthermore this process of precarisation damages the basic social services for human existence (water provision for instance, housing etc.). As it targets the collective organisational forms of their provision it also erodes the collective forms of agency developed in the past. The outcome – at first – is a collective atomisation of agency, and therefore the decomposition of individual agency too.

Of course, in big parts of the world, for the poorest basic public services were never or badly been provided by state institutions. But with an expanding neoliberal globalization a process of continued primitive accumulation is associated destroying traditional modes of living and subsistence (through opening up of markets, world market competition, a decline of prices for agricultural products and simultaneous increase of prices for fuel, energy, machines or modern medication, rising interest rates etc.). We experience a global expansion of capitalist labour relations that requires the expropriation of non-capitalistic means of production, like the *ejidos*. An expropriation of common property executed by means of market mechanisms, new laws and last but not least violence. Investors are already waiting to produce genetically manipulated soybeans, extract natural resources like oil, or new one like biodiversity. In some regions like Brazil that is not even necessary, because land was never a common, but concentrated in the hand of a few *latifundistas*, trying to defend this land violently from those, trying to appropriate it as productive means for a mere survival.

The outcome is a rural exodus into the global mega-cities and their *favelas* in search for work. But the wages paid in the global *maquiladoras* are often under the

subsistence level, other activities are necessary: private cultivation of food, small commodity production, arbitrage on small market places, diverse supportive social networks – a set of different kinds of informal economy. As Rosa Luxemburg once pointed out: the capitalist mode of production requires the existence of other modes of production, to balance their destructive forces and sustain a low level of wages – but at the same time capitalism undermines their basic social, economic and ecologic conditions. Again, agency is destabilized.

3. Precarisation – an expanding general phenomenon

Precarisation is mostly understood as relative term, which in social sciences is formally defined as forms of work below the standards of old fordist labour relations (Mayer-Ajuha 2003, 14). Such labour relations do not necessarily imply absolute poverty, deprivation and isolation in the workplace, but a relative disadvantage in these three dimensions in face of prevailing dominant form of work (15). But what is the dominant form today? Globally? If we consider precariousness simply a deviation from old forms of (fordist) regulation, we do not get a picture of the concrete situation in the workplace. It is not a problem of some small groups outside normal unionised labour relations, not even of the mass of global (labouring) poor. Rather, precarisation is a general process to dismantle and polarise the levels of social rights and standards of living, with very contradictory consequences, for most of the labour force, including the highly-qualified cybertariat and the old proletariat under pressure – unable to make compatible work and individual reproduction. Precarisation includes different dimensions and processes: 1.) labour relations or forms of self-employment that in a concrete time and space do not guarantee an acceptable level of subsistence, 2.) (job) activities that society and employers deny certain criteria of qualified work and which therefore only have little or any social appreciation, associated 3.) with low labour and even citizens' rights status, and 4.) with little or any right on unemployment benefits, health insurance or pensions, 5.) a work organisation which disables cooperative structures, 6.) the erosion of public services and dispossession of commons as basic means of reproduction, 7.) working and living conditions that exclude the realisation of long-term life concepts and expectations, 8.) a massive insecurity and weakening of individual agency and self-confidence (Candeias 2004a). Many of these aspects are not new for large parts of the global labour force and the poorest,¹ but the tendency is clear towards a general precarisation and simultaneous production of new divisions.

For Robert Castel (2000) this represents the emergence of new collective (class) positions. Everybody feels the pressure of precarisation, many are conscious about the possibility to be hit by precarisation – but this understanding still is not at all a comprehension of a general, common situation. That is the reason why we cannot speak of a coherent social class, despite of converging social positions (perhaps can speak of a new class fraction in the process of constitution). ›Moreover the ruling public discourse tries everything to veil‹ these generalisation (Gorz 2000, 76), – starting with statistics about unemployment, so-called ›atypical employment‹ and really rendered work in all social spheres. What or who is not recorded in these statistics is regarded as non existent (Altvater/Mahnkopf 2002, 86; for a quantification of these processes see Candeias 2004a, 400-2).

4. Precarisation, subjectivity, agency – diverse forms of (re)appropriation

¹ When 50 to 80% of labour relations from Mexico and Uganda to India are recorded as part of the so-called informal economy, it makes no sense to speak of ›standard employment‹. Then precarisation is the ›standard‹ form of (self)employment today. See the entry ›informal economy‹ in the *historico-critical Dictionary of Marxism*, Vol. 6.2. (2005).

Crises of representation and identity

Increasing inequalities produce insecurity and dissatisfaction. Simultaneously the latter in a situation of ongoing neoliberal hegemony because of lacking alternatives does not find forms of articulation inside the existing social frame. A ›rupture between represented and representatives‹ is the consequence. Nicos Poulantzas takes up this Gramscian figure and leads such a situation back to contradictions inside the ruling power bloc. None of his fractions is able to bring the other groups under their leadership – the result is a ›characteristic incoherence of actual governmental policies, a short-term leadership, a lack of global politico-ideological project or social vision‹ (Poulantzas 1978, 226f). Both, orthodox-conservative neoliberalism such as social-democratic neoliberalism were insufficient to process the contradiction between the revolution of all existing social relations and the demand for orientation and reliable future existence in a way suitable for a majority of the population. The orthodox neoliberalism is equated with distribution from the poor to the rich, social-democratic neoliberalism becomes incredible: no one relies on a combination of neoliberal reforms and social justice anymore. Neoliberal ideology gets into a legitimization crises and loses persuasive power.

At a specific point, when the progressive function of a ruling hegemonic bloc – in our case the process of transformation towards a mode of production based on informational technologies and knowledge and a transnationalisation of social production and communication managed by a neoliberal bloc of forces – is exhausted, ›the social groups turn their backs on the traditional parties ... in their actual form of organisation, with these specific men ..., – the social classes or class fractions do not recognise them any longer as their expression‹ (Gramsci, Gef.7, 1577f). Within this constellation a crises of traditional ideological elements and values becomes manifest: concepts like (industrial)work, family, nation, sex and gender are disarticulated, without getting a new social form able to preserve a comparable secure identity. Particular experienced injustice is unfeasibly to be counteracted individually, enforcing feelings of powerlessness. As the function of every ideology is to constitute social individuals as subjects, this ideological crises converts into a crisis of identity (Laclau 1981, 90). A longing for self-coherence emerges, which could partially express herself violently. The larger the psychic overstretch, the stronger the heat of passionate confusion. For example: When the gender hierarchy is turned upside down, because women in the *maquiladoras* become the head of household and emancipate themselves from patriarchal relations, the old social position of men is weakened and some might turn this insecurity into violence against women. – The deficient representation of their interest brings growing parts of the population, in particular the threatened ›middle classes‹, into an antagonistic position towards the existing mode of societalization. ›Despite their divergent position in economic relations, these diffuse middle classes have one thing in common‹, their separation from central positions in the ruling power bloc (98). This crises of political representation could be observed from Argentina, to South Africa, to Indonesia and even Western Europe.

Precariat – a non-class, subject without subjectivity?

Castel observes a tendency of ›self-arranging with precariousness‹, marked by habitualised mobility of ›provisional muddling through‹ (2000, 357f). To become a regular worker, to be like the others, Castel supposes, is the precariats' dream, of course with a sadly presentiment of never reaching this goal. These paradox figures ›permanent temporary workers‹ develop a ›realism of hopelessness‹, which says goodbye to every effort of re-integration and proceeds to a passive acceptance, to

resignation (including sporadic eruptions of violence with self-destructive character). Castel sees these ›redundant‹ individuals as ›non-integrated and without any doubt unable to be integrated‹, because they lost the indispensable element for social integration – a positive identity through work.² For him they are a ›social non-force‹ without agency (359). Hans-Jürgen Bieling understands the increasing group of precarious individuals as a ›non-class of marginalized people‹ (1996, 84). For Dahrendorf (1994) these groups represents anom and atomised individuals, which interest is not articulated.

Such observations might be partially correct, describing phenomena of disintegration of the old fordist work model. But they do not reach beyond old theories of constant deterioration into misery, missing the contradictions of new developing forms of labour. In particular they reproduce a view from ›above‹ on the individuals and groups concerned, denying their subjectivity as active in social relations. Precariousness is not a destiny, precarisation is a process wherein subject are active in shaping its concrete forms and tendencies. ›Self-arranging‹ in precarious social relations *is* a form of *active* subjection, what becomes clear, if we just take a look at the different strategies to cope with increasing insecurity and lack of money. We can suppose that people who experience precarisation as a common process of many, develop certain forms of solidarity and collective action to cushion the consequences and work on a change in social relations (reorientation on family structures, solidary economies, self-help and neighbourhood initiatives, barter rings etc.). Disfunctionality of old habitus, the erosion of old forms of work and modes of living in many cases causes crisis of sense and identity. But identity is not exclusively arising out of integration into labour relations. Decisive seems to me a direct, as far as possible, involvement in socially necessary und thus socially recognized work in cooperative relations, able to support the development of the social individuals. This redirects our view to the sphere of reproductive work: gender relations, housework, children education, care, social work, voluntary ecological or cultural work, self-work etc., which could tie a supportive social net. Nevertheless, such strategies for developing niche economies within civil society reproduce the ruling structures by accepting a subordinated position beyond formal economic structures and a renunciation of participation. But they could also reveal politicising effects beyond the traditional struggles about labour relations, focussing on recognition of reproductive work, cooperative appropriation of the general means of reproduction (housing, access to internet, municipal child care etc.), on legalisation of migrants and so on and so forth.

Appropriation of Agency

Other, still sporadic but definitely increasing phenomena speak against the view of an atomised non-class of marginalized individuals. There is resistance rinsing among the precariat. Decisive is the relation between individual and collective reworking of contradictions: Ken Loach in his film *Bread and Roses* (2000) shows exemplary, how cleaning women and other contingent labouring poor get on strike and what

² Castel (358) compares the precariat with pauperism. For Marx the latter is “the hospital of the active labour-army and the dead weight of the industrial reserve army. Its production is included in that of the relative surplus-population, its necessity in theirs; along with the surplus-population, pauperism forms a condition of capitalist production, and of the capitalist development of wealth. It enters into the *faux frais* of capitalist production; but capital knows how to throw these. for the most part, from its own shoulders on to those of the working-class and the lower middle class” (MEW 23, 673). Pauperism is an expression of “ruined proletariat, the lowest level to which the proletarian sinks who has become incapable of resisting the pressure of the bourgeoisie, and it is only the proletarian whose whole energy has been sapped who becomes a pauper” (MEW 3, 183). Nevertheless, for Marx a revolutionary potency was associated with this impoverishment of the whole working class (MEW 4, 473).

consequences for the banks and enterprises in Los Angeles show up. Beyond unionised structures of representation (frequently missing the needs and problems of precarious workers, for instance when dumping wages are fixed in wage agreements), they begin to organise themselves, creating new forms like the *living-wage* or minimum wage initiatives in the US, the transnational *Euro Marches against Unemployment and Precarious Employment* or *no-seat-campaigns*, the alternative *movement unionism* in France, Spain or South Korea, *Call-Center-Initiatives* and alliances against workfare (*Anti-Hartz-Initiatives* and *Monday-Demonstrations*) in Germany, transnational networks of female house workers and/or migrants like *respect*, *Mujeres sin rostro* or the *Sans-Papiers*, peasant workers organisations in India etc. The most radical forms of self-organised social re-appropriation movements are surely movements like the *Zapatistas* (Chiapas), the *MST* (*Movimento dos Sem Terra*, Brazil) or *piquetero* groups like *MTD Solano* (Buenos Aires). They all create forms of practice and alliance that are more open to people sceptical about institutions (like traditional unions) and motivate active engagement. And they are more open for cooperation with other groups – the organised unemployed, altermondialist protest movements, the diverse anti-privatisation initiatives on local and national level, ecological and feminist movement, other (less radical) civil society initiatives in general. Nevertheless the unions (hardly under pressure from the bourgeoisie) are a necessary element in this spectrum of groups, to assure organisational improvements in institutionally and legal compromises on the shop-floor, municipality, branch, national or even supranational levels – but the unions themselves have to develop new structures and political forms of involvement. Such experiences are to be explored widely (see Candeias 2004a). They are contrary to a ideology of a ›radically individualised society‹, in which ›everybody becomes the entrepreneur of one's own labour power‹ and where ›(class)solidarity becomes cumbersome‹ (Bonß 2000, 378). Rather a polarised transnational economy produces new class divisions, which are overdetermined by other social divisions along qualification, gender, racial, national, and ethnic ascriptions. ›Pictures of a classless society‹ can serve to ›veil deeper differences‹ (Sennet 2000, 97) and to inhibit that new forms of collective reorganisation and solidarity become visible.

5. The ›precariat‹ – from a deeply divided to a coherent form?

The increasing exploitation of a transnational labour force goes along with old and new forms of dispossession of social commons, social rights, and the general means of reproduction to organise daily life. The result is a new transnational composition of class and class fractions with other social divisions. But all the different groups concerned are experiencing a process of general precarisation of labour and reproduction in its diverse forms. These altered divisions simultaneously offer the chance to raise again the question about the ›union‹ of the working class, but on the level of a new transnational mode of production. As we have seen a lot of resistance is developing on different levels of actions in diverse forms.

The precariat in its double meaning as universal social figure for the new mode of production and a class fraction in formation, with heterogeneous positions in the social division of labour along with other social ascriptions (qualification, gender, race etc.) finds no form of representation in traditional political institutions. To become visible as social group with own demands and interests a break with the rules of corporatist negotiation and political representation in force might be necessary. A ›strategic essentialism‹ (Spivak 1988, 314) can play a decisive role: in contrast to an ideological separation of individuals and distinct groups along small differences, an offensive reinterpretation (Butler 1993, 47) as ›precariat‹ opens possibilities to get into public consciousness and start a process of class formation:

›not we are the dependent, but you; if we would not clean your offices and bathrooms, would not care for your spoiled children, would not offer a lot of other pleasant services, and produce your food, your lifestyle would be an impossible one and the whole society would not be viable‹. The emphasis on the high use value of the labour concerned directly points towards the quality of services and the associated productive relations and living conditions of the workers, opening up possibilities for building alliances across classes. But this form of strategic essentialism and offensive reinterpretation must be a result of a real generalisation of experience (and scientific analysis), otherwise it is just the suggestion of a coherent class with unified interests that does not exist in this reality. One of the basic needs is learning to deal with universalism and difference, recognising diversion but constructing common interests. The capability of differentiation between diverse interests, organisational forms and political cultures in the common struggles is indispensable. At the same time, there is always the danger to fall back on narrow corporatist positions, ›that are based on representation of particular interests‹ (Poulantzas 1979, 135), what leads to an intensification of subjection, when struggles are not understood as hegemonic struggles about the whole social structure.

In the last 10 years the engagement of people all over the world had led to the emergence of a movement of movements. And we have seen a kind of consolidation of that process, the World Social Forum (like other continental, national or local fora) have a remarkable part in that consolidation. But there are very different ideas about *how* to continue and *which* political forms are appropriate for a new kind of radical social transformation. There is a consensus about plurality and the richness of diversity, but also a comprehension about the need for coherence. Very often the problem is discussed in forms of simple dichotomies like the opposition between institutional politics and autonomy, between movements and parties, between avant-garde thinking and basic democracy, between civil society and state and so on. But these essentialisations are false oppositions, because all these oppositions in concrete life are contradictions in motion.

Maybe we could call them antinomies arising from the field of practice of political movements himself. Antinomies prevail when two or more forms of action and organisation seem to exclude each other, but were indispensable at the same time. For not dividing the movement and to develop political capabilities it's necessary to learn what Bertold Brecht called ›to operate with antinomies‹, to deal with our own contradictions beyond a non-committal or evasive – may I say post-modern – plurality.

Pierre Khalfa³ supposes that diversity paralyzes. But its not diversity as such – she might enrich the movements –, but a lack of deep analysis including the production of neoliberal hegemony from below, in combination with non-committal plurality. This undermines a generalization of experiences, views and understandings (without closed unification under one primary force) preventing us from incoherent approaches and strategies. On the one hand there are more or less successfully local social movements, creating autonomous spaces and transforming subjectivities, sometimes re-appropriating the essential means of reproduction from below, but hardly touching the relations of power on national or even transnational level. On the other there are global events for the altermondialist, national and transnational NGOs, some national parties, getting some media presence, shaping the public discourse, but far away from the everyday experience of the people, acting in some kind of representative vacuum without really questioning the ruling political form

³ At the European Social Forum October 15, 2004.

(Brand 2004).⁴ There is a need for intermediate political forms and organisational work.

6. *Precariat and political forms in motion*

At the heart of the problem lies the relation between representation and participation. A permanent movement (in the strict sense of the word) is difficult to sustain, movements are fragile forms with periods of higher or lesser activity, they develop out of concrete situations of dissent with the ruling mode of production and living, with a perspective of (molecular) social transformation, while the struggle for this transformation has to be a very long-standing one. Out of this results a need for institutionalisation to bridge times of less activity, disintegration, defensive situations and to overcome defeats, save experience and knowledge for the next generation of activists etc. Local social or workers centres are a good example, social movement unionism could be another, as well as cooperatives for self-organisation of production and reproduction. A renewed concept for left political parties could be *one* more possibility to create intermediate institutionalised political forms and prevent narrow corporatist interest formation.

What is a party? A party does not simply represent a group or class; she is always a result of inner struggles between different interests and struggles with other parties or social forces, therefore a possible form of working out the common between the deeply divided fractions of the precariat/proletariat. The party only represents a group or class when she is able to intervene into the culture and politics of other groups and classes, reorganising the whole class and social structure (including the groups and classes she wants to represent). The bourgeois understanding of political representation as passive element therefore is only part of the reality. The opposition between representation and participation is not that hard when the mutual organising and transformative aspects between representatives and represented, between social movements and parties come to the fore. If we take this seriously representation on both sides is an active one, directed to convergence between the two sides while never achieving it, because they represent two different cultural/political forms. Parties are the fields of struggle between self- and foreign (or alienated) social association (*Selbst- und Fremdvereinigung*) virulent in every society.

Parties have a dual character: in the parliamentary system they are part of the state, therefore transforming social conflicts into institutionalised forms of consensus building, integrating oppositional forces into the ruling power structure. Radical parties could try to discredit the consensual uniformity, to extend the legal forms, to break with rules of the political field, but up to a specific degree they have to play the game. Nevertheless parties are also part of civil society and for a left radical party its

⁴ The link to concrete situations of resistance in time and space on the (World) Social Fora is sometimes difficult to achieve. In many seminars and workshops you just get flat already known analysis, simple propaganda and wishful thinking. Again and again the common enemy (neoliberalism, transnational corporations, the US, the WTO etc.) is condemned – in this sense the perspective on the ESF seems too unified; the few times debates became concrete consensus is melting away – the different approaches and goals are too diverse: a necessary result emerging from the contradiction of the Social Forum process itself as open space for discussion and self-education, without real attempt to develop some applicable and visible alternatives. Therefore the Forum is no movement in itself, but maybe a space for a new political consciousness and sovereignty, the modern form of articulation and association of structurally fragmented groups, classes and movements. However, because there is no alternative social project formed, the actual representative crisis of neoliberalism does not lead to a weakening of its hegemonic position.

strength depends essentially on the existence and organic connection to active social movements. Otherwise a left party is going to isolate itself, lost in the structures of parliamentary politics without the transformative power of movements as their mobile spine and vital space for imagination. Left radical parties have to reflect their privileged position in ruling political systems, divide power with social movements systematically, giving them institutional forms of influence over party decisions and (financial) means. The more successful they are, the more they have to ›disempower‹ themselves vis-à-vis the movements, recognising that they are not the centres of hegemonic counter-power, no privileged political form for social transformation. Such a party could be some kind of ›institutional backbone‹ (Spehr 2000), an infrastructure (Brand 2004) for social movements, creating and securing spaces for activities from below. Parties like movements need institutionalised spaces for self-reflection and critique beyond the daily tasks. The connections might be intensified via interchanging personal, representatives of movements on (open) electoral lists of the party, active participation of party militants and movements on all levels of decision making, obligatory reports to militants and movements etc. (see Spehr 2004).

Progressive parties in power could be a strong defensive potential against repressive attacks, strengthening offensive political movements, assuring social achievements by giving them a legal form (for a possible future when the movement may be weaker). If they create a closed bureaucracy feeling independent from the movements, cutting the vital organic relations for negotiating compromises with the social bloc in power, the ›party becomes anachronistic‹, loosing ›its social content‹ (Gramsci, Gef.7, H.13, 1579). ›If the radical left tries to cooperate with the majoritarian left (participating in governmental coalitions or other strategic alliances), under conditions of neoliberal hegemony, she is under suspicion [and in danger] of renouncing its own positions for taking part in policy making processes‹, pretending to ease the pain of politics otherwise implemented without their participation. ›Even because of its radical [ethical] standards applied to politics‹ in such situations, ›the radical left is seen as especially untrustworthy measured with these own standards‹ (Brie 2004; Candeias 2004b, 340). Taking the government does not mean take the power – cultural hegemony is rooted in complex state structures, in civil society and in webs of private institutions, in everyday thinking, in habits and of course: cultural hegemony is always ›a political one, but also and especially a economic one, its material basis roots in the decisive functions the hegemonic groups exercise in the core of economic activities‹ (Gramsci, Gef.3, 499; Marx, MEW 3, 46). Therefore the dangers for self-deception, strategic misjudgements, exaggerated self-assessment, cooptation, and entanglement in the traps of *Realpolitik* etc. are manifold.

Therefore a critical distance vis-à-vis the state and political parties is essential for the survival of social movements. But we enforce these dangers if we understand the party as something outside from us – than she becomes ›a fetish‹ (Gramsci, Gef.7, H.15, 1730). Parts of the movements think that the parties are something apart, alienating us from each other and from our desire to self-determination, becoming an apparatus that decides for us and betrays our will. But they don't see that in separating the parties from the movement they promote bureaucratisation, parties loose active participation, become a mechanical closed form, with political aims that are an expression of her dried up social basis, just the functionaries remain. Therefore John Holloway's (2002) recommendation to turn the back on state-oriented politics and parties reproduces the bourgeois division between state, civil society and economy, instead of understanding the ensemble of social relations not only as determining but also as available one, transforming the whole social organization. We have seen what happens when parties and movements cut off their organic connections or when movements disappear and parties continue to exist. The

›arrogance of the party‹ (ibid., H.14, 1696) that develops in such situations was quite visible on the last European Social Forum (Wainright 2004), enlarging the gap between *some* parties trying to dominate the ESF and the radical movement.

One problem is that the existing radical left parties mostly are representatives of a completely undermined social basis, while the transnationally restructured social groups and classes of the precariat have not yet created their own political institutions. The altered conditions of struggle in a new mode of production and living are not yet reflected, leading to sectarian particularities. If there is no real movement emerging, there could be no transformative project. Sometimes old forms of the welfare state are the orienting measure (or even older concepts of world revolution of a unified world proletariat), sometimes the complete rejection of these structures throwing their progressive elements over board. The idea of a *rifundazione comunista* (see Haug 2003, 292ff) in its broadest sense therefore is a very reliable one (although the Italian formation is still quarrelling with its hierarchical constitution).⁵

Gramsci was warning against sectarian, narrow-minded thinking: ›A political party is not only the technical organisation of the party itself, but the whole active social bloc.‹ (Gef7., H.15, 1774) In a specific hegemonic constellation ›nobody is unorganised or independent from a party, if organisation or party is understood in its broadest sense not formally‹ (Gef.4, H.6, §136). Each social bloc, as a convergence of different social groups, classes, genders etc., generates only *one* formation in the sense of this broader integral understanding of a party (that is nearer to the notion of social forces and movements than it is to parties in the narrow sense). All different partial formations, the non-commitment plurality, are only transitional ›reformist‹ forms, oriented on simple negation or on transforming only partial dysfunctional elements, not the existing mode of production as a whole. Therefore a communist re-foundation is more than a renewal of given party organisations (where you could become a member, pay your fee, and vote for your ›leader‹).

It requires the reinvention of proletariat as Marx put in the *Manifesto*: ›the proletariat recruits itself from all classes of population‹ (MEW 4, 469), a diffuse milieu of released, redundant people without property except their own labour power. Under circumstances of the neoliberal, transnational mode of production this includes the increasing global industrial labour force, the modern precariat as well as the modern cybertariat, the rural labour force as well as landless people, the non-paid reproductive workers (mostly women), the migrant labour force – all of them shaped by differentiations along class, gender, race, nation, their positions in production processes, political alliances, cooptation by ruling forces, etc. *If we take all this diverse fragmentations seriously we could come to a deeper understanding of a contradictory multitude that is to be worked out to a coherent social bloc of forces able to form social transformation.* This new modern prince (Gramsci) cannot be understood ›as a singular form of collective agency, for example a single party with a single form of identity‹ (Gill 2003, 221). Required is an articulation of the different political forms due to concrete situations, permanent reorganisation of organisational forms in face of developing conditions, including the collective and individual ›molecular change of modes of thinking and acting‹, forcing this transnational partiality (*Parteiung*) to rearticulate again and again, arranging new and original problems to solve (Gramsci, Gef. 8, §51).⁶ This is not possible without involving constantly the active elements of subjectivity. For Marx Communism is neither a theory in the minds of intellectuals,

⁵ The idea for a new social democratic party (for instance in Germany) is surely not the recommended way for changing the world, just a very defensive intent to fill up the representative gap.

⁶ Gramsci denounces when the mass becomes a mass for manoeuvre for the party (Gef.8).

nor a present or future state of affairs, but ›the *real* social movement which abolishes the present state of things‹ - this is still valid.

But to become politically effective, demands and political forms have to (re)orient towards questions of everyday life. More than a mere reintegration into standard labour relations is required – the demand for better work conditions and higher wages is reasonable, but not enough. On such a base we could not overcome the deep divisions between the different class fractions of labour and the reserve army, between wage labour and reproductive work, between men and women, between domestic workers and migrants. To overcome the diverse divisions we need a redistribution of all socially necessary work, including non-paid reproductive work, but also social and political work, and a collectively organised form of social assistance for discontinued work towards decommodification of work and social reproduction. The general precarisation not only of labour but of social reproduction as such (because of privatisation of ›public goods‹ and commons) refer to strategies of social appropriation from ›below‹ against strategies of dispossession from ›above‹, and to the difficult task to translate the associated experiences of Piqueteros, Zapatistas and MST in the global south to the north and vice versa.

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