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Maurizio Lazzarato

Majority/Minorities

The conceptual pair majority/minorities takes account of a subjection that the Marxist concept of exploitation does not allow one to grasp. Now, like the concept of exploitation, the conceptual pair majority/minorities defines two heterogeneous movements by means of one and the same mechanism [*dispositif*]: the constitution of minorities as a majority and the constitution of minorities as forms of resistance, as creation of one and the same multiplicity.¹ But while exploitation is a dialectical mechanism, the majoritarian model is differential: the conceptual pair exploiter/exploited is symmetrical, whereas the conceptual pair majority/minorities is asymmetrical. In this sense, the differences between these two mechanisms are considerable.

Classes are structurally pre-defined, whereas minorities do not pre-exist their constitution any more than a majority does. The dualisms of class are written into the mode of production, whereas every majority and every minority is an event-like [*événementielle*] singularization of multiplicity. Exploitation refers to the essence of the subjects involved; the majoritarian model refers to the control exercised over their event-like becoming.

When we use the concept of exploitation, we know in advance who is good (the workers) and who is bad (the capitalists), whereas in the majority/minorities model we are confronted with the uncertainty and unpredictability of what is good and what is bad (a minority is perfectly capable of transforming itself into a majority or of being subordinated to a majority—which is what is happening, for example, to a part of the male homosexual movement).

As has been emphasized throughout this work, it's not a matter of opposing one power relation to another. The majority/minorities model does not replace exploitation, but superimposes itself on it, employing ways of giving consistency to multiplicity that are more mobile and elastic than the power relations characteristic of disciplinary societies, both from the point of view of power and from that of resistance.

Two examples will help to illustrate the efficacy, pertinence, and elegance of the conceptual apparatus elaborated by Deleuze and Guattari.

The first example demonstrates the limits of an approach that conceptualizes the relationship between workers and the power of capital only in terms of exploitation. Workers find themselves in a relation of exploitation when they sell their labor-power to an entrepreneur, but they find themselves implicated in a majoritarian dynamic when, for example, their revenue is invested in pension funds. A number of the largest American pension funds are in fact veritable “worker” insurance firms; they participate in the constitution of the majoritarian model by which finance captures flows of wealth and activity across the entire planet. The logic of finance, which functions according to the majoritarian principle of opinion and not according to the principle of exploitation, blurs the dividing lines between classes by establishing new divisions between those who profit and those who suffer from the accumulation of capital. In the case of the majority, the lines of division are not the same as in that of exploitation.

The wage laborers who invest their income in this manner constitute a multiplicity along with other revenue holders, and they help impose this multiplicity as a majority (a bad multiplicity). That shouldn’t surprise us, since, as we’ve learned from Tarde, singularities can participate in different publics and groups at the same time (the impossible [*l’incompossible*] is not governed by the logic of contradiction).² The exploitation of wage laborers is no less real than their participation in the financial majority.

Is this then a case of a worker aristocracy that has betrayed its class? Isabelle Stengers suggests that we ought to change our vocabulary, in a world in which different possible worlds proliferate. In her words, we can say that the wage laborers who invest in pension funds are not “guilty,” but “poisoned or bewitched” by finance, just as we are all poisoned or bewitched by advertising, marketing, television, and so on.

We have already amply stressed the impossibility of distinguishing an expressive from a corporeal assemblage; we have tried to show that one cannot conceptualize the economy without first conceptualizing marketing, public opinion, and so on—that is, without taking into account mechanisms that function according to the conflictual majority/minorities dynamic, rather than according to the dynamic of exploitation.

Our second example will demonstrate how the majoritarian model overdetermines the activity of one of the most important and wealthiest industries of contemporary capitalism: the pharmaceutical industry.

Philippe Kourilisky, general manager of the Pasteur Institute, has pointed out that one of the major obstacles to the circulation and production of those pharmaceutical products whose absence causes death

for millions worldwide is not just an economic obstacle. Nor does it arise from intellectual property laws. As surprising as it may seem, one of the obstacles to meeting global health needs is (bio)ethics.

The power held by institutions such as the US's FDA and Europe's EMEA—institutions that set the standards for research, development, and manufacture of medicines and vaccines—has a “strong ethical connotation, since they're charged with protecting the security of persons.”³ A product of the “security-oriented logic of Western nations,” these standards cause the costs of research and development to rise to the point where “poor countries, incapable of meeting these standards, frequently refrain from producing for themselves, even though they would be able to do so.”

According to Kourilisky, bioethics has become a genuine locus of power. Its logic is that of the majority (wealthy nations) that subordinates minorities (poor nations) to its criteria of measure (the standards regulating research and development). “Regulatory globalization goes hand-in-hand with the globalization of ethics.” The partisans of a universalizing ethic are at odds with the exponents of an ethics adapted to local situations. They radically reject every notion of a “double standard” that allows a pharmaceutical product to be produced according to non-Western norms (or to use vaccines used in the West until the 1960s, but which do not correspond to present norms as established by the regulatory institutions). “In this manner, regulatory standards and a universalizing ethic meet, to the detriment of poor countries [...]. And by what right do we want to export our norms, our judgment, our ethic of wealthy nations to those who lack everything or almost everything?”

One cannot properly understand this situation by considering simple economic logic, or by analyzing the organized theft of intellectual property rights. Here again, exploitation results from the interlinking of different logics, each oriented towards different goals—overlapping logics that connect or disconnect in a more or less coherent manner.

Pace Rancière, the philosophy of difference does not abandon the “negative,” but rather re-defines it in accordance with the concept of multiplicity and the differential dynamics of refusal and creation we have discussed. When it comes to multiplicity, the “negative” cannot be conceptualized without the conceptual pair majority/minorities.⁴

To be sure, class relationships and majority-minority relationships co-exist, but it is the latter that are becoming more and more generalized, and that determine, reshape, and subordinate the former, forcing us to re-conceptualize resistance off the beaten track of the labor movement.

The Living, Resistance, and Power

And yet as you understand it, resistance is not just a form of negation: it's a process of creation; to create and recreate, to transform the situation, to participate actively in the process, that's what resisting is. [...]

Yes, that's how I would define things. Saying no constitutes the minimal form of resistance. Of course there are times when it's very important. You have to say no and make of that no a decisive form of resistance.

– Michel Foucault

The concepts of the living [*vivant*], resistance, and power change depending upon the ontology according to which they're formulated.

Marxism has conceptualized the living, resistance, and power according to an ontology of the subject/object relation, transferring this relation into politics in the form of the capitalist/worker relation of exploitation. According to this tradition, the living presents itself as labor ("living labor"), that is, as producer of the world and of history. Power is the mechanism that brings about the metamorphosis of the "living" into its opposite: "dead" labor. The subject objectifies itself, reifies itself in a product, a work, and thereby becomes the slave of what it has produced. To come to life again, to once more become the master of its destiny and affirm itself as the subject of history, it has to effect a reversal of reification: the revolution is the reversal of the reversal, the subjectification of dead labor, the metamorphosis of the object into the subject.

As we have seen, there is another tradition in modernity, which conceptualizes the architectonics of the world in terms of what Mikhail Bakhtin defines as the self/other relation. The relation between self and other must be understood neither as a relation between a subject and an object nor as a relation between subjects, but rather as an event-like relation between "possible worlds." The other is neither an object nor a subject; it is the expression of possible worlds.

What do the relations between the living, resistance, and power become when one no longer conceptualizes them on the basis of the ontology of the subject, but rather on that of the event-like relation between self and other? Foucault can help us answer this question. In effect, in his final and definitive theory of power, Foucault defines power as action performed upon possible actions, as the capacity to control the ways in which others may conduct themselves. Perceiving power relations as capacities to constitute and define the possible conduct of others allows us to return to what is at stake in the practices, mechanisms,

and techniques of power that we have seen at work in the coordination-form, in feminist movements, and in the struggles against neoliberal globalization.

At the beginning of the 1980s, Foucault draws a distinction between three different concepts that he had until then subsumed under the single category of power: strategic relations, techniques of government, and states of domination.⁵

Strategic relations make up a considerable part of human relations and must not be confused with a political structure, a government, a dominant social class, or anything of the kind. They constitute a set of power relations that play out between individuals within a family or a teacher-student, communicative, or romantic relationship. They are infinitesimal, mobile, reversible, and unstable power games that allow the partners involved to put in place strategies for modifying situations. For Foucault, strategic relations have no negative connotations. For example, exercising power over another within a sexual or romantic relationship—where one attempts to dictate the conduct of the other and acts upon the other's possible actions as part of an open strategic game within which things can always be reversed—"is part of love, of passion, of sexual pleasure." If power is defined as the capacity to structure the other's field of possible actions, then in order to conceptualize the exercise of power one needs to suppose that the forces engaged in the relation are virtually "free." Power is a mode of acting upon "active subjects," "upon free subjects *qua* free subjects." Within this framework, to say that the subjects are free is to say that they "always have the possibility of changing the situation, that this possibility exists constantly."

States of domination, on the other hand, are characterized by the fact that the strategic relation has stabilized itself within institutions that limit, freeze, and block the mobility, reversibility, and instability of the action performed upon another action. In this way, the asymmetrical relationships that every social relation contains are crystallized and lose the freedom, fluidity, and reversibility of strategic relations. Trade unions, political parties, and State institutions may insist on the democratic character of the procedures that characterize them, but they freeze and block at the outset the ways in which individuals attempt to direct the conduct of others, such that it becomes almost impossible to implement strategies of transformation.

Foucault situates technologies or techniques of government in an intermediate region between strategic relations and states of domination. Technologies or techniques of government are the ensemble of practices

by which one is able to “constitute, define, organize, instrumentalize the strategies that individuals, in their freedom, can implement in their relationships with one another.”⁶ What these techniques govern is one’s relation to oneself and to others. According to Foucault, techniques of government play a central role within power relations, because it is through them that strategic games can be given a closed or an open character; it is through the exercise of techniques of government that these games crystallize and fix themselves in institutionalized, asymmetrical relations (states of domination) or in fluid and reversible relations, open to the experimentation of subjectivations that escape states of domination.

Political action must therefore concentrate on techniques of government. Such action has two major aims:

1. To allow for strategic relations to be played out with as little domination as possible, by giving oneself rules of right (new rights).
2. To increase the liberty, mobility, and reversibility of power games, since this liberty, mobility, and reversibility are the preconditions for resistance, creation, and the experimentation of relationships to oneself and to others.

The notion of “techniques of government” helps us to conceptualize in another way the newness of the mechanisms we have seen at work in coordinations, in post-feminist movements, or in the various mobilizations against neoliberal globalization. The techniques of government that organize states of domination (such as marketing, the management of a business enterprise, global “governance,” or workfare) are not the only possible techniques of government. In effect, it is also possible for there to be techniques of government that cut across strategic relations and states of domination transversally. While it is an illusion to believe that there can be social relations without power relations, one mustn’t think that states of domination are inevitable. It’s a question of the techniques employed, if one envisions these techniques as collective constructs.

Conceptualizing political action as the construction of techniques for the governing of oneself and of others allows one to render both strategic relations and states of domination “problematic.” It allows one to make them the object of politics, thereby creating the conditions for transforming them. The techniques in question are themselves the means employed in such an act of questioning; they are themselves the locus of experimentation. Experimentation and the transformation of the

situation can be brought about neither in the exteriority of strategic relations nor in the interiority of states of domination; they trace a line of flight “between” the two, by means of techniques and mechanisms that prevent states of domination from fixing every space for the creation of what is possible, and by giving to strategic relations a new mobility and a new reversibility, a reversibility assured not by the transcendence of the law and of right, or by categorical statements on equality, but by the action of mobile and nomadic institutions such as coordinations.

Such new institutions blur the distinctions and the distribution of roles fixed by established power; they allow for subtraction from the dichotomous (or dialectical) alternatives within which we are bound (man/woman, capitalist/worker, citizen/foreigner, worker/unemployed, and so on). This space “between” the microphysics of power and the institutions of domination (a space that is not given, but that must be invented, constructed, cultivated) is propitious for a politics of becoming and creation, for the invention of new forms of subjectivation.

In the end, Foucault, Deleuze, and Guattari tell us that if one wants to conceptualize and practice the politics of multiplicity, one needs to start from these spaces, these lines that are traced in an always singular manner between the molar and the molecular, between relations of dominance and strategic relations. That’s exactly what social movements do, and what molar institutions (both right-wing and left-wing) refuse to do. And it is the only way of constructing social relations whose horizon is not that of war.

Translated by Max Henninger

Notes

1. In the same manner, the concept of exploitation defines the production of capital (it is the concept of the production of surplus value) and the production of that which destroys capital (it is the concept of the constitution of the proletariat).
2. “Impossible” is Leibniz’s term for that which escapes from the possible/impossible binary. (Translator’s note.)
3. Philippe Kourilisky, “L’éthique du Nord sacrifie les malades du Sud.” *Le Monde*, 8 February 2004. All subsequent quotations are taken from this article.
4. By the same token, the concept of the multitude, while it allows one to conceptualize “an ensemble of singularities,” seems incapable of defining in a non-dialectical manner a principle internal to the dynamic of the multiplicity that corresponds to what is called “division” or the “negative.” In effect, when it becomes necessary to refer to this principle, one applies to the multitude a conceptual apparatus related to classes (one speaks of the “class of the multitude”), instead of examining the relationship between different mechanisms of power and subjectivation.
5. See Foucault, “Deux essais sur le sujet et le pouvoir.” *Dits et Écrits*, vol. II (Paris: Gallimard, 2001).
6. Foucault 2001 (728).