

New Rules, New Actonomy

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That the world is changing wasn't really noticed for a while, and if at all only in positive ways – at least for as long as the fall of the Berlin Wall and the overcoming of the Cold War gave rise to great hopes, the Boom of the New Economy hid its bad points, as long as the postmodern fun spread nothing but good vibes. Nowadays the signs have become more obvious that there are many political, cultural, economic and social conflicts simmering under the cover of digitalisation, infotisation and globalisation; the extent and breadth of these conflicts cannot yet be estimated.

Seattle, Melbourne, Prague, Nice, Davos – Quebec has just been added to this list, and Genova soon will be, where the G-8 meeting will take place at the end of July, and Qatar, where the next WTO will be, and a global day of action will be carried out. At first glance, it seems as if a new global protest generation is emerging, which endeavours to equal, include and battle against that of 1968.

However no one should yield to this illusion. The great social movements of the past centuries from labour to environment seem to be exhausted. Simple recipes have lost all credibility, of course. The ways back to familiar models is obstructed, and the complex cohesion of an ever more closely networking global economy and of ever more differentiated living conditions seem to be immune against any form of criticism.

The field of the political has collapsed into thousands of single fragments, but it is exactly in this chaos that a new activism with new ways of political articulation and action is breaking through. All these new beginnings are extremely flexible and operate with tactical and strategic plurality. They strive for up-to-date notions of solidarity and self-determination, and they try to link and to short-cut immediate and local conflicts with global ones.

So what has changed?

In former times, it was all about imprisoning people somewhere in order to discipline them (in schools, the army, factories, hospitals). Nowadays people are monitored in real time practically everywhere. In all political, social and cultural fields networking techniques of control replace the former techniques of power exertion. Chip-cards, biometric systems, electronic collars control the access to proprietary and privileged areas. Borders are subjected to a special change of meaning in this context. At electronic frontiers and virtual borders everything is about matching user-profiles and instead of in- or exclusion: networking against one's will.

There is no outside anymore and that is why the Archimedal point of criticism has vanished, to settle exactly on the border and to risk a glance into the circumstances without really being a part of the controversy. The 'New Left', as it emerged from the student set-

tings of the 1960s and 70s, had made its ideological criticism from these safe positions. Little wonder that the remains of such a protest culture excel at complaining, winging, griping and if it really gets radical, at making someone feel guilty.

Work that is no longer calculable and measurable anymore is certainly nothing really new. But their meaning for production process is pivotal.

What some call 'Affect Industry' covers work in hospitals and in the film industry, in software sweatshops and kindergartens, in the entertainment industry and in nursing homes. Classic reproduction work, which aims to stir emotions and create a feeling of well-being. The newest development in the emotion industry opens up a bio-political dimension where the most riddling aspect that exists on earth – life itself – becomes the object of production.

Nowadays, almost all habits of political thinking and action are more or less radically questioned. Necessary is a redefinition of the political practice and its theorising, not starting from point zero but from where we are now. In this context it is extremely exciting not to abandon all insights, but on the contrary to investigate experience from a new historical upheaval and to recapitulate and to develop new terms and refuel old ones; to let struggles communicate with each other, regardless of if they are old or new, regardless of where they are physically located, and how they will end.

Resistance always comes before Power and sabotage derives from the French word *sabot*, which is a wooden shoe that is secretly introduced into a machine and blocks the production temporarily. This interruption aims to reduce the efficiency of the machine to such an extent that the emerging material damage underlines the concrete demands or a general disgust at the condition of exploitation.

As the normal strike, sabotage as a means of direct action aims directly at the pick-pocket of the corporation in order to achieve the realisation of certain conditions. Particularly when workers were robbed of their right to strike, sabotage was an appropriate although illegal means of struggle within the factories. Sabotage is a direct application of the idea that property has no rights that its creators are bound to respect. That way sabotage can be seen as a sort of anticipated reverse engineering of the open source idea.

Indeed, in the current political debate about direct action there are several parallels to the situation of the late 19th century which can be made. Sabotage is radically antagonistic to the representative discourse, i.e. in the institutionalised contexts of the working class or social movements. Those representative forms have always referred to a nation-state while spontaneous, un- or better-organised forms of resistance (e.g. the Industrial Workers of the World – IWW) have expressed a global class consciousness. What is nowadays called direct action re-presents sabotage.

From "No Logo" to "Ruckus Society", from wild strikes in the hardware, Hi-Tech and service industries to the semiotic guerilla of indymedia, RTmark or Adbusters. We suspect: current forms of activism attempt a redefinition of sabotage as social practice, but not in the usual destructive sense, rather in a constructive, innovative and creative practice. Such a constructive approach results in a movement without organs or organisation. In a variety of perspectives – self-determined cybernetic thinking that spurs on different approaches and connections, which refers to a social antagonism refers to the level of production, and

that is constituting a collective process of appropriation of knowledge and power.

So far three layers of net activism appeared in a still rudimentary way: Networking within a movement: The first level of net activism consists of facilitating the internal communication inside the movement. It means communication on and behind mailing lists, setting up web sites which are designed as a toolbox for the activists themselves. It leads to creating a virtual community, whose dynamics do not so much differ from romantic off-line communities, besides the fact that people do not necessarily need to meet physically, but very often they do afterwards.

> Networking in between movements and social groups: The second level of net activism is defined by campaigning and connecting people from different contexts. It means joining the forces, collaborative and cooperative efforts, creating inspiring and motivating surroundings, in which new types of actions and activities may be elaborated.

> Virtual movements: The third level of net activism means using the Internet vice versa as a platform for purely virtual protests, which refer no longer to any kind of off-line reality and which may cause incalculable and uncontrollable movements: E-protests like online demonstrations, electronic civil disobedience or anything which might be seen as digital sabotage as a legitimate outcome of a social struggle: counter-branding, causing virtual losses, polluting the image of a corporation.

Time is running out for reformism.

This is the golden age of irresistible activism. Accelerate your politics. Set a target you can reach within 3 years – and formulate the key ideas within 30 seconds. Then go out and do it. Do not despair. Get the bloody project up and then: hit hit hit. Be instantly seductive in your resistance. The moral firewalls of global capitalism are buggy as never before. Corporations are weakened because of their endemic dirty practices, mad for profits. The faster things are changing, the more radical we can act. The faster things are changing, the more radical we have to act.

The green-liberal idea of slowly changing capitalism from within no longer works. Not because the Third Way parties powers have 'betrayed' the cause. No, simply because their project is constantly running out of time. Global systems are in a state of permanent revolution, and so is subversive politics. Society is changing much faster than any of its institutions, including corporations. No one can keep up. There is no time anymore for decent planning. The duration of a plan, necessary for its implementation is simply no longer there. This mechanism turned the baby boomers into such unbearable regressive control freaks. There is no more time to go through the whole trajectory from research to implementation. Policy is reduced to panic response.

Government policy is reduced to panic response. For the complex society its enemies are the blueprints of five years ago. The future is constantly being redefined, and renegotiated. Global systems are in a state of permanent flux between revolution and reaction – and so is subversive politics. Society is changing much faster than any of its institutions can handle. In short: no one can keep up and here lies the competitive advantage of today's mobile actonomists.

Instead of crying over the disappearance of politics, the public, the revolution, etc.

today's activists are focussing on the weakest link defining the overall performance of the system: the point where the corporate image materialises in the real world and leaves its ubiquity and abstract omnipresence. Short-cut the common deliberations about the dichotomy between real and virtual. Get into more sophisticated dialectics. It's all linked anyway, with power defining the rules of access to resources (space, information or capital). Throw your pie, write your code. Visit their annual stockholders' meeting, and do your goddamned research first. What counts is the damage done on the symbolic level, either real or virtual.

The new actonomy, equipped with pies and laptops, consists of thousands of bigger and smaller activities, which are all by themselves meaningful, manageable and sustainable. For this we do not need a General Plan, a singular portal web site, or let alone a Party. It is enough to understand the new dynamics – and use them. Create and disseminate your message with all available logics, tools and media. The new actonomy involves a rigorous application of networking methods. Its diversity challenges the development of non-hierarchical, decentralised and deterritorialised applets and applications.

Laws of semiotic guerilla: hit and run, draw and withdraw, code and delete. Postulate precise and modest demands, which allows your foe a step back without losing its face. Social movements of the last century were opposing the nation-state and disclaimed its power. In the new actonomy, activists struggle against corporations and new forms of global sovereignty. The goal is obviously not so much to gain institutional political power, rather to change the way in which things are moving – and why. The principle aim is to make power ridiculous, unveil its corrupt nature in the most powerful, beautiful and aggressive symbolic languages, then step back in order to make space for changes to set in. Let others do that job, if they wish so. There is no need for a direct dialogue in this phase. Exchanges on mediated levels will do. Complex societies have got plenty mediators and interfaces. Use them. Indirect contact with the power to be does not affect your radical agenda as long as you maintain and upgrade your own dignity, both as an acting individual and as a group.

Radical demands are not by default a sign of a dogmatic belief system (they can, of course). If formulated well they are strong signs, penetrating deeply into the confused post-modern subjectivity, so susceptible to catchy phrases, logos and brands. Invent and connect as much intentions, motivations, causalities as possible.

These days a well designed content virus can easily reach millions overnight. Invest all your time to research how to design a robust meme, which can travel through time and space, capable of operating within a variety of cultural contexts. The duality between 'small is beautiful' and 'subversive economies of scale' is constantly shifting. Low-tech money-free projects are charming, but in most cases lack the precision and creative power to strike at society's weakest link. Be ready to work with money. You will need it for the temporary set-up.

Think in terms of efficiency. Use the staff and infrastructure on the site of your foe. Acting in the new actonomy means to cut the preliminaries and get to the point straight away. A campaign does not rely on ones own forces, but on those of your allies and opponents as well. Outsourcing is a weapon. It is a means of giving someone else the problems you cannot solve yourself. Remember that you won't get very far without a proper infrastructure such as offices, servers, legal frameworks to receive and pay money, etc.

However, you can also treat these institutional requirements as flexible units. You do not need to own them, the only thing you need is temporary access so that you can set up the machine ensemble you need for that particular project.

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Invent and connect as much intentions, motivations, causalities as possible. Nowadays activists use multi-layered and multiple voice languages that reach out far beyond the immediate purpose of a campaign or a concrete struggle, and in doing so they create a vision much larger than what is accessible right at the moment. This mechanism needs a re-assessment of rhizomatic micro-politics, which sprung up in a response to the centralised macro-politics of the decaying communist parties in the seventies.

Act in a definite space and with a definite force. Dramaturgy is all that matters. Precision campaigns consist of distinct episodes with a beginning and an ending, an either smooth or harsh escalation and a final showdown. Accept the laws of appearance and disappearance. Don't get stuck in structures, which are on the decline. Be ready to move on, taking with you the (access to) infrastructure of the previous round. Action is taking place in a variety of locations and thus refers in a positive way to a new stage of people's globalisation from below. One that is not just an empty, endlessly extended market, but full of energy.

Refuse to be blackmailed. If attacked, make one step aside or ahead. Don't panic. Take all the options into account. No one needs cyber heroes, you are not a lone hacker anymore. The attack maybe be done by a single person but remember we are many. The corporate response may be harder than you expect. It may be better to evade a direct confrontation, but don't trust the media and the mediators. Ignore their advice. In the end you are just another news item for them. If trouble hits the face, scale down, retreat, reorganise, get your network up, dig deep into the far corners of the Net – and then launch the counter campaign.

Program and compile subject-oriented campaigns! These days a lot of people talk about a global uprising, which is only in the very beginning and definitely not limited to running behind the so called battles of the three acronyms: WTO, WB and IMF. But the urgent question of that movement is: what new types of subjectivity will rise out of the current struggles? Everybody knows what's to be done, but who knows what are we fighting for and why? Maybe it doesn't matter anymore: net activism is of a charming fragility. In the end it means permanently revising and redefining all goals.

The revolution will be open source or not! Self-determination is something you should really share. As soon as you feel certain strength on a certain field, you can make your power productive as positive, creative and innovative force. That power opens up new capacities, reducing again and again unexpected and incalculable effects.

Ignore history. Don't refer to any of your favourite predecessors. Hide your admiration for authors, artists and familiar styles. You do not need to legitimise yourself by quoting the right theorist or rapper. Be unscrupulously modern (meaning: ignore organised fashion, you are anyway busy with something else). Create and disseminate your message with all avail-

able logics, tools and media. The new actonomy involves a rigorous application of networking methods. Its diversity challenges the development of non-hierarchical, decentralised and deterritorialised applets and applications. In the meanwhile leave the preaching of the techno religion to others. Hide your admiration for everything new and cool. Just use it. Take the claim on the future away from corporations.

Remember: they are the dinosaurs. Read as much business literature as possible and don't be afraid it may affect you. It will. Having enough ethics in your guts you can deal with that bit of ideology. Remember that activism and entrepreneurial spirit have a remarkably lot in common. So what? Benefit from your unlimited capacity of metamorphosis. With the right spirit you can survive any appropriation. Free yourself from the idea that enemy concepts are compromising the struggle. You don't have to convince yourself, nor your foe. The challenge is to involve those who are not yet joining the struggle. The challenge is to use resources, which may not belong to you, but which are virtually yours.

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