



Extended Abstract

Multitude and Internet: cooperation and domination

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Introduction

This presentation is the product of reflections arising from qualitative research realized with five countercultural groups in Colombia that intensively use information and communication technologies. The findings are analysed in relationship with new ways of sharing and disseminating knowledge and new forms of social and political organization. These sociotechnical practices are considered as potential forms of resistance against dominant and homogenous political and cultural models. They also show alternative forms of community and the creation of knowledge. Nevertheless they are a novelty that is observed in relation to the ambiguous power and inequality that exist on different levels within these collectives (Rueda, 2012).

For this reason, the concept of multitude as introduced by Spinoza and elaborated by Negri and Hardt (2000) and Lazzarato (2006), can be useful in understanding that while this *socius* is an unstable and volatile social energy, it constitutes a collective voice that resists the cultural and political order with surprising political potential. The multitude articulates affects and experiences that are the basis for political action. It is something located *in between*, it is multiple and at the same time conforms a singular body made up of diverse interests, experiences, feelings and relations, without a homogenous unity. Relationality and cooperation establish what is *common*, which in turn faces the political challenge of difference. But “modern society is characterized by antagonism of co-operation and competition. ... Characteristics of late-modern society such as the colonization of the life-world and the whole society by economic logic are again reproduced in cyberspace” (Fuchs & Zimmerman, 2009:119-125).

This multitude is then also unpredictable and unstable and we believe it faces the challenge of critically confronting the inequalities and exercises of power that exist within it. In fact, this new condition of the subjective experience – individual and collective – requires us to be alert to certain social and technological determinisms that inflate the reach of both the technology as well as the movements and collectives, and suggest that, for example, connectivity immediately means collectiveness and democratisation. We cannot underestimate the complexity of this *socius*, which is always faced by an array of possibilities ranging from social cooperation and creativity, to new forms of domination and the capturing of desire in the service of capital.

Methods

The methodology used was of a qualitative, ethnographic nature (participant observations, in-depth interviews, life stories). Firstly, a review was made of collectives who are connected to the Internet in Colombia, of which six were selected: one in the Valle del Cauca, in Santander de Quilichao: *El tejido de Comunicaciones* of the NASA-ACIN indigenous community; one in Medellín: *Corporación Vamos Mujer*, and four in Bogotá: *Niuton*, *Mefisto*, *La Cápsula* and *Chicas Linux*. These collectives were chosen for their social, political and cultural critiques of the established and dominant culture. Monitoring was then made for a period of one year of the different actions realized by these collectives in the cities where they are located, as well as on the Internet through their respective webpages.

Results and Discussion.

These cases of new forms of sociality, of multitude, that we found in the five countercultural groups are far from conforming a coherent whole, but they can be – and are – functional bodies of knowledge, valuable for inventing for us better and more just political forms of the everyday. These invite us to unlearn social, political, cultural forms that in the past were sole, colonial, homogenising.

At the same time, however, they remind us that, despite libertarian, rebellious and non-conformist outlooks regarding the establishment, these collectives contain within them questions related to relationships of power, of gender, of race, of social class and profession that appear in an ambiguous way, that become invisible and seem to coexist in a not always harmonious way in this social context, as is the case with markedly masculine and competitive practices in certain collectives of free software, or the hierarchical relations in countercultural collectives of women who oppose authoritarian political models. In effect, we see a complex condition, of hybridity, of non-contemporary contemporaneity of cultural times. Of the ways in which dimensions of subjectivity that were excluded from modern thought (such as affectivity, desire) are rescued while simultaneously exclusions of gender, race, social class and region are maintained intact, as is notorious, we might say, in those collectives that are principally urban and middle class.

Similarly, technologies are not sufficient or determinant per se regarding social or cultural agencements, because collective dimensions of use are what constitute settings of communication, spaces for the dissemination of the sensitive and places where diagrams of social creativity and desire are described. For this reason, we examined the power possessed by the collectives we have selected,

because we believe that friendship as politics, peer learning, sharing, donating, expression and the free circulation of commons, places us before new forms of understanding the formation of subjectivity and social practices that is still not easy to define. It is in these practices that technologies and their settings for participation and collaboration – such as the social network or Web 2.0 – are of interest for their political potency.

Conclusions

While discursive categories exist that give an identity (women, young people, indigenous people) to the five counterculture collectives we've considered in this study, internal differences also exist within these collectives, different subject positions and partial forms of articulation to the collectives and to the social practices of resistance to power, in which individual aspirations and dreams are also in tension.

We need to find metaphors to make evident the complexity of this sociotechnical vitality and the coexistence of traditional and novel forms of social and political organisation, as well as new and traditional cultural forms and practices. Another challenge we face is to try and better understand how that tactical combination is produced between connectivity and the conformation of common(ity), network, (multitude) and how the forms of control and diverse dynamics of power (co)exist even in alternative forms of networks and multitudes.

References and Notes

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