geheimagentur, Martin Jörg Schäfer, Vassilis S. Tsianos (eds.)

THE ART OF BEING MANY MANY MANY

Towards a New Theory and Practice of Gathering

[transcript] Culture & Theory

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Content

Rehearsing the Art of Being Many
geheimagentur | 9

Introduction
geheimagentur, Martin Jörg Schäfer, Vassilis S. Tsianos | 19

THEORIES OF THE ASSEMBLY

Calling Assemblies
The Many as a Real Fiction
Sibylle Peters | 35

The Labour and Leisure of Performing the Many
Martin Jörg Schäfer | 51

Consensus
The Togetherness of Those Who Would Not Wait for One Another
Kai van Eikels | 61

From the People to the Many and Maybe Back? Magic.
Ilias Marmaras | 69

Assembling Bodies in New Ecologies of Existence
The Real Democracy Experience as Politics
Beyond Representation
Vassilis S. Tsianos, Margarita Tsomou | 77

The Art of Being Uncanny
LIGNA | 95

Un/Easy Resonance
The Critical Plural
Ulrike Bergermann | 103

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MATERIALS OF THE ASSEMBLY

Coming Together, Coming Apart
A Soundtrack for the Journey to an Assembly
random people (Daniel Ladnar/Esther Pilkington) | 121

The Art of Being Many
A Critical Review
Chris Zisis | 129

Assemblies in Theatres, Biennials, Museums
The Failing Necessities of ›Being With‹
Gigi Argyropoulou | 149

A Clock for Assemblies
Experimentation in Collective Time Measuring
Sibylle Peters / Theatre of Research | 159

Tear Gas Democracy
Orgy Punk | 165

Amplification and Assembly
Sylvi Kretzschmar, Kathrin Wildner | 169

Intervening in the Narrative Voice
Reflections Around ›The Art of Being Many‹ and the ›Meditation Exercise‹ Genre.
Ernesto Estrella | 183

Ceremonials of Gathering
Syncretizing Vogue and Voodoo
Martin Jörg Schäfer | 193

Foreplay in Many Axioms
A Theoretical Voguing on Performance, Labor, Pleasure and Multiplicity
Giuila Palladini | 201

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Contexts of the Assembly

Unfinishing Legislation
Constituent Performativity in the *Charter for Europe*
Elise von Bernstorff | 213

Charter for Europe | 225

Urban Panics and Black Holes
Ambiguities of Deceleration in the Time of Financialization
Marios Emmanouilidis | 233

Open Source Finance Hacking
Potentials and Problems
Brett Scott | 251

Invaders Are Here!
Pantxo Ramas | 267

Art and Jack-in-the-Box
Brigitta Kuster | 275

Third Projection: Collective Film Activation
The Archive of the National Film Institute of Guinea-Bissau and its Reactualization in the Mobile Cinema
Nanna Heidenreich
in collaboration with Filipa César and Aissatu Seidi | 279

Drawings
Enrique Flores | 18, 31, 49, 67, 94, 117, 157, 168, 182, 210, 232, 274, 288

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Rehearsing the Art of Being Many

GEHEIMAGENTUR

In May 2014, geheimagentur invited the people who took part in the preparation of *The Art of Being Many* as well as the general public to participate in a rehearsal of the assembly planned for autumn 2014. The rehearsal took the form of a guided tour through the future assembly, taking place in the same hall and using the same technical setup. Two interrelated questions were at stake: 1) Can an assembly be rehearsed at all? and 2) Was the real assembly in autumn 2014 not bound to be something like a rehearsal, too – an assembly taking place in a theatre space and experimenting with its own practices and formats?

This is the script of the performance *Rehearsing the Art of Being Many*:

Everybody is waiting outside the theatre, outside the empty hall. Headphones are being distributed, so everyone is listening to the following text through the headphones.

Speaker 1:

Welcome! In 144 days we will be many. Many – that means first of all: more than now. To be precise – 10 times more than now. But even now we are already more than we were fifteen minutes ago.

We have assembled here for a rehearsal of a rehearsal. A rehearsal assembly. Perhaps a bit like a rehearsal dinner for weddings – maybe you know those from TV. During a rehearsal dinner, the procedure for the future event is practiced. It also serves the purpose of thanking everybody who contributed to the realization of the future event.

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Speaker 2 (from inside the hall):

Imagine the hall that one enters through this door. The so-called entrance hall. A huge space, the ceiling as high as the sky. Concrete, steel, rust. Emptiness.

Empty spaces are stages. Stages are empty spaces, in which one imagines putting things. In our imagination, they are still empty spaces, just with many things in them. Only when one really enters them and really puts things into them, one realizes that the space is no longer empty. No matter how huge a space is: To enter a stage that one has imagined filling again and again means seeing how much smaller it is than the universe that one placed in it. It is a bit like looking at the stars and realizing how long the light took to reach us. Following the same principle, spaces become bigger in our memory. The longer we weren't there, the bigger they become. Memory is a space time warp.

Imagine how the door opens. And imagine you could hold an assembly in the hall for two days. An assembly of 400 people, 400 people who will have set off, who will have met others on their way, who will have participated in other assemblies, who right now are assembled somewhere else, in other halls, in other squares and streets, in factories, conference rooms, school classes, in basements, in bars, on roofs and in parks. An assembly of the many.

What should the many find when the door opens?

Imagine you could set up the hall for the arrival of the many. What should be in there?

What should you see when the door opens? What will be assembled there before the assembly begins? Who will assemble in order to prepare the assembly?

Imagine a recording from a fish-eye camera from the ceiling. Imagine the many people, walking around, sitting, standing, swinging, lying, dancing, talking, writing, eating. What structures can you recognize?

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And now rewind. Look how the hall empties, how the podiums and platforms and lights and scaffolding and tents and projection screens and saunas and kitchens and dance floors disappear – in the reversal of their accumulation. Further and further back, until the hall is empty again, to the beginning, and further, and further – back to this moment. Just before the door opens and you enter.

Speaker 2 opens the door from inside:

To fill an empty space in your imagination is a forecast. The stage is a concept that makes it possible to align desires with expectations and to generate a prognosis for something that one causes but does not control. The empty space is a double boundary – once in your imagination, when you imagine the stage and putting everything there, exactly at that place and at that time, there and not anywhere else – and then a real boundary when one is standing on the empty stage again.

Like a wave the first prognosis breaks over reality and with more or less force and froth washes over the beach. After that the second wave appears, the second prognosis – starting from the real stage through time to the moment when everybody starts assembling.

Speaker 1:

To begin our assembly today, we would ask you to come close to each other, as close as possible, still closer, so close that there is no space left between us, and closer yet, perhaps so close that we touch each other, even if we do not know each other well yet. And then we can drift apart again and look around us in this huge space that once was even bigger.

Recorded voice, describing elements that will fill the hall:

In the middle there will be an arena. And around it: two containers, and a third one on top of these. Scaffolding forming a kind of tower house. Bracing like steel trees, with terraces inside. An old water canon with seat cushions. And somewhere in-between a grandstand. A caravan with a sauna. A four-storied kitchen installation. A bar. Four projection screens.

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Speaker 1:

We have brought these things, these different places with us. As markers on these signs. Perhaps we can take these signs and put them where we imagine all these things that will be here in September. Where will be the kitchen? Where the containers? What will be next to each other? And what is still missing? What is still needed? Perhaps we can write these things that we desire to be here in September on the floor. Let's imagine the future entrance hall together.

The signs and pieces of chalk are distributed.

Speaker 2:

There, above the containers, will be two screens. On Saturday, September 27, videos of the occupation of Syntagma Square in Athens will be shown.

144 days before the occupation of Syntagma Square nobody knew about it.
144 days before the occupation of Porta del Sol in Madrid nobody knew about it.
144 days before the occupation of Gezi Park nobody knew about it.

Nobody submitted a building application.
Nobody calculated the capacity of the soup kitchen.
Nobody wrote a technical rider.

When so many assemble spontaneously, it is because other forms of assembling, of gathering, of making decisions, of adjourning, of speaking for each other, of agreeing, do not function anymore.

When so many assemble, the assembly at first is a blockade, an interruption, a special zone, in which the non-functioning becomes manifest. A state of emergency in which assembling has to be reinvented – not 144 days beforehand, but now, here, in this very moment in which we are together, while the cops are already standing outside the hall, while we are slowly getting tired, and hungry, and have seen somebody twice already back there in crowd with whom we would rather be alone.

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And this is the moment when it is essential where the others have come from, where they have been before, who they have met on their way, how many tweets they have read and written on the way, if they have charged their computers and if, many years ago, they participated in this assembly at school, where this thing with the list of speakers worked for once and everybody joined in this one dance.

Because when the many invent an assembly, they do so by putting together what they know, by mixing together how to move, how to address the others, how to get up to something, how to touch each other and how to not touch each other, how to agree and how to disagree, how to vote, how to be visible and how to be invisible.

In 144 days an assembly on assembling will take place here, in which we want to share this kind of knowledge and art with each other.

Many will be together in this space – from 12 pm to 12 am and then again from 12 pm to 12 am.

How can we plan this assembly? Perhaps best by simply already beginning, by realizing that it has already begun, that we are already on our way to the assembly, that we are already there.

Speaker 1:

When we assemble, our paths cross. When we assemble, our bodies, our thoughts, our desires, our fears, our stories, come together. When we assemble, technologies, techniques, sounds, smells, things, ghosts, come together. When we assemble, our voices assemble.

Our technology tonight allows us to hear each other without having to look at each other. We can turn around; we can turn away. We can look at each other, but we do not have to. We can be very close to each other, like we were before, but that does not mean that we can hear each other better. We can grow apart; we can disperse within the assembly.

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As this is a rehearsal of a rehearsal we would like to try how far we can disperse within our assembly, how much distance is possible – perhaps we can go as far away from each other as possible, still further and further, and a bit further yet, so far that we would leave the space if we were to take another step, as far apart as possible, so far that perhaps we cannot see each other anymore ... And nevertheless, we can still hear each other very well. Even if we whisper.

In this entrance hall, two spaces merge: the space where we actually are together and the acoustic space. These spaces belong to each other, but they are not identical. Here, things happen that do not necessarily happen there. While I am talking here, other conversations can take place there.

We are standing together, listening to the same thing. And yet we are separate with our headphones. Are dispersed in the hall. At the same time assembled and dispersed. It is exactly this technology that will be used at *The Art of Being Many*. *The Art of Being Many*, an assembly of assemblies. Otherwise dispersed assemblies will assemble here in dispersal, and perhaps in dispersal is exactly how the many can assemble.

Assembly spaces are acoustic spaces. Public address systems. The architecture of the acoustic space formats political speech. Do new acoustic spaces thus form new kinds of political speeches, new addresses? Do we hear old addresses differently in new acoustic spaces?

Sound check: Please compare the live sound in the hall to the sound over the head phones.

You will listen to Pericles' funeral speech from the year 431 BC, addressing the citizens of Athens:

It is true that we are called a democracy, for the administration is in the hands of the many and not of the few. [...] Neither is poverty an obstacle, but a man may benefit his country whatever the obscurity of his condition. There is no exclusiveness in our public life, and in our private business we are not suspicious of one another, nor angry with our neighbor if he does what he likes; [...] While we are thus unconstrained in

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our private business, a spirit of reverence pervades our public acts; [...] having a particular regard to those laws which are ordained for the protection of the injured as well as those unwritten laws which bring upon the transgressor of them the reprobation of the general sentiment.

And we have not forgotten to provide for our weary spirits many relaxations from toil; we have regular games and sacrifices throughout the year; our homes are beautiful and elegant; and the delight which we daily feel in all these things helps to banish sorrow. Because of the greatness of our city the fruits of the whole earth flow in upon us; so that we enjoy the goods of other countries as freely as our own.

[...] Our city is thrown open to the world, though and we never expel a foreigner and prevent him from seeing or learning anything of which the secret if revealed to an enemy might profit him. We rely not upon management or trickery, but upon our own hearts and hands. And in the matter of education, whereas they from early youth are always undergoing laborious exercises which are to make them brave, we live at ease, and yet are equally ready to face the perils which they face. [...] If then we prefer to meet danger with a light heart but without laborious training, and with a courage which is gained by habit and not enforced by law, are we not greatly the better for it? [...]

We are lovers of the beautiful in our tastes and our strength lies in our opinion, not in deliberation and discussion, but that knowledge which is gained by discussion preparatory to action.[1]

Speaker 1:

Pericles' speech is about ›us‹. Talks about ›us‹. Is addressed at ›us‹. Imagines an ›us‹. Perhaps as we imagine speeches about the many to the many. It is the speech that we listened to here together. We who are assembled tonight. Yet, if we are dispersed at the same time, if we are separate with our headphones, are we ›us‹? Are we the many? When we talk about ›us‹, do we feel addressed? Are we ›us‹, then?

1 http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/education/thucydides.html, accessed 26 January 2016.

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Perhaps you can give us feedback regarding this question if ›we‹ can work with the headphones. Perhaps you can turn around, away from the middle, looking at the wall, if the ›we‹ does not work and ›we‹ are actually not ›we‹. But if ›we‹ is possible, even if we are dispersed, then please look towards the middle of the room, look at the others.

Does this work? Are we on a first name basis via the headphones? When I say you, do I mean only you? Do you feel addressed? If yes, please look towards the center. Do you think you are addressed or the person next to you as well? Are we on a first name basis because, in a way, it is only the two of us? Or are you not addressed? Does this not work at all? Then turn outwards. Because then this does not concern you. Has nothing to do with you. Because the others are there as well.

And, does that mean that the plural works? As when you were asked to respond to the ›we‹? Did you notice that you were addressed in the plural rather than the singular? And actually that is what we have done all along – addressed you as a group. Does that work better than the other you? If yes, well, you know already … face the center, but if that ›you‹ is not for you – because you are standing there alone or together with us – if you are you, who are we who are talking right now – then turn away and look at the walls.

When we are contemplating how to address you, as you, the many, then this has to do with the technology. With the two spaces. With the simultaneity of assembly and dispersion. And quite pragmatically: What sounds better when the voice arrives via the headphones?

But it also has to do with how we imagine ourselves as a group. How we imagine the many to be, who the many are, and who exactly the many will be at *The Art of Being Many*.

People from Athens.
People from Madrid.
People from Rome.
People from Bucharest.
People from Rio.
People from Mexico City.
People from Milan.
People from Vienna.

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People from Istanbul.
People from Cairo.
People from St. Pauli.
People from Barmbek.
People from Kotti.
People from Copenhagen.
People from Gängeviertel.
People from squatted theatres.
People from Somalia.
People from Lampedusa.
People from university.
People from the sea.
People from Schanzenviertel.
People from the harbor.
People from abroad.
People from the neighborhood.
People from drowning islands.
People from far away.
People from beyond.

Welcome to *The Art of Being Many*!

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Introduction

GEHEIMAGENTUR, MARTIN JÖRG SCHÄFER, VASSILIS S. TSIANOS

Human microphones, neighbourhood assemblies, camps in public spaces, mass protests organized through digital media – the first half of this decade has seen many new forms and ways of assembling. Most of these assemblies took place in the name of ›real democracy‹, with ›real democracy‹ not being a fixed political program but rather a new practice of getting together and of sharing that seemed to constantly reflect on its performative protocols and media strategies. Since the year 2000, new forms of political gatherings have also been an important focus in the arts. With projects like Christoph Schlingensief's *Chance 2000*, the exhibition *Making Things Public: Atmospheres of Democracy* by Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel or LIGNA's participatory *Radioballets* reclaiming public space we have witnessed the development of an experimental art of assembling. The Hamburg-based collective geheimagentur has taken part in this research for more than a decade. In this context, »The Art of Being Many« has initially been the title of a position paper written by geheimagentur for the International Forum of the Theatertreffen Berlin in 2008. In this paper, geheimagentur analyzed and criticized current strategies of audience participation in terms of their economical, political and aesthetical implications. For a long time, copresence, the simultaneous presence of artists and public audience, has been understood merely as the basic premise of performance and theatre. But with the development of participatory performance art the form of the assembly turned from a premise into an experimental setup: If and how a public assembly emerges as part of a specific performance became a core question of participatory art. In other words: In art and activism, the assembly as such has been revisited, redefined and reclaimed as the basic mode of political participation. On these grounds

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The Art of Being Many became a research project aiming to collect experiences and knowledge produced by these innovative practices and experiments.

In September 2014, artists, activists, researchers and participants from all over Europe and beyond gathered in Hamburg, Germany, for an assembly of assemblies. Sharing experiences from real democracy movements and artistic experimentation they came to explore new ways of gathering: collective insights into the materiality, the timing, the agenda, the desires and the catastrophes of being many. This book presents some of the outcomes of this gathering. However, the following texts are not supposed to archive what happened at the Hamburg get-together and to draw up the balance. By putting together theories of assembling, materials taken from the event as well as reflections on the contexts from which *The Art of Being Many* originated, we rather aim to contribute to the art of being many as an ongoing research program into a new theory and practice of gathering.

The Art of Being Many of 2014 took place at Kampnagel Internationale Kulturfabrik. In a huge hall of the former factory building, which has been turned into a cultural center in the 1980s, the assembly became a laboratory of itself: a collective of friends and strangers with many voices and bodies including those of ghosts and things. Many of us met for the first time, but we all had something in common: We had witnessed moments of assembling that made the word ›democracy‹ sound important again. These assemblies may not have brought about the political changes many of us had hoped for. Nevertheless, we are convinced of their importance.

Speaking about ›the many‹ (instead of the masses, of the oppressed classes, of ›the people‹ or of various minorities) invokes new concepts of collectivity by renegotiating their modes of participation and (self-) presentation and by rewriting rhetorical, choreographical, and material scripts of assembling. This renegotiation happens necessarily between politics and cultural practice, between art and activism, and thus in a notorious zone of conflict, of doubt and of self-critique: After all, is it not most of the time a feeling of NOT being many that is common to both art and activism, i.e. of not being enough people to bring forth the necessary changes or to win the important battles? And even if art and activism share a desire for being many, does this make them good accomplices or is not rather the opposite true? Is their alliance not always linked to the risk of reducing the many to an economic feature and a spectacle (cf. Bishop 2012)? Participation, prosumption, social

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media, data mining – in all of these fields the many are treated as a resource, and success is defined as providing access to this resource one way or another.

But the desire for being many reaches beyond this necessary critique. For good reasons it rises up against the cultural tyranny of the individual which has long been captured and redesigned as the self-optimizing subject of cognitive capitalism. It rises up against the economics of attention, of knowledge, of cultural credit and its imperatives of the big name, the keynote, the star, against the principles of scarcity and accumulation. It rises up – most importantly – against the ongoing concentration of power and capital in the hands of the fewer and fewer, against the reduction of the many to the few, the reduction of the many to the statistics of control, security, austerity and biopolitical representation.

When the many actually emerge and start to engage in the constituent process of becoming a ›we‹, terrible and wonderful things can happen. The wonderful part is that, in such moments, the most important things can be reinvented: care, dignity, and the power to change our lives collectively. So, how to learn, how to embody, how to continue to be many?

The Art of Being Many was initiated by geheimagentur in cooperation with a research network of sociologists, activists and philosophers (initiated by Vassilis S. Tsianos) from Greece, Italy, and Spain, who examine new approaches to cities in crisis in the current age. These two groups also cooperated with the Hamburg postgraduate research program *Assemblies and Participation: Urban Publics and Performance*. Running from 2012 to 2015 at Hafencity University, Fundus Theater and K3 – Centre for Choreography, this program fostered art-based research into assemblies and political participation. In addition, activists, academics, and artists (including Martin Jörg Schäfer) with interests in the political dimension of theatre and performance studies were also included.

Initiated by this network, the assembly itself was prepared in a collective curatorial process. Open, transdisciplinary and transnational working groups were created, each preparing one panel of the assembly (about 150 people alltogether). This preparation continued for the year leading up to *The Art of Being Many*, mainly via the project website. Finally, the working groups met for two days in order to collectively prepare the assembly for about 400 people. This event lasted for another two days, from noon to midnight, respectively.

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As an assembly of assemblies *The Art of Being Many* was not meant to be a series of individual presentations, acts and keynotes but wanted to focus on what can be done together: no audience, no performers, only those who were part of the assembly for those days and only that which they wanted it to be – a congress, an endurance performance, a conference, a meeting point, etc.

This volume cannot document this event in all its complexities, and does not even try. Instead, it collects texts and documents of three different kinds in the corresponding parts of this publication:

- Theoretical essays outlining the discussion that currently links political struggles with questions of how to assemble as many.
- Material from the gathering in Hamburg; texts and scripts that were presented at the assembly, but also documentations, reflections, and critical reviews.
- Texts which give insight into the context – with regard to judicial, financial, organisational or aesthetic aspects of an art of being many.

As a gathering and as a research program, *The Art of Being Many* differed considerably from other meetings, discourses and endeavours in the context of what is called ›political resistance‹: Instead of referring to immediate political demands and necessities, the agenda of *The Art of Being Many* referred primarily to seemingly formal and technical aspects of assembling. Nevertheless, these aspects were conceived as inseparably intertwined with the political stakes of real democracy. The performance dimension of the art of being many was understood as a retraining and remaking of our senses in order to allow us to understand how radical social transformation is possible and how it already takes place. Thinking and acting in terms of resistance makes us confine ourselves to practices of reactive opposition. But what we saw in the first half of this decade was a series of eruptions which announced something that by far surpasses the political semantics of resistance. How can we understand that people who had been partaking in ›oligarchic democracy‹ (and worse) all their lives suddenly *practiced* real democracy in so many places all over the globe? They did not so much ›resist‹ something but rather created a new situation that allowed those »who have no part« (Rancière 2004: 30) to enter. Historically, mass movements have often been discussed as something threatening, for instance by being portrayed through the image of *infection* (cf. Stäheli, 2011). Today, it seems important to foster

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a theory of the democratic potentiality of assemblies that both resists pathologization and is capable of understanding moments of uncontrollability as opportunities. In this context the ›assembly‹ is a modality of communality and of togetherness; it is linked to an explicit criticism of political identity primarily understood via *representation processes* (cf. Negri/Hardt 2009; Rancière 2004). In this context, the material and operative way of functioning, the ›architecture‹ of assemblies, moves to the fore: the affective dynamics as well as the media and cultural techniques of the many. For good reasons, assemblies of real democracy movements have incorporated an aspect of slowness and carefulness when it comes to the process of organization and decision-making (cf. Papadopoulos/Tsianos/Tsomou 2015). The difference they have inscribed into the political sphere has very little to do with the pathologic realism of so-called post-democracy (Crouch 2004), whose main point of criticism is the alleged lack of sustainable political organization and optimal institutionalization of the interests in question. Assemblies of real democracy movements have not engaged in the discourse of being disenchanted with politics but created a kind of real-democracy infra-politics, an assembly infrastructure against the tyranny of neoliberal crisis management. Criticizing the limits of given forms of political representation implies interrupting unsubstantiated ontological assumptions about people's capacities to represent themselves and the world. Therefore, assemblies of the many insisted on becoming their own politics. Their concepts, demands, affects, and ways of working transgress given mechanisms of control in a way that can only be understood if we give up on binary oppositions like form and content, matter and idea, means and goals.

Nevertheless, during the gathering in Hamburg in 2014 it proved ambitious to engage in an embodied and at the same time reflective exploration taking the assembly itself, its practices and bodies, its affects and setups, as starting points. It did not only presuppose that the working groups, which were involved in the curatorial process and the participants present at the assembly would all want to make and find connections between seemingly formal aspects and more common political questions instead of focussing on their individual presentations and accounts of things done elsewhere. It also produced clashes between given assembly cultures in the absence of an overall directive, for example by creating conflicting juxtapositions: People who wanted to continue talking about experiences with severe police violence were confronted with flashing lights and a dancing encounter of queer

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voguing and Somalian folkdance that turned the forum into a stage. People who wanted to discuss transnational perspectives of debt resistance were confronted with others organizing a local sauna in the same spot. People who wanted to share moments of commoning were confronted with the complicated technical setup of the full-blown performance space at Kampnagel Kulturfabrik.

Readings of clashes like these notoriously fall short of the complexity that had brought them about in the first place. Conflicts of reflective assemblies cannot be explained or dealt with by relying on identity schemes like ›artists vs. activists‹. People on either side of these clashes are artists or activists or both or neither, and will find themselves on the other side of that same distinction soon enough. Whoever calls the many to assemble, whoever calls an assembly that cannot rely on any preexisting practice of the assembly, has to be ready to encounter irritation, confusion and conflict and has to withstand the temptation to pacify, exclude or resolve.

The initiating network started this process by drafting questions and titles for the seven panels of the assembly. This collection of questions and titles became an outline for a research program that, as such, is still standing. It is included in this introduction not in order to enable the reader to measure aim and outcome but rather to provide an inducement for further thought and action.

materiality and decision

What is the material makeup of democratic decision-making? What media, which kinds of props do we use or could we use to decide as many? Obviously, if and how we decide collectively will influence the character of a meeting: consensus or majority? Hierarchical or horizontal? Analog or digital? Soft or loud? By lot or oracle? Intoxicated or sober? How do we decide how to decide? What is the relation between the body of the assembly and our individual bodies? Do we have to be in one place to be an assembly? How are things and bodies arranged in the space of an assembly? What proceedings are suggested by spaces specifically designed for assembling? And what happens if other spaces are reclaimed for an assembly of the many?

This aspect is reflected by Kai van Eikels' essay on consensus and the specific dynamics that make assemblies of the many differ from others, and by

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Ulrike Bergermann who analyzes media figurations of the ›critical plural‹ focussing on the example of the human mic. In both cases, the assembly does not negotiate a (political) content disconnected from its form. Rather, democratic form and contents turn out to be inseparable.

timing and breaks

Timing is crucial for assemblies – for the structure of the assembly itself, but also for its formation: When do we get together? What kind of events trigger the getting together of the many? How do assemblies of the many interrupt temporal governance? How to turn an assembly that is allocated a certain timeslot into an assembly that takes its time? How do we measure and organise our time? Assemblies are often determined by a certain relation to the future. How is this future represented, predicted and referred to? Time seems always too short and too long in assemblies and is linked to a feeling of both urgency and boredom. Is there a way out of this predicament?

In the second part of this volume, an experiment in collective timekeeping is documented that took place at *The Art of Being Many*. Moreover, the script of the audio guide created by Random People for *The Art of Being Many* can be read as a documented experiment with the extended time of gathering.

blockades and panic

Many assemblies of real democracy movements took the shape of metropolitan blockades. They turned urban space against itself by blocking the movements and connections sustaining it. Thus, the blockade of Syntagma square, Placa del Sol, Tahrir Square or Gezi Park seemed to give birth to a new frame of time and space in politics. What is the possible shift in power relations between police forces and protesters if the public assembly in urban space turns into a collective experience of blockade? Is metropolitan blockade mobilizing space as a direct means for political action?

The various accounts and analyses given by activists belonged to the highlights of the event. In this volume, you will find the above questions and their theoretical implications explored in the text by Marios Emanuilidis as well

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as in the essay by Vassilis S. Tsianos and Margarita Tsomou on assembling bodies as a new politics beyond representation.

vogue and voodoo

What are the ceremonial dimensions of gathering? How do the trance-like states come about that are sometimes experienced when coming together as many? What do they do to you and me and friends and strangers? By what rituals are they produced and/or abused? What are the stimulants, the techniques of sampling and appropriation that lead to enhanced states of self-presentation or self-loss/transcendence? What are the links between representation and trance? Who is speaking in whose name and why?

A unique answer to the questions asked in this session was given by Orgy Punk's performance *Tear Gas Democracy* that is described in his text and depicted by Enrique Flores' respective drawing. Moreover, Martin Jörg Schäfer's article on the labor and leisure aspects of »performing the many« also addresses the modes of non-work prevalent in assemblies. In addition, the second part of this book includes two texts presented during the panel. Both Giulia Palladini (with respect to the manifold figurations of foreplay) and Martin Jörg Schäfer (with respect to the ceremonials of gathering) address notions of multiplicity and togetherness in considering the buzzwords ›vogue‹ and ›voodoo‹.

sound, systems and voices

How is public space, how is the assembly as a forum constructed by voices, sounds and soundsystems? How are temporary collectives produced acoustically? How are imaginations of political community linked to sound machines and rhetorical techniques? To ask about the sound of assemblies means asking how humans and technical devices are assembled to become hybrid public adress systems.

The sound of assembling has been a focus in the work of many in the network of *The Art of Being Many* and is fairly well represented in this volume. In their text on the »art of being uncanny« the collective LIGNA gives an account of their approach by linking critical radio theory to the theory of gathering. In the form of a dialogue, Sylvi Kretzschmar and Kathrin Wildner

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exchange their explorations of sound in religious assemblies, of public adress systems and urban space and link it with their experience of the September 2014 assembly. In addition, the script of a meditation exercise specifically devised for *The Art of Being Many* by Ernesto Estrella is included in this volume.

affects and documents

In recent years, the video image and other diverse forms of archives of political movements have become protagonists of assemblies in their own right. How do places and documents affect each other? What are the respective narratives and struggles? How are lines of memory entangled by travelling images? How are strategies of contemporary image production and distribution driven and rescripted by social movements? Are these affects and documents able to facilitate transnational catenations between collective practices?

Chis Zisis' and Gigi Argiropoulou's contributions in the second part of the book give a vivid account of the respective panel (as well as a detailed critique of the assembly altogether). In the third part of this book, Nanna Heidenreich's article on reactualiziation and activation in mobile cinema explores some of these questions further with respect to a current example. Apart from that, other contributions to this panel could not be translated into the medium of text and therefore have not been included this book. However, there is one very special contribution that did find its way: the drawings by Enrique Flores. Witnessing and partaking in the 15M-movement on Plaza del Sol in Madrid, Enrique Flores has dedicated his work to the depiction of the assemblies of the real democracy movement. Leaving his former work for big media networks, he has become one of the most important and most beloved chroniclers of real democracy. Due to their unique combination of respect and precision his drawings often seem to be the most reliable transmission of what happened, or what happened in-between. Thus, they build a precious pictorial archive of recent European history. We still feel very honored that Enrique followed our invitation to come to Hamburg and draw *The Art of Being Many*. Therefore, we decided to reproduce ten of the drawings he made in September 2014 as the only images included in this volume.

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real fictions

To assemble in new fashions often feels as if one is engaging in some kind of real fiction: just made up, but yet entirely real. The many themselves are a real fiction. What are possible elements of creating, sustaining, nurturing, and embodying this real fiction? How is it different from other real fictions? When do we consider ourselves ›to be many‹? What is the reality and what is the fiction in the relation between the many and the few? What other real fictions are created and can be created by the many? Can ›real fiction‹ even be understood as a strategy? Are real fictions embodied by the many ready to counteract other real fictions like austerity or oligarchic bureaucracy or the nationstate?

Various aspects of these questions are explored in texts by Ilias Marmaras, Brett Scott, Brigitta Kuster, and Elise von Bernstorff. Ilias Marmaras discusses the relation between the ›many‹ and ›the people‹ as conflicting real fictions in the Greek situation. Brett Scott's text provides information about hands-on-strategies of the many to counteract the financial system, i.e. the most powerful real fiction of our time. Elise von Bernstorff's text discusses constituent processes as real fictions and introduces the Charter for Europe, a document written by participants of real democracy movements from all over the continent. Her text serves as an introduction to the current state of the charter, which is reproduced in full.

On a more general level, questions around the many as a real fiction and assemblies as performances have been crucial for geheimagentur's own approach to *The Art of Being Many*. They are explored in greater detail in the opening text by Sibylle Peters: »Calling Assemblies«.

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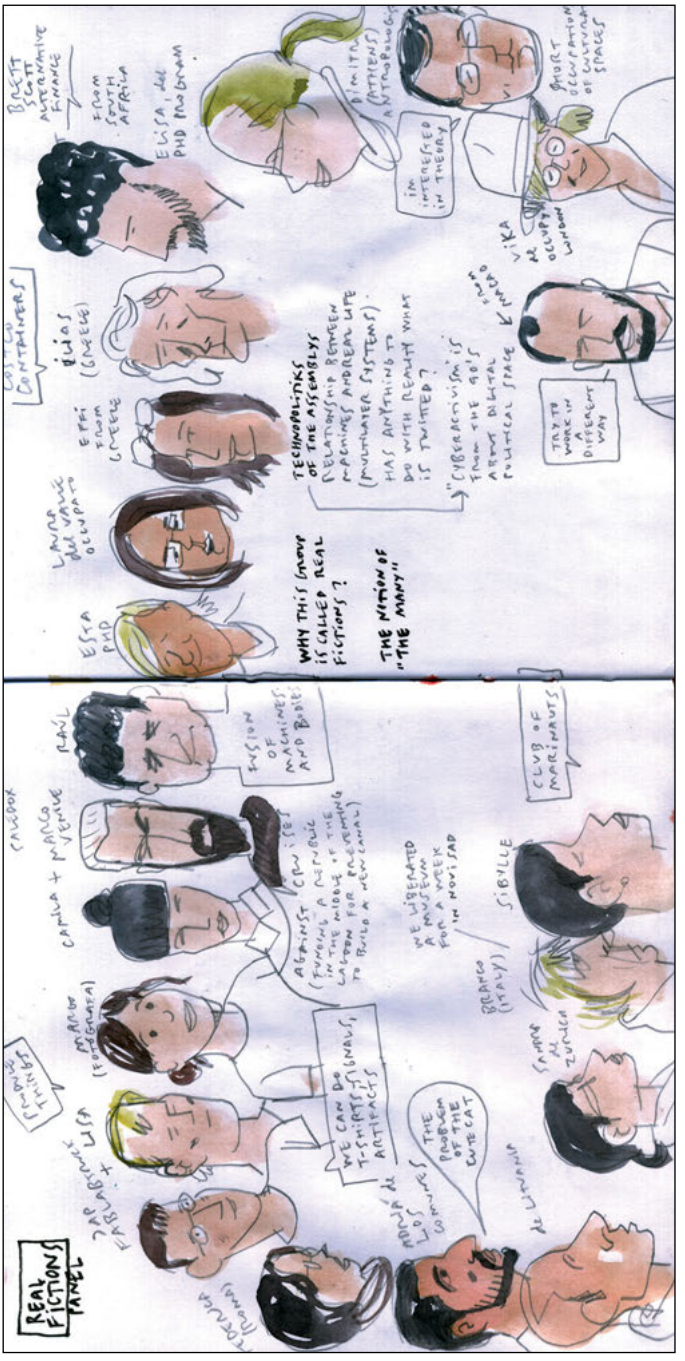

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Theories of the Assembly

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Calling Assemblies

The Many as a Real Fiction

SIBYLLE PETERS

The so called financial crisis that is ongoing since 2008 brought one question to the forefront of political struggle: What is the relation between the many and the few? This question is not only raised each time the crisis proves to foster the concentration of capital in the hands of the fewer and fewer, it is also raised when given instruments of representative democracy, given procedures of political representation, which were designed to make the few stand, speak and decide for the many, prove to be dysfunctional once more. On a different scale, the scale of our own agency as cultural workers in art and activism, the relation between the few and the many is at stake with regard to how we organize resistance and alternatives. How is the relation between the few and the many articulated in our own work?

In the following I would like to discuss this question with regard to a new art of assembling that has been developed in performance art/live art during the last two decades and, more specifically, in regard to the gathering *The Art of Being Many*. To begin with, I will focus on one particular strategy that geheimagentur, who acted as a host to the gathering, has been using since 2003: the strategy of ›real fictions‹ and its relation to what I would like to call ›improbable assemblies‹.

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IMPROBABLE ASSEMBLIES IN PERFORMANCE ART/LIVE ART

Since 2003, most of geheimagentur's projects have tried to open up passages from an economy of shortage to an economy of gift and abundance. Many of these projects were situated between reality and fiction and used the tension between the two as a space for experimentation. They employed an as-if-it-were-real-approach to interventions into the everyday by trying to make a desirable, seemingly fictional, association as real as possible.

The first real fiction geheimagentur produced was the *Bank of Burning Money*, which opened its counter at the bottom of the towers of Deutsche Bank in Frankfurt in 2004. Eight years later, one of the most *real* real fictions was the *Schwarzbank* Oberhausen, the *Black Bank* of Oberhausen, a bank that issued its own currency and consisted of a network of shop owners, cultural workers and other citizens of the bankrupt city of Oberhausen.

Sooner or later, most of these real fiction projects took the shape of assemblies, assemblies of the network of alternative bankers coming together in the theatre of Oberhausen, but also more improbable ones such as, for example, assemblies of those who give each other alibis to cope with neoliberal working conditions, assemblies of tricksters or assemblies of real and wannabe pirates.

Geheimagentur has not been the only art collective that experimented with improbable assemblies in the past two decades. On the contrary, I would like to argue that the mode of the ›as if‹ allowed for the development of a whole new art of assembling, an art that at the same time changed and rearticulated the relations between the few and the many in performance and live art (cf. Peters 2013).

One important aspect of this experimentation has been the address, in other words: Who is called to assemble? I first witnessed an experiment with the address when I took part in the *Conference of Fare Dodgers* by the collective Hygiene Heute in 2002 (Kampnagel Hamburg). Invited and addressed were fare dodgers of all kinds, but at the same time usual audience members, who were addressed ›as if‹ they were fare dodgers and therefore were free to decide for themselves if they actually identified with how they were being addressed.

In cases like this it becomes evident that the address resembles a performative paradox or maybe the paradox of performativity itself. Michael

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Warner described it in his book *Publics and Counterpublics*: To address a specific public is to presuppose its existence, though it is actually only produced by the address itself, which potentially calls it into being (Warner 2005). In regard to this paradox, working on a real fiction is similar to calling an improbable assembly: It means postulating the existence of an organization, an institution or a network, whose existence is desirable, yet improbable. It means acting *as if* the respective group actually existed, and thereby calling it into being. This may sound simple but it is not. It is magic, and like all magic, it sometimes works and sometimes does not.[1]

In other words, nobody knows beforehand how real a real fiction is going to be, because in order for it to become real, wishful associations and improbable assemblies have to be collective endeavors, happenings which involve friends and strangers.

This is why a real fiction is not about the few performing *for* the many. It is about a few people who start to act *as if they were many*, to act *as if* the entities and practices, the wishes and necessities in question already existed, and thereby they might turn out to *be* many later on. To allow for different degrees of realness to develop, the ›as if‹ has to be a strictly performative one, a gesture of presupposing something which is thereby possibly transformed into collective action. The performative ›as if‹ generates a space for playful experimentation, because even if a real fiction remains fiction and does not become very real, and even if something happens that is very different from what was expected, it can still be an interesting piece of art, a

1 For example, when geheimagentur made the series *Molotov's Magical Lantern* in 2010 at Deutsches Theater Berlin, the *Circle for the Socialization of Magic* was meant to be called into being. Night after night a suitcase with a considerable amount of cash was put on stage and performers made it clear that everyone was able to claim it and take it away if he or she would only be willing to act as a member of that circle. Nobody did. Then again, when geheimagentur opened a *Casino of Tricks* and an *Academy of Tricksters* postulating that to survive neoliberal capitalism we all have to become tricksters, indeed a huge amount of people turned up and confessed to be tricksters, happy to talk to each other, collect and exchange knowledge as tricksters. Of course, in most projects the result is somehow mixed – some features of a real fiction stay fiction, others become surprisingly real, and others again are completely different from what was expected.

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good performance. One could call this ›the gift of cultural production‹. Obviously, this gift is twofold and can be critiqued in terms of commodification. Nevertheless, it creates an experimental space in which we are able to go for the improbable in the first place and to face results just the way they turn out to be.

The ›as if‹ enables the few who start to act as if they were many to imagine the spatial, temporal and dramaturgical shape an assembly might need to take and to set up gatherings accordingly. Beyond the address, other important aspects of this performative shaping of improbable assemblies are the mode of theatricality that is underlying an improbable assembly, the setup of the assembly in terms of material space and media tools, and the modes of participation that are encouraged. All of these aspects were crucial for hosting *The Art of Being Many*, so I would like to describe briefly what is meant by them: Though ›theatricality‹ might be a controversial term at first sight, in this context it just refers to the fact that there are many formats and practices of assembling, which are historically and socially established, such as, for example, church services, sports matches, assemblies in court, in the ballroom, school assemblies, party conventions, stockholders meetings, and so on. Now, all of these formats come with their very own theatricality, i.e. with protocols of elements, proceedings and conducts to be performed. In recent years, many performance art/live art projects focused on these given formats of assemblies and used the performative ›as if‹ to explore each and every one of them for experiments in the art of assembling: examples include Rimini Protokoll, who simulated a world climate conference in the Deutsches Schauspielhaus in Hamburg in 2014, or SheShePop, who famously devised a ballroom night (*Warum tanzt Ihr nicht?* 2004), or Reverend Billy, whose New-York-based *Church of Stop Shopping* is one of the most well-known endeavors between art and activism in recent decades. What makes it rewarding to work with existing forms of assemblies is not only that the theatricality of society itself is uncovered, but that, instead of being an audience watching the few performing for the many, people can take part, experiment and interact as participants of an assembly. By shifting formats of assemblies from their given place in society it can be experienced that new forms of assembling emerge through hybridizing given practices of assembling. This does not only happen in the context of art, but also in the square occupations, where traditional practices like drawing a lot to determine a speaker, or assembling people for dinner, or square dancing (while wearing

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gas masks on Syntagma Square) were merged to collectively create new kinds of assemblies. To some extent geheimagentur assumed this technique in hosting *The Art of Being Many*, which in itself was a hybrid of many other formats of assembling – conference, manifestation, general assembly, theatre performance, party and so on.

Moreover, recent performative research has shown that assemblies are shaped not least by their use of material space and media, and that therefore different forms of assembling can emerge when spatial and media conditions are changed. Important work on this aspect has, for example, been done by the collective LIGNA, who introduced the use of radio and headphones to assembling in public and thereby invented a completely new format that allows a gathering to extend far beyond the copresence of conventional assemblies (see LIGNA's essay in this volume). Similar techniques have been used by Mobile Akademie/Hannah Hurtzig for the conference *Die Untoten/The Undead*, creating an uncanny mixture of copresence and coabsence that suited the topic of the gathering perfectly. These experiments lead geheimagentur to make use of headphones and three simultaneous audio channels as media for *The Art of Being Many*. In this context the scenography of an assembly hall can be understood as the basic medium for an assembly: Most assembly halls suggest a specific relation between active and recipient participants and organize attention towards a single center or the front. The assembly hall built for *The Art of Being Many* differed widely from this established model by allowing for several different focal points and directions.

It goes without saying that the aspect of participation is crucial for every assembly. But while in most given forms of assemblies the question of how to participate is always already answered, the hosting of an improbable assembly requires a radical rethinking of the aspect of participation. This starts with the question of what is at stake in an assembly: what kinds of desires and interests are present?

Though all the assemblies geheimagentur called over the years differed a lot from what usually happens on theatre stages, they, of course, still depended on the economies of cultural production. Therefore, these economies have often been a starting point: Many of the assemblies were called to make collective decisions about how to use the means of production in a current project. Of course, not only money, but also cultural economies of attention and credit have to be taken into account when it comes to cultural production. And this is particularly problematic when it comes to projects that are made

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possible by collective efforts, by a public consisting of friends and strangers. Because if in the end these collective efforts of the many are assigned to the few artists who are signing the work, this is quite plainly a capitalist accumulation of symbolic capital. To avoid this, geheimagentur was founded in 2003 as a free, anonymous label, a multiple name that can be used by anyone who has participated twice and is willing to stay anonymous when using the group's name. In other words: geheimagentur as a label (translated: ›secret agency‹) was invented to hide relations between the few and the many from the machines of cultural accumulation. To keep it that way was, and still is, a lot of work. Members of geheimagentur have often been treated like fools when they refused to send in personal CVs to appear in programs or to identify the ›head artist‹ of the collective for the press. No wonder it was very special for members of geheimagentur to witness how this very gesture of refusal became so important to real democracy movements all around the world. It felt as if radical activist self-defense, the critique of cultural and political representation merged and produced something beautiful: the movement of the willingly-not-represented, the unrepresentable many. If geheimagentur has ever been part of a movement, it was this one.

As a concept, ›the many‹ has been used in leftist writing as an equivalent for what has been called ›the multitude‹ in post-operaist thinking (Hardt/Negri 2004). In this context, ›the many‹ have replaced a more established and coherent concept of the political subject. As such, the many rise up against the ongoing concentration of power and capital in the hands of the fewer and fewer. At the same time, the many are what emerged after the bubble of individualism crashed: The many failed to be autonomous subjects and then stopped feeling guilty about that. The many are those who finally realized that, as individuals, we are precarious, fragile, and totally incapable of living, whereas, on the other hand, as many we are totally capable of producing a common life together. And finally and most importantly, the many are those who are not reducible to the few, which is why they organize horizontally, not vertically. However, to know all this *about the many* is something else than to act *as* many, or to act *as if* we were many. So, what was at stake at *The Art of Being Many*, if not the *many* themselves?

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TO ACT AS IF WE WERE MANY

Whereas the reality of real democracy movements stays, of course, unquestioned, *The Art of Being Many* was still a real fiction project, as it presupposed the existence of a trans-European crowd who felt addressed by the words »Dear Many«. The Many – are they we, you, them? How do we relate to us, them, you – as many? What is implied in this notion of ›the many‹, and what kinds of agency unfold as soon as these implications are transformed into action?

Geheimagentur started to use this phrase in gatherings like the *Agora 99* in Rome (2013) and conferences like *The Abduction of Europe* in Madrid (2014), in assemblies of *Embros Theatre* Athens and in preparatory meetings in Hamburg with about two dozen participants from Germany, Greece and Spain. This was initially related to the excitement of calling for peers: the many as peers who had witnessed and engaged in moments of assembling that made the word ›democracy‹ sound important again, peers who refer to this shared experience as a starting point for a new *art of being many*. And this art as such seemed to start with the many organizing themselves as the many. Therefore, early on in the project, means of production were distributed, decision-making was decentralized and self-organization was installed wherever possible: About a year before the assembly took place, seven working groups were founded to each autonomously plan one part of the assembly, including the question of who should be invited and how to use the limited amount of money for fees. To allow people from abroad to take part in this process, a web platform for exchange among the many was installed.

Interestingly, and rather typically for structures labelled as ›self-organization‹, a certain relation between the few and the many took shape in what followed. It can best be described with the formula ›doers decide‹ that is quite essential to what is called ›activism‹. ›Doers decide‹ has its beauty because it counteracts a lot of the established power relations in an unpredictable way: Who happens to become part of a specific ›doers decide‹ constellation is often very different from who was meant to do it, may it be in terms of institutional authority or in terms of experience. The few who end up deciding will often be an incomprehensible gang like – and this is just a random list – a student of urban design, a transgender punk performer from Mexico City, a woman engineer employed at the theatre that hosts the event, an honorary

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member of the black block, an intellectual from Athens, a local witch, a digital nerd and a professor of theatre studies. But whoever it happens to be, the few are usually not happy at all to be few in moments of decision-making. Instead, they send messages to peers calling for help, expertise, opinion, time and attention. But often these messages remain unanswered. There is no way to argue that the few who end up deciding in a self-organization-regime of the ›doers decide‹-pattern are in any way specifically legitimized, authorized or capable to do what they do. This is why none of them would usually want to claim a leading role, would like to be seen as deciding *for* the many. On the contrary, the decisions are essentially based on the assumption that they are taken *as if* the few *were* many. Before this background it becomes difficult to make individuals accountable. Whether that is a downside has yet to be discussed. Yet another downside is much more obvious: If doers decide, they necessarily quiet the voices of the ›non-doers‹, the exhausted, and the otherwise engaged. In this sense activism stays true to its name and is regularly firing back on those who end up deciding.

An alternative to this trap seemed to be to put as much energy as possible into a setup that would enable the many to decide once they would finally arrive on the scene. It goes without saying that distributing decisions and preparing for choices to be made by the participants instead of determining a certain program was done to undermine the representational structures usually in place in conferences and theatre festivals long before participants arrive. Thus, this became geheimagentur's main strategy in the preparatory process for *The Art of Being Many*. For example, with regard to the material and media setup of the assembly: As the ›how to‹ of assembling itself was at stake, this just could not be decided beforehand. Instead, the ›doers‹ prepared a heterogeneous structure and environment that allowed for a variety of very different conventional as well as experimental approaches to assembling. The architecture and equipment of the assembly hall did not suggest a specific direction, a specific organization of audience and speakers, but allowed for many different ones. Installations, lights, public address and media systems – they all were designed and installed to allow for a multitude of choices to be made on the spot. And not only the participants in producing *The Art of Being Many* in the different working groups were meant to make choices, but all the participants including those who only attended the two public days. To achieve that, the assembly hall supported very different forms of participating – from being fully engaged to just being physically present

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while listening to music over the headphones or going in and out of the sauna covered in blankets.

Of course, geheimagentur was aware of the fact that this was likely to create a multi-layered, always slightly diffuse situation, as opposed to a concentrated focus on one thing happening, one person speaking, one event to be witnessed. This was willingly accepted, and might very well have been the one choice geheimagentur did not share with or delegate to the many. It shall therefore be explained in the following: To opt for a diffuse situation, instead of a clarified and unified one, has its background in a political culture shared by several art-and-activism-groups from Hamburg and Berlin involved in *The Art of Being Many*. I would like to describe this political culture starting from a Facebook post by Margarita Tsomou, commenting on the atmosphere at the OXI-assembly in Athens in July 2015. As a prelude to her enthusiastic description of that assembly, she wrote:

> Especially for Germans it is difficult to imagine a progressive, popular crowd, which is moving beyond fascist culture and beyond leftist rituals. I'm sorry for all those who can only understand the following descriptions as romanticisms.

Though ›Germans‹ (in as far as they exist) certainly do not generally have a problem with crowds of whatever kind, what Margarita states here is probably true for people from the radical left who have participated in the so called anti-German-discourse. This discourse was strong in Hamburg, Frankfurt, Berlin and other places in the 1990s, when many activists had to fight to stay true to the historical legacy of the Shoa, while being confronted with the rise of a newly united, highly self-celebratory German nation. And, yes, as a participant of this discourse, I personally cannot deny that whenever I find myself in a crowd that celebrates itself and unifies in the act of identifying a common enemy (regardless of the kind of enemy), or as part of an assembly that is meant to be an authentic and natural political communion beyond all technical and rhetorical agency, I start to feel intensely sick. However, I would like to insist that this mindset is nothing to feel sorry for, instead it is an intrinsic, legitimate and necessary part of a post-20th-century-political approach and, more importantly, it is motivating the use of the notion of ›the many‹ – the many *being many* instead of ›one‹. In practical terms: The way geheimagentur organized the process and set up the assembly hall was heavily informed by a concept of the many as an intrinsically not unified and non-

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unifiable, not homogeneous crowd. Geheimagentur acted as if the many were a crowd that was strong exactly because it allowed for diversion, even dispersion, due to its resistance against being reduced to the one – the one focus, the one belief, the one community, the one external enemy to fight.

THE LEGITIMACY VACUUM AND OTHER OUTCOMES

However, in the actual gathering the concept of the non-unifiable many came alive in a very different, much more conflict-driven way than expected.

Regarding the material and media setup: By the means that had been provided to enable choice, diversion and dispersion – above all by the headphone-system – many of the many felt cut off from an immediacy that for them seemed to be essential to a ›true assembly‹.

Regarding the theatricality of assemblies: Not only from the immediate feedback, but also from critical reviews which were circulated after the gathering through the mailing list of participants, I learned that the wide and rather inclusive understanding of assemblies, which underlies the performative art of assembling, differs significantly from the emphatic and sometimes rigid understanding many of the participants had of ›the assembly‹ as the format of ›true democracy‹.

Regarding participation: Unfortunately, it proved to be difficult to talk about or experiment with this difference in perception and strategy, as, when confronted with the demand to decide about the spatial, temporal, visual and auditive shape of the assembly, many of the participants didn't feel liberated and empowered at all. On the contrary – and in contrast to what was intended and predicted – they felt forced to participate in the production of a spectacle. Thus, during the assembly, it became a major task to acknowledge this different view concerning the modes of production that were at stake in *The Art of Being Many*. These modes of production, of course, differ a lot from those of other cultural workers in art and activism, who face conditions of severe austerity and therefore might have perceived the sheer amount of technical equipment and institutional support as symptoms of a different economy, as a mode of production that belonged to the winning side in the battles of austerity.

So, instead of working together on one very diverse assembly of the many, what happened during the four days of *The Art of Being Many* was

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that a lot of very different assemblies were called and held. Thus, the subtitle of the gathering – ›an assembly of assemblies‹ –proved correct in a surprising way. Instead of working on one assembly as a forum to share experiences from many other assemblies, the assembly itself seemed to split into many other assemblies. Each of the seven working groups found a very different way to use and at the same time counteract what was perceived as the prearranged setup, and thus each session of the two-day-long public assembly was yet another specific assembly in itself. Furthermore, beyond the given structure of working groups and sessions many other assemblies of different kinds were held. One of them was the assembly of those who wanted to play table tennis instead of attending the official assembly, another one was like a committee of critique that proved to be telling with regard to the first aspect discussed in this text, the address.

This committee of critique took place on the evening of the second day, the night before the public part of the assembly started. In this assembly I was personally charged with the infringement of illegitimately calling an assembly of the many and of trying to stage a fake assembly. I felt that the verdict was not spoken until the next day, when a Greek activist at the end of the first plenary session finally said that »It didn't look like it, but it is a real assembly«. Nevertheless, the committee of critique left a staying impression: It was as if the many were calling a bluff. And, of course, we were, I was, guilty of bluffing. For what legitimizes anyone to call the assembly of the many? Can there be a proper answer to that, or is there not necessarily a vacuum at this point?

Antonio Negri und Raul Sanchez-Cedillo have referred to this problem in their recent publication *Towards a Constituent Process in Europe* (Negri/Sanchez-Cedillo 2015). In their introduction to the volume Isabell Lorey and Gerald Raunig point out:

> The problematic aspect of constituent power as a constituent assembly is the decision how the assembly itself comes about, mainly with regard to the question of the assembly's legitimation. Who is calling the assembly and who is called to assemble? How can the inclusion of the excluded take place as a process of social exchange, despite all asymmetries, and how can it – as a radical inclusion – encompass a potentially infinite multitude? (Lorey/Raunig 2015: 26)[2]

2 Translation by the author.

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This made me think of how the initial moment of Occupy New York has been described as a media prank: Apparently, it was impossible to make anyone accountable for calling the first assembly (Graeber 2014: 19-23), and at the same time the situation was so diffuse that it produced innumerable accounts: Everyone could have been behind it.

This was a highly privileged situation, as it prevented that a certain, and therefore necessarily wrong, relation between the few and the many was already articulated in the act of calling the assembly. The constituent process that starts with the assembly of the many presupposes itself (see Elise von Bernstorff's introduction to *The Charter of Europe* in this volume). Calling an assembly of the many is often equivalent to this failure of self-presupposition. As simply identifying the few who have called it and asking them to legitimize their action can already lead to failure, as there is no way of legitimizing calling an assembly of the many when individual, or, more precisely, biopolitical, identification is complete. This is the essential reason why it is illegal to hold a public assembly unless there is one person officially signing responsible for it.

So, by calling the bluff and exposing the legitimacy vacuum the committee of critique indeed threatened to turn the whole assembly of the many into a fake. What came along as critical questioning was in fact a performative speech act. The many called a bluff which geheimagentur wanted to pull off together with them, as if we were many, with everyone knowing all the cards. In this sense, the real-fiction-strategy, the performative as-if, was a suggestion how to respond to the legitimacy vacuum, how to turn the regress of legitimization into a process of performative research.

Instead, by calling the bluff and therefore by splitting the many into the few who called and the many who had illegitimately been called, the committee demanded ›transparency‹ and attacked the anonymous ›we‹ of geheimagentur that had been the group's initiation to the movement of the unrepresented many in the first place.

Under this unexpected attack it collapsed for the first time in twelve years. And that is when the many became ›them‹, became those who were sitting in front of me, in front of us, the few who had to defend themselves in what in that moment felt like a strange hybrid version of a communist party tribunal. Nevertheless, the many as ›them‹ were peers, peers who were finally there, seriously present, in an admittedly very immediate, very true,

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and at the same time kind of cruel form of an assembly, discussing what really was at stake here.

IN RETROSPECT

In the light of the Greek summer of 2015 I started to suspect that what had happened in this incident was something else, was not about us, was not a mistake and not even a misunderstanding, but a splitting of the many that is still going on. A splitting that rearranges the unrepresentable many of 2011 along the lines of renewed but conventional economical, national and representational boundaries, within a Europe divided into rich and poor nation-states.

However, what *The Art of Being Many* wanted was to acknowledge the constituent moment of the many that we had witnessed in the first part of this decade. It wanted to help with instituting it as a legacy that we, the many who had witnessed it, will treat as a continuous source of inspiration and that we will not forget. To be true to this legacy – in the current political situation – will not be easy. On the contrary. In my opinion, living up to it implies a leap of faith in the many, understood as a faith in each other. In the many as us, who are still there, still working in, with and against institutions, may it be theatres, universities or political parties. And we will continue to be many as long as we defy the temptation of organizing along the questions of who is to blame, who stands for whom and who owes us what.

We will go on trying to resist these questions, since what we learned from the movements of 2011 is still valid: Modern representative democracy has a basic ubiquitous flaw. It relies on reducing the many to the few. Therefore, it produces a very specific form of the many, one that is controlled by biopolitical regimes in the form of statistical data. This form of the many is produced for no other reason than to easily reduce it to the few. This reduction is organized and legitimized by seemingly rational procedures of counting, dividing, collecting, distributing and, therefore, of representing. But now we understood and will not forget that the many are actually not equal to the statistical figures of biopolitics, that they are not identifiable as counted members of parties or nations. The given procedures for producing and then reducing the many to the few have turned out to be invalid, as they notoriously fall short of the potential, the richness, and the essential horizontality

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of the many. Therefore, the question still remains to be answered: How to not reduce the many to the few?

And again: From my limited experience I would like to start by admitting that most of the time we are not many. We are actually few. Even in those moments when we seem to be many, as, for example, in the Occupy Movement, ›we‹ have never been the 99 percent. Compared to this claim we have always been few. But we acted *as if we were many*.

And in doing so we found that the relations between the few and the many can actually be quite different then they are in traditional politics; they can be reversed, in fact: to be a few who act *as if they were many* is not the same as being a few who speak for the many, who embody the many in leading figures, or who supposedly represent the interests of the many. Instead, to act *as if we were many* performs an awareness of the many, who are actually there with us, though many of them, unfortunately, couldn't make it here. It is a way to act that bears witness to the abundance of people, beings, things, and ghosts who are always already present in our action, enabling it, framing it and carrying it on.

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The Labour and Leisure of Performing the Many

MARTIN JÖRG SCHÄFER

Although the so-called real democracy movements of the early 2010s may not have been as successful and influential as many people have wished for, the various movements, networks, and events have managed to highlight the term ›democracy‹ again in academic and not so academic discussions. The claim can be made that they have questioned the very meaning of the term by trying to put something like a ›real‹ democracy into practice in the social spaces they squatted, occupied, and transformed: as a quasi-reenactment (cf. Lütticken 2005; Roselt 2012) of the coming together on the *agora* in ancient Greece. In this understanding, the real democracy movements have tried to make democracy work in new fashions – albeit just for a short while and by raising questions instead of looking for answers. Then again, one might retort that the nametag ›real democracy‹ has only been attached to an old hobby-horse of the radical left, bottom up self-organization, and that trying to practice ›real democracy‹ inside global capitalism is an invalid (or at least highly ineffective) form of criticism.

The following considerations[1] will not take up these discussions. Rather, they will examine the discursive effects produced by the equation of democ-

1 This text is based on a paper first presented at a June 2014 workshop entitled *The Labor and Leisure of Performance*, organized by Giulia Palladini at Erfurt University. Another version of it was presented at the May 2015 *Art and Reproduction*-workshop organized by Dorothea Walzer and Jenny Nachtigall at Humboldt

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racy with gathering on the *agora*: the disruption of prevalent political metaphors, Hannah Arendt's theory as a prominent but problematic example of the assumptions under debate, and finally the ways the 2014 congress *The Art of Being Many* in Hamburg took up and negotiated these questions.

Equating democracy with the practice of assembling shifts two sets of metaphors traditionally associated with politics: that of labor and that of theater. The work and labor of democracy now has to be undertaken by each and everybody – not only by those this work is delegated to so that everybody else can carry on with their work-lives, i.e. wage labor. One of the catchphrases of the real democracy movements pinpoints their allegedly anti-representational character: ›direct‹ instead of ›representational‹ democracy. A delegation of power is not supposed to take place; those who delegate cannot just watch and listen to those who speak and act for ›us‹. In the 18th and 19th century, the bourgeois theater with its picture stage (*Guckkastenbühne*) came to stand in as a metaphor for a public seeing and feeling itself represented by the fiction displayed on the stage (cf. Habermas 1989: 51-56). The critique of the leisurely gaze of an audience passively taking in what is presented to it on stage has long been a starting point for political theory from Rousseau to Rancière and beyond (cf. Rousseau 1968; Rancière 2010). It has also been at the heart of theatrical practices that aim at transforming the traditional performance/audience-relationship (in the vein of, on the one hand, Brecht, or, on the other hand, Artaud (cf. Bishop 2012; van Eikels 2013: 104-146)). Usually the goal is to activate the audience, i.e. to pull them out of some poisonous stupor dreaded as the death of any political life from Plato to *The Matrix*. The rhetoric of the real democracy movements falls pretty much in line here. Would the dawn of a democracy as we have not yet come to know it mean the end of a certain kind of theatrical leisure, then? That is: the end at least of what movement and theater activists alike have long denounced as some sort of political laziness?

On the one hand, these questions gain new weight in the age of structural mass-unemployment and a still prevalent 1990s rhetoric of self-entrepreneurship (i.e. self-exploitation (cf. Bröckling 2007)) in ›the system‹ as well as in political activism. Would not a more active political or theatrical participation just become appropriated by the system in no time at all? On the other

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University. A shorter version of this text has appeared in *The Art of Being Many*: A Reader for an Assembly of Assemblies (Schäfer 2014).

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hand, there is a certain arbitrary character to any attribution of ›labor‹, ›work‹, or ›leisure‹ to a given action. My labor may be your leisure depending on personal tastes, cultural codes and potential wages involved (cf. Galbraith 2004: 17).

The theory most constantly referred to when talking about what happened on the squares is the one developed in Hannah Arendt's *The Human Condition* (1958). The book was reworked and published as *Vita activa* in German in 1967: Arendt places democracy most firmly on the side of leisure. While in the ancient Greek polis women and slaves keep busy with the labors of daily life the ›free men‹ leisurely gather on the *agora* to stage the play of democracy. But the evocation of Arendt does not seem wholly unproblematic when conflating gathering and democracy, to say the least. In *The Human Condition*, Arendt outlines a brief theory of Attic democracy: The male slave holder minority does indeed gather on the public square to discuss and decide upon matters of public life, often on matters of peace and war. Provocatively and a little tongue-in-cheek, Arendt puts aside the justice and gender aspects of this gathering. Rather, male chauvinism is of the essence here. In her version of the by now well-rehearsed story of ›the fall of public man‹ (cf. Sennett 1992), Arendt laments the retreat into the private sphere in Western history. In her mind, politics and democracy need a public sphere. Individuals need to expose themselves to one another on the marketplace: not as today's staging of one's inner life but as a way of caring for the common good (cf. Arendt 1998: 50-58). Conveniently, exposing oneself in ancient Athens means having the chance of gaining fame and honor. The male slave holders take part in public life because it gives them the chance to become remembered by their peers in myth, poetry and drama, for example for their battlefield heroics (cf. Arendt 1998: 175-188). Presenting oneself in one's singularity on the agora means vying for modes of remembrance through oral mimesis, reproduction, repetition. Arendt stresses the »frailty« (Arendt 1998: 188) of this mode of potential recording and reproduction. More stable means of reproduction (e.g. archives containing written law and documentation of precedents) seem to obstruct the respective singularity of the staging of democracy. Fragility and fleetingness seem of the essence here. There's no reenactment required, and none at all called for.

This is the point in Arendt's argument where leisure comes in – and the place of leisure in this line of thought is probably aligned to the non-reproducibility of democracy: Modes of non-work and non-labor are hardly ever

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mentioned in Arendt's *The Human Condition*. But, as critics such as Paul Ricœur and Dirk Baecker have pointed out, non-work is the implicit focal point from which Arendt describes different ways of human activity throughout the book (cf. Ricœur 2006: 42; cf. Baecker 2002: 227-228). Aristotle's famous line from his *Politics* that leisure is the basis for the good life, happiness and knowledge (cf. Aristotle 1944: 1337c) is never quoted but it constantly lingers in the background: To Arendt, publicity, politics, and democracy are linked to the human activity of »action« (cf. Arendt 1998: 175-247). Such action can be neatly distinguished from labor and work. Labor upholds the cycle of life. It consists of the daily reproductive work assigned to the hands of women and slaves in the shadows of the private (cf. Arendt 1998: 68-73). Work builds permanent structures sheltering from the inconsistencies and violent tendencies of nature: houses, the marketplace (cf. Arendt 1998: 136-174). Inside the stable sphere opened up by works, action (i.e. politics) can take place. Therefore, all the male battlefield heroics are a matter of leisure: To Arendt, they are uncontaminated by labor and work. Arendt considers the exclusion of work and labor from politics the great achievement of ancient democracy. (With a bit of a twinkle in her eye, though: She doesn't see a desirable model for the present here.) So, when it comes to the direct democracy of the assembly, Arendt does not dwell so much on decision-making processes. Rather, she describes a leisurely theater of democracy: The ancient *agora*/market-square turns into a giant performance space where every man is at once performer and part of the audience. Democracy as an assembly starts with the mutual appearance to one another. The theatrical metaphors are especially prominent in some additions made to the German 1967 version of *The Human Condition*:

> Der politische Bereich im Sinne der Griechen gleicht einer solchen immerwährenden Bühne, auf der es gewissermaßen immer nur ein Auftreten, aber kein Abtreten gibt, und dieser Bereich entsteht direkt aus einem Miteinander. (Arendt 2003: 249).

In my translation:

> The political realm in the sense of the Greek resembles such a perpetual stage on which there are, in a certain sense, only entrances but no exits. And this sphere emerges directly from being together. (cf. Arendt 1998: 197 for the original English without this passage).

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According to the metaphor of democracy as »a perpetual stage on which there are only entrances but no exits«, democracy is conceived as a theater of leisure. Labor and work have no room in Arendt's democracy. And this is not the least of the reasons she considers the labor and jobholder societies that emerge in the 19th century doomed, or at least inherently non-political: as something that should remain backstage upholding the scaffolding but is instead dragged into the glaring light of the performance space (cf. Arendt 1998: 126-135). In passages, which are as fascinating as troublesome, Arendt imagines an originary democracy without predetermined procedures, rule-books and basic laws (i.e. without means and media of reproduction), but nevertheless able to make decisions in the name of the common good and never tipping into injustice and violence (cf. Arendt 1998: 192-207). Possible objections as to the sustainability of such a democracy are brushed aside with a nod to the »hardly […] surprising swift decline« (Arendt 1998: 197) of the ancient democracies: They vanished because they could not and would not make an effort to reproduce themselves.

Arendt's notion of democracy has not only been heavily criticized as ›naïve‹ (cf. Habermas 1977; cf. Butler/Spivak 2007). It has also been praised for prefiguring performative and contention-oriented concepts of politics (cf. Butler/Spivak 2007). But what is of interest here is her notion of democracy as an anarchic theater of leisure: a mid-Grotowsky-style performance where everybody is a performer and where the work/labor-dimension of the very word ›performance‹ (as in ›measurable result‹) is conspicuously absent: Democracy equals the gathering as many which equals the leisure of mutually performing in front of one another. But leisure does not mean ›without result‹, though. On the contrary, Arendt describes political action as highly effective in her 1963 book *On Revolution*: She retraces or re-imagines the self-organization of local councils from the American Revolution via the Russian ones up to contemporary uprisings in Eastern Europe. Arendt gives emphasis to the »spontaneity« (Arendt 1963: 266) of a democratic self-organization only determined by »the elementary conditions of action itself« (Arendt 1963: 271). While to Arendt, such spontaneous self-organization can be observed everywhere where people come together in political action, it is later oppressed by professional revolutionaries, political parties and administrative apparatus (cf. Arendt 1963: 265-279). To Arendt, a participatory democracy of the many is able to function inside of practical economic constraints

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as well. But in *On Revolution*, Arendt does not elaborate on what has happened to the labor and work aspects of everyday life when the activists are not ›free‹ male slaveholders in the first place. Nor, for that matter, on what happens to the theater aspects of democracy.

As far as the theater of politics and its labor and leisure dimension are concerned, Arendt's theory does not quite do justice to the events on the various squares in the early 2010s. At *The Art of Being Many*, different approaches to both were put to the test. First of all, Arendt's implicit and explicit attributions of labor and leisure seem quite arbitrary to begin with: The self-presentation on the public square, the constant jostling for attention and influence, the efforts invested into fame and honor etc. come across as quite laborious tasks, even when coded as leisure in antiquity. From an Arendtian perspective, the Syntagma Square or Occupy Wall Street assemblies would not make the cut as performances of democracies. The spontaneous self-organization in the Arendtian register consisted not in the least part of an organization of the chores that kept the camp afloat: Who's to provide food and how? Who's to cook? How to camp on the square? Where to wash? What about lavatories? On the squares, the labor of keeping up the cycle of life and the work of providing relatively stable structures did not take place on the outside of a leisurely performed democracy but proved to be its very centre (cf. Mörtenböck/Mooshammer 2013: 49-66).

The Hamburg event did not go as far as to reenact decision-making processes on this fundamental a level. But there was a sleeping camp next to the assembly hall and basic food was produced onsite, partly in the assembly hall: Show Case Beat Le Mot, in their own words ›Germany's oldest male performance collective‹, cooked vegan food (thus undermining the Arendtian gender stereotype). As one member of the preparation team put it: »Whenever I take part in a large gathering where I don't know anybody I join the kitchen crew. That's the perfect way to bond; that's the perfect way to get into the swing of things.« In this description, communal cooking provides a common space and a relation to one another where there was none before. It is the basis for negotiating everything else; Arendt's leisure of democracy might start as kitchen work after all.

Secondly, Arendt pits leisure against leisure: the good performance leisure of democratic action against the bad leisure of the passively gazing theater spectator. As if such a gaze was altogether leisurely in the first place. Sitting through a boring play can be laborious toil, and so can be acting in

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one. One does not even have to think of endurance performance pieces as popularized Marina Abramovic. Everybody who takes part in assemblies on a regular basis (academics going to university meetings included) knows that gathering shares similarities with endurance performance pieces. They just go on and on. Often, one has to sit through them until the very end. This aspect was very faithfully reproduced in *The Art of Being Many*: The two-day-congress went on for twelve consecutive hours a day. But in contrast to what Arendt's image of a stage with no exits suggests nobody was forced to stay for the whole time. As in a lot of recent endurance pieces people came and went whenever they wanted. And there were multiple occasions to disperse into different sub-groups or simply disengage.

There are various moods and states of mind occurring when gathering. Sometimes it becomes undecidable whether a gathering of a few (or many) people leisurely hangs out or toils through time. Enduring an assembly means going idle over long periods of time: doing nothing or just going along with the flow. But going along with the flow can also mean becoming a part of the very ›working‹ of the assembly. And such working can revert back into the leisure inherent to the festive mode of gathering: into a joyful mood that takes over but is, at the same time, always in danger to tilt over into a pervasive foul mood or even the transformation of the assembly into an angry mob. The last panel of the first day of *The Art of Being Many*, *Vogue and Voodoo*, tried to stimulate and experiment with various ways of intoxication: The panel dealt with intoxication as a state in which passivity and activity, leisure and labor cannot be told apart but are instead both ostensibly present, as emphasized e.g. by Walter Benjamin in his essay on surrealism (cf. Benjamin 1979). Not surprisingly, the *Vogue-and-Voodoo*-panel was the one that in retrospect for quite a few of the ›many‹ seems to have ›worked best‹ as a theatrical and performative event. Partly, this might have been the case because this panel was billed as a transition to the after-show-party and, therefore, did not succumb to high political expectations.

And thirdly and perhaps most importantly: Somewhere between labor and leisure, *The Art of Being Many* put an emphasis on the various notions of repetition and reproduction so conspicuously absent in Arendt. The reenactment dimension of *The Art of Being Many* rattled many political activists; this was a ›performance art‹-aspect, and worse: a cultural-industrial spectacle, which to them undermined the political necessity as well as the spontaneity of a ›real‹ assembly. The invitation to ›come to Hamburg and gather‹

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seemed to be a mock invocation only because what happened turned out to be very much on the side of the playful. Given the seriousness of the struggles of many of the participants this point seems justified. On the one hand, it was obvious that the reenactment did not treat its originals as museum pieces. The reproduction rather reflected the devices and means of assembling: a proto-Latourian laboratory of the stages and things used in an assembly (cf. Latour 1994). Everything was mediated; not even face-to-face-interaction was ›real‹ because of the three-channel-headphones everyone was wearing. One could stay inside the assembly while stepping out into the sunshine; one could zoom out of the assembly while staying bodily present but switching to a DJ-channel, etc.

And by highlighting the fact that this was a reproduction a blind spot of not only Arendt's political theory came into view: that the political – or for that matter, an assembly – cannot be reduced to spontaneity but that it relies on repetition, reproduction, procedures, ceremonies, rituals, media and so on. The dividing line between the participants at *The Art of Being Many* did not so much run between activists, artists and those who were bored but between those who thought this was a valid point, those who did not and those who did not care. Political assemblies were not turned into ›art‹ (or not only turned into something that went by the name of art in the technological sense of the term: *téchne*, *ars*). At some points at least, they were examined in their material and technical conditions: the interdependencies between gathering and the respective assembly spaces, the timing of assemblies, the moods of assemblies, the sounds of assemblies, the documentation of assemblies, the fictions assemblies make up about themselves in order to come into being. It is in this vein that *The Art of Being Many* can be called (in Esther Pilkington's words) a »rehearsal assembly« (Pilkington 2014). A rehearsal follows a script sometimes or it is based on an idea. But under the pretense of art or that of being only preliminary it can become a try-out for the real thing. And one never knows when it is over, or, in the case of a collaborative effort, who decides when the rehearsal actually turns into the real thing: when political leisure turns into political labor and perhaps the other way round; or when something ›new‹ emerges from a space in which social practices can be reflected, tried out as well as put to the test.

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Consensus

The Togetherness of Those Who Would Not Wait for One Another

KAI VAN EIKELS

1

What was new the last time there seemed to be something new in assembling was that people did not feel the need to all decide together everything that could be left to individual decisions, or to initiatives by a few at a time. Many of the people felt okay with other people doing other things, things they would not have considered doing themselves, or would not have done, or maybe would have done but then were thankful that others were already doing them, focusing on doing other things instead. There was a whiff of the spirit of a division of labor permeating the assembly, but without the structures that implement the division of labor in economic enterprises. The assembly held up its legacy of not assigning tasks according to an economic matrix, not putting the most skillful in the positions that require skills, the fastest where matters are most pressing, the most robust where violence is imminent, the ones with so-called natural authority in leading positions. Just as before in the democracy project, everybody was entitled to anything, as things worth doing were worth doing badly, and competence never counted as an argument *against* someone doing something. Still, the looseness that comes with a division of labor, when the occasional synchronization of rhythms breaks free from the constancy of being together, somehow materialized in the gatherers' bodies, the bodies of those who stayed with the plenary session most of the time no less than the bodies of those who would

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come and go. The bodies unfurled in their attendance, as it were, and a visitor might have believed that this less cramped fashion of being there came about inside-out, that the participants had been guided to assume a relaxed aggregate phase from insight into their totality as a collective organism, but it really came about outside-in. It came from the society the people came from, and returned to after the assembly or during the assembly. It had to do with their routines of working, of collaborating or letting collaboration happen. Possibly, much of it could be traced back to the pitiable fact that they had forgotten how to stop working, even when taking time off their jobs for participating in a political assembly. Nonetheless, people were right where they were, but while they kept arguing and defending a position that seemed decidedly theirs, they realized how replaceable they were in virtually every respect save making that point and defending it. In whatever followed from the assembly's decision, others would do things for them, and even in their place, just as often as they would do things for others, and even in their place. And as though that temporality of collective acting, of filling in and helping out, had been admitted to the time of collective decision-making, everyone who stated their position in the debate did so in a form that suggested a moment for one position to give way to another position, or to move into a position previously maintained by another person. Positions, it followed, were not coordinates in an ideal, timeless geometrical space, to be adopted by a majority of individuals present at the assembly, in order to make the proposal connected to that position stronger than any other. Neither did positions represent those outposts which activists had conquered and successfully or unsuccessfully secured in their struggles, becoming unquestionable, for the fighters themselves no less than for others, as the victories and defeats seemed too heavily laden with individual pain to be questioned. Rather, positions were linked to the positions inhabited by the individuals in the real space and time of the assembly – not identical, as identity does not exist in real space and time, but willing to embrace the materiality of the gatherers' living bodies, the bodies in gathering, and of the finite time they would have at their hands for realizing their decisions, if realizing was to mean something other than just continuing the struggles on hold, hurrying back to those outposts that had been successfully or unsuccessfully conquered and secured in that legendary time before the assembly. Making decisions in the assembly was thus disengaged from (the illusion of) enacting laws. At least for the time

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being, the assembly had done away with being a weak version of that powerful congregation that enables a bunch of mortals to pass resolutions whose period of validity will be a weak version of eternity. And it had also shaken off the contempt of those who only saw assembling as an interruption of their activism, as idle, self-enamored talk that had to be constantly reminded of some urgency it neglected. As the people's weakness turned out to be not that of being less than eternal in their respective lives, and less than immortal in their dedication, the assembly's weakness turned out to be not that of being less than an institution capable of sublating its members' voices into a compact statement resounding with the authority of an absent origin and an absent fulfillment. As the shortcomings of using words turned out not to be due to words being less real than deeds, the pressure to inflate speech with hatred and to turn the debate into a surrogate battlefield vanished. The decision this assembly arrived at, if it did (and more often than not, it did not), verified an understanding of assembling that considered assembling a part of everyone's lives, that is to say a limited period of time within limited periods of time, and just as nobody would be in the position to wait for anyone else at the point of death, adding two deaths up to one more comprehensive death and then three, four, etc., the participants did not think this was the thing to try doing during their lifetimes. Since without my body you can never be in my position, let us see how we can transform opposition, the drama of ideologies clashing where every speaker speaks in the name of a silent majority, claiming to represent all those who will not object (hence causing plenty of objections), into a more corporeal performance of raising voices: one that has silence mean ›I find nothing to require alignment of our separate intentions‹ instead of ›I agree‹, and speaking out mean ›This would be a place and time to metonymize…‹ – thus they kept telling each other with whatever they left unsaid, or said.

2

Yes, that assembly accepted two conclusions, two states of being many once the time of assembling was over. One: disbanding without having accomplished a formal agreement, leaving acting to individual decisions or initiatives by a few at a time. And one: consensus. It is hard to know what people know, particularly when there are many people, but it seems likely that many

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of the gatherers were unaware that favoring consensus-oriented decision-making in political movements had once been inspired by Quaker practice, where patiently listening to the opinions of others organized an aggregate waiting for God's voice to communicate the truth. In that religious practice, the assumption of a God, of that God conveying His wisdom through that which happens with a random composition of His creatures, of a truth to be revealed in the course of speaking and listening, and even silence and listening – all of this firmly embedded the finite time of the gathering in eternity, and only those who were willing to wait, to wait, if necessary, until the end of their lives, could be counted on to be valuable members of that community. For if they were not willing, or unable, to wait until the end of their lives, their consent to something someone else had said might not have confirmed that that something someone else had said was the divine message related to all of them, but that they wanted to cut the meeting short as they needed to leave. After the assumption of a God had been dropped, there remained a naked, unmediated power imbalance based on how much time assembly members would be able to devote to the process of forming consensus, and also on their desires. Participants with more time would be in a more powerful position than people who needed to observe working hours, care for children, the elderly or the sick, attend other meetings, sleep. Participants who wished for a quick leap from discussion to action, either out of fear that an opportunity to act might pass or because they suspected their own motivation to act might not survive a long and tedious deliberation process, found themselves at a disadvantage against those whose prime pleasure consisted in playing a certain role in the assembly, and whose self-confidence appeared unshakable. More than just a few remembered a feeling of impotence in moments when they had desperately wanted a meeting to close, and yet others would go on forever raising objections, finding problems, multiplying viewpoints. Their obliviousness as to the genealogy of that impotence perhaps added to the despair. Why does our commitment to consensus come without a sense of timing, they might have asked themselves. Because without reference to the eternal, consensus cannot coincide with truth anymore, someone might have answered. Take Badiou, who insists that political action discloses a universal truth. In order to proceed to that kind of action, you will need a philosopher to have the last word. Any assembly, then, whatever it decides or fails to decide, can hardly be more than an arrangement of waiting, popu-

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lating a stretch of time suspended in eternity, filling that time with warm-hearted or coldhearted chatter. The value of that assembly, whatever it decides or fails to decide, will have been an event, which it eventually turns into; and the people gathered in the assembly will be in need of a philosopher to inform them on that very turn. With god being dead, the philosopher takes over the job of a priest. And if he doesn't, someone might have asked in that familiar manner of asking simply for the sake of masking an objection as a question: What if we do not let him? In that case, the assembly will be frustrated, time and again, about its inability to match up consensus with truth. Lacking reference to eternity, consensus cannot coincide with truth, not because there can be no truth but because there can be no coincidence with truth. Instead of appreciating a time that can never be the time of waiting for the event, for the intervention of the eternal into the temporal – instead of saying ›OK, then let's do something else than wait for the event with what we're doing in our attempts to reach a consensus‹, a lot of people stubbornly keep waiting. I suppose I do, too, someone like me might have added. Despite better knowledge, I still do, and my impatience with assemblies stems from waiting for the event. While I hesitantly join in on what I perceive as a dry, bureaucratic exchange concerning problems and solutions, my deeper self won't let go of hoping for that moment when something someone says transforms the meeting into the collective-singular source of the *good idea*. A divine inspiration minus God for us unpropheted disciples. But what else is there to expect, except the *good idea*, others or myself might have asked in that manner of true curiosity that sometimes pierces through the thicket of rhetorical questions: compromise? Please don't tell us all we can hope for is compromise! I think there is a risk that compromise becomes the predominant form of acknowledging the immanence of the finite, the reality of our time dedicated to consensus. However, compromise presents itself as a compromised ideal result. It continues to show us that whatever we achieve in what little time we have is but a flawed, deficient proxy for what good we could achieve if the voices of our mortal bodies embodied a message from beyond the temporal sphere. Compromise means disappointment about being mortals, and too many of them (more than one). This is why the spirit of a division of labor might be helpful when permeating an assembly that, although it does not assign tasks according to an economic matrix, understands consensus less in the sense of an all-inclusive agreement and more in the sense of ›This is what we will remember as an occasion to distinguish our

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preferences, until distinctions felt right, before we all went off to do whatever we considered the right things to do‹. A godless consensus, with a non-evental, uncoincidable truth: a drumless groove for the many who knew they would replace each other any number of times in doing what the consensus was, going along in casual proximity, taking over, moving in and making way, precisely because they knew they were all mortal, they knew nobody was in the position to wait for anyone else at the point of death, and hence they did not think that waiting for each other was a habit worth preserving during their lifetimes. Taking consensus to be the togetherness of those who would not wait for one another, not even while participating in an assembly – that was definitely not a *good idea*. But did it work at the time?

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From the People to the Many and Maybe Back? Magic.

ILIAS MARMARAS

PART ONE
MANY COME FIRST, THE REST LATER

It is May 2011, and a description of the then so-called ›phenomenon of squares‹ in a mainstream Greek newspaper reads: »It was a mosaic of ages, wages and demands. A multitude that was belonging everywhere and nowhere.« (Papadopoulos 2011) The journalist went further, he tried a categorization. First: *the newlyweds*. Practically, this category included just a couple that »celebrated their wedding with a kiss in the square among the indignados«. The category was judged as essential, because the enthusiastic clapping of the multitude at the view of the kiss had been broadcast globally that day. Then: *the activists*, defined as »these individuals« that came to the square holding their bicycles, instead of holding the Greek flag like others. »Not because of the trend but moved from ideology«, explained the journalist. Then arrived: *the gadget geeks***,** accepting invitations from »friends« in social media. Their goal being »to upload everything that happens«. Then: *the unemployed***,** described »as those that hold one or two degrees but no job.« Finally come: *the veterans*, experienced syndicalists and members of parties, some »standing embarrassed« in front of the motley multitude, while some others feeling »pleasant surprise seeing colleagues that never participated in the past in protests, now standing in front of the parliament.«

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THE MANY AND THE OTHERS

Such a description was an immature differentiation between ›the many‹ and ›the people‹ addressed to both at the same time. It was simultaneously signaling a rupture and a division. It was an attempt to create a form of representation of the ›many‹ gathered in the square, for those who were not there, yet. It is true that most of those gathered in the square had no prior political experience. They were not organized, at least in the way that people used to be organized in the past. There were no references to the workers' struggles in Greek history or to anti-Nazi resistance, to the civil war and the struggles against dictatorship of 1967-74. Most of the people in the square were sharing a common belief, a common feeling against parliamentarism (some against the parliament building itself).

The refusal of the many in the square to select representatives embarrassed the state politicians, as it was inverting the usual practices of power, practices that are based on aspersion toward the leaders. It is characteristic that mainstream media used a psychiatric term to describe the non-representative will of the many by calling it ›depersonalization‹. The People reproduced it. The result of this critique became visible in the 8 o'clock news as well as to the hipsters' crowd on the Facebook timeline. The new thing for the many was: the people criticizing the many.

THE INTERPSYCHICAL DIMENSION OF THE MANY

In an interview given to Alexei Penzin, Paolo Virno talks about the relations between the *I and the many*, referring to the theory of Lev S. Vygotskij. He states that

initially there is an ›us‹ […] yet this ›us‹ is not equivalent to the sum of many well defined ›I's‹. […] the mind of the individual […] is the result of a process of differentiation that happens in a primeval society: ›the real movement of the development process of the child's thought is accomplished *not* from the individual to the socialized, *but* from the social to the individual.‹ Gradually, the child acquires the collective ›us‹, which we can define as an *interpsychical* dimension, turning it into an *intrapsychical* reality: something intimate, personal, unique. However, this introversion of the

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interpsychical dimension, this singularization of the ›primordial us‹, does not happen definitively during childhood: it always repeats itself during adulthood. (Virno 2010)

Was this manifested on the square? Did some signs of an upcoming desire to form new institutions of communication appear? Was this the beginning of a new form of life style? Certainly, some early signs of institutionalization attracted many critics. But after all, as Virno says about the term ›institution‹: »Is it a term that belongs exclusively to the vocabulary of the adversary?« (ibid) Maybe the answer is in Virno's claim: »For the people, the One is a promise; for the ›many‹, it is a premise.« (ibid) In any case, on the square, consciously or not, the many set rituals for a future institution. But the peaceful rituals did not last long.

VIOLENCE AS RITUAL

Violent clashes during protests are nothing new. Going back in time, protests of workers' syndicates, students etc. were often turning violent for various reasons. However, these protests were protests of the people.

The new thing at the square concerned subjectivity. During the days when the riot police decided to fully raid the square, using thousands of canisters of tear gas, the many faced the emersion of the ›no-subject‹. What since then was loosely called ›riots‹ encircled the movement of the square, punctured it, penetrated it and produced deviations in the practices of the movement.

Who is this emerging no-subject who practices violence as a ritual? In 2011 we were already in the middle of the crisis and the number of the unemployed especially among the youth was already increasingly high. Precarity produces exclusion and in a new and paradoxical way – one more derivative of the state of exception – the exclusion becomes the command through which the state produces integration and which the no-subject has to obey.

For thousands of young people, mostly belonging to the lower social classes, this new absurd form of ›integration‹ to society means only one thing: to lose the ground they stand on. Losing the ground means losing subjectivity. When the objective conditions of living, the objectivity of a social section,

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and the vital space of desire production is cancelled, there is no subject anymore. The subject disappears. Was the no-subject-group part of the many? The answer is yet to come. The many kept a rather contradictory stance towards violence. This stance was visible during the two days of June 2011 when police was raiding the square. The first day many voices among the many were against violent involvement with the riot police, while they changed stance the second day, after experiencing the ›hate for society‹ executed by police forces.

Sunday, February 12, 2012 was the day when the movement of the many and also the violence skyrocketed. This day was more or less expected. It was almost announced on mainstream media. Nobody did something to block its arrival and nobody could do something about it. That day the many faced the rage and at the same time experienced the tactics of the state. It was a crucial day, an explosion, necessary for the reproduction of power structures. An integration into the state through discipline and oppression that could only be achieved by the state making an exception to the law. It was a risky situation for the state, and a brand new lesson for the movement of the many. It was the day that many among the many realized the end of the workers' movement. The rupture between power structures and the people was total. That day the many won the battle because they stayed in the streets in spite of the oppression, but they lost themselves. They lost themselves not in fear but in hope. They went home expecting the promise of the One, like normal people.

THE MANY ON DEMAND (AS PEOPLE)

There haven't been significant protests of the many since Sunday, February 12, 2012. Attempts to reconstruct a massive social movement have failed. The majority expects a ›solution‹ from parliamentary parties now. However, hundreds of assemblies, collectives and social initiatives have spread all over the country. Some practices and ideas of direct democracy remain alive, regardless of the wildness of the landscape. Will the magic of the many work in the future and how? It remains to be seen.

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PART TWO
THE MANY ON DEMAND (AS HOPE)

- I gave the mortals a way to stop foreseeing their death as fatality.
- And what kind of remedy have you found for this? (Asks the Chorus)
- I provided them with blind hopes. (He answers)
- Oh! You found a great solution. (Replies the Chorus)
- I gave them fire too! (Says Prometheus)

Aeschylus, Prometheus Bound[1]

Why was hope included into Pandora's box (*pyxis*) of woes?

The legend, as written by Hesiod in Theogony, describes an era when only gods existed, and then (during this era), they decided that it was about time to create humans and animals and everything that exists on earth. They took from earth all the elements that melt in the fire, put them together and thus created all living beings. According to the myth, Epimetheus, brother of Prometheus, undertook the work to distribute the qualities and faculties among the beings. But as he was not very wise, he wasted them thoughtlessly, leaving man naked and defenseless. As the day was coming when the gods would breathe life into the beings, Prometheus decided to save man by giving him the gift of the skillful use of fire, which he stole from the gods. Because, as Herodotus says, »it takes wisdom for fire to be useful«[2], he also wanted to offer politics to mankind. However, this was impossible as politics were the privilege of Zeus and strictly kept by him. So, before the day that gods would breathe life into beings, Zeus decided to have revenge on Prometheus, and thus begins the myth of Pandora and along with it the punishment of Prometheus.

Reading Pandora's myth carefully, the woes meant for mankind were not deriving only from the spectacular, attractive and deceptive appearance of Pandora. In the bottom of the box, below all woes, Zeus put hope. It is a kind

1 http://esperos-library.ucoz.com/_ld/0/3___---.pdf, accessed January 26, 2016. Translated by the author.

2 http://www.greeklanguage.gr/greekLang/ancient_greek/tools/corpora/anthology/content.html?t=541&m=1&pane=trans, accessed January 26, 2016. Translated by the author.

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of hope that was constructed and offered to mankind by the gods, the powerful, the leaders and the ruling class and not by man himself. In addition, when Pandora opened the box and the woes scattered in the world, the myth wants Zeus to ›regret‹, and thus he kept hope inside the box. Since then, hope is surrounded by mystery. We can never know if hope is a blessing or a curse, because we can perceive its face only through social and political struggle. Hope is destined to create expectations of liberation from fear and to establish aims, which in turn recreate the principle of delegation.

In the last seven years, the Greek society has been crushed, precarized, impoverished. As Bifo says, the Occupy movement of the many in the squares:

> […] was an attempt to reassert democracy, but Occupy has been unable to go beyond the social uprising of precarious cognitive workers. It has been unable to start a process of self-organizing the general intellect. […] Occupy has been an exceptional process of reactivation of the social body, fragmented by financial abstraction and the deterritorialization of networked labor. However, Occupy has proved unable to turn this process into one of long-lasting social recomposition. […] (Berardi 2014: n.p.)

In an anonymous pamphlet that circulated in Athens a while ago, it said that while the content and the time of a confrontation within power relations are set by those who take the initiative and define the rules, sometimes the content and the time are created by the confrontation itself, overcoming and reversing the original set. As mentioned before, there were moments during the years of protests when the confrontation of power relations could indeed reverse the original setting imposed in time and in space and produce unexpected and new perspectives – e.g. the persistence with which Syntagma square was chosen as the site for protest and struggle. But the social movements – not to mention the left wing political parties – could not or did not have the will to take advantage of these ruptures in time and space. The many of the protests became both producers of hope and products of political commodification.

However, the set of ›hopes‹ which was the promise – and the aftermath of the ›party‹ – for the radical left is nowadays practically an institutional proposal to exit the crisis era, which leaves no space for ideology anymore.

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It became obvious that ideology is not problem-solving and at the same time it cannot be fed by the crisis itself.[3]

One of the reasons why this happened was the evacuation of the squares through the use of brutal police force. On the squares, the many, though they had put forward the issue of direct democracy during the period of the occupation, finally focused on (and hoped for) the imaginary of a helicopter, such as the one used by Fernando de la Rúa in December 2001 in order to elude the parliament building in Buenos Aires, rather than on the occupied, self-managed factories in Argentina; leaving space to the »easy« solution of the delegation and the elections. And this is how we arrive at the reestablishment of the state and the promise of the One.

Where there is hope, frustration lingers. It is a vicious circle, a composition of subliminal metaphysical exhortations, that only another imaginary could possibly break: the imaginary of the self-governed person who is aware of collectiveness. It is about this person and this collectiveness that presuppose one another and resist the ›inherited temptation‹ of the political history of the past to see each other as a tool or as set of tools. The many who had imagined a ›helicopter‹ ousting the corrupted government from the parliament building in the summer of 2011 could not anticipate that this would happen the other way around. The coming sleep, induced by hope, resulted in the awakening in a state of delegation and in the ritual of ›representative democracy‹.

However, social movements are still tracing the actual and contemporary perspectives of social transformations. As far as they do not fall into the trap of delegation, they work on new forms of the social, by creating alternative social relations in different aspects of our common life; they will remain here pointing towards the possible exit from the dipole of fear and hope and, as Bifo puts it, »be transferred into the real place of production: not just the

3 Indeed, during the events that followed the compromise of the radical left government on the debt issue and the acceptance of the 3rd memorandum in July 2015, and more precisely at the current pre-electoral period in September 2015, it is clear that the issue of ideology becomes an internal instrumentalization into the political space of the radical left wing party (parties), a set of tools for the redefinition of their institutional roles and positions, while a major part of society remains indifferent, distanced and in a state of disenchantment in relation to ideology. Probably, these could be good news.

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urban territory, but also the bio-financial global network« (Berardi 2014: n.p.)

Ps: The text was written in two different periods. Part one in May 2014 and part two between August and September 2015. There was – and still is – an overflow of events that we should consider in reading it.

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Assembling Bodies in New Ecologies of Existence

The Real Democracy Experience as Politics Beyond Representation

VASSILIS S. TSIANOS, MARGARITA TSOMOU

The emergence of modern political sovereignty is founded not on a subjugated, working, tormented, reproductive, or disciplined body but on a stolen body (cf. Papadopoulos/Tsianos 2007). The establishment of sovereignty through the punishment, control, productivity, and disciplinization of the body is a recurrent theme of classic political and social theory: Hobbes's genesis of Leviathan, Marx's primary accumulation, Polanyi's great transformation, Foucault's great confinement. These are the stories told from the perspective of dominant power: how power is inscribed onto the body, how the order of power absorbs the body and renders it fertile, creative, manageable, profitable and governable. In *The Life of Romulus*, Plutarch tells the story in a different way. The myth and birth of Roman power starts with the abduction of the Sabine women. By means of subterfuge, Romulus kidnapped the women of the Sabine tribe so that the future growth of Rome's population could be assured. In its very first moment, the myth of modern political sovereignty is founded not on the issue of the productive transformation of the body under its power but on the theft of bodies. The life of power is a primordial result not of a capacity to transform the body into an available thing but of its disposition over life. The life of power is parasitic. It devours something it never owns. The stolen bodies are never completely absorbed into the order of power. The magic formula of social transformation that we attempt to grapple with is that the social changes not when people

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resist, respond or react, but when they craft new situations, new worlds, new ecologies of existence. Resistance is only one of the things that sparks people's creative action – think of fantasy, melancholy, desire, boredom etc. Moreover, acting sometimes produces a surplus which does not just respond to oppression but creates a new occasion, an excess that is not reducible to what has existed before. The relation between social movements and power that played out in the 20th century can be depicted as an aleatoric succession of encounters. In the case of the relation of capital and labor, for example, we can see that in every one of these encounters labor attempted to escape its own conditions of existence and exploitation, and this escape kept transforming the tissue of everyday life itself. It is like a Beckett play – the actors coexist on the stage and each actor's deeds are the precondition for the actions of the other, but they never directly address each other or engage in systematic dialogue, they simply act and change the other through the material effects of their doings. We name this as imperceptible politics: politics that are imperceptible firstly because we are not trained to perceive them as ›proper‹ politics and, secondly, because they create an excess that cannot be addressed in the existing system of political representation. But these politics are so powerful that they change the very conditions of a certain situation and the very conditions of existence of the participating actors. Representations do not exist independently of the material world which they supposedly represent. Thus, politics is not about representations but about constructing the world. This work of construction can be done through concepts, affects, ideas. But these are not just outside matter – they belong to it, they are made of the same stuff. Concepts, affects, ideas are material, just as a cell, a neuron, tissue, water or soil is material. Radical politics are possible only when they are anchored in the flow of experience between people and between people and things (cf. Papadopoulos et al. 2015). In other words, politics is a practice that materializes in the everyday life of people and in their relations with each other and the world. Continuous experience works without being mediated by some form of representation; instead, it works by constantly being in a process of materializing.

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POLICE AND POLITICS

Rancière understands politics as a singular accident in the history of forms of ruling power. To him, politics is a break of the police order, seen as the naming and counting of subjects. In his best-known work *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*, he suggests introducing a difference between politics and police, with the latter drifting radically away from its common meaning. Police indicates an array of procedures organized by power and generating consensus, which, according to Rancière, is

> an order of bodies that defines the allocation of ways of doing, ways of being, and ways of saying, and sees that those bodies are assigned by name to a particular place and task; it is an order of the visible and the sayable that sees that a particular activity is visible and another is not, that this speech is understood as discourse and another as noise (Rancière 1999: 21).

To the counting of the police, i.e. the distinct identification as subordinate subjects by the sovereign power, Rancière opposes counting the share of the shareless through a conflictual foundation act of equality:

> What I am trying to say is that it is democracy, understood as the power of the people, as the rule of those who neither have any special claim to nor any specific aptitude for its exercise, what turns politics conceivable as such. When power finds its way back to the hands of the most skilled, the strongest and the richest, there is no more politics. […] To my understanding, democracy requires equality, vis-à-vis which even an oligarchic form of government as ours needs to justify itself to a larger or lesser extent. Yes, democracy does have a critical function: it is the wedge of equality, being objectively and subjectively inside the ruling body and preventing politics from merely becoming police. (Rancière 2011: 79)

This egalitarian *kairos* (a Greek word meaning the opportune or supreme moment) of political difference created from the tension between politics and police, between real democracy and authoritarian representation, establishes an urgent challenge for both representative democracy and its subjacent sovereignty. Sovereignty is the matrix of power able to render the territory, the population, and political representation governable. However, sovereignty is not in a position to integrate all spaces and possibilities of bodies into a new

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post-national system of social rights. The social spaces of such post-liberal souverainism become unrepresentable, which has been made clear by the mass protests in Egypt and Tunisia, the Spanish 15-M movement in Puerta del Sol, the Greek summer of Syntagma Square, mass demonstrations in Tel Aviv, and the global coverage of the Occupy Wall Street movement in the US.

Here, the ideas and concepts of anti-austerity materialized themselves into relational processes of commoning, into flows of affects, into bodies enduring together, into vis-à-vis democracies creating shifts in the ›ways of doing‹ or the ›ways of being‹. One could say that these assemblies of the many with their democratic practices enacted by bodies in all their vulnerability were involved in confronting power by transforming representational partitions of the visible and the sayable into ›politics‹.

THE REAL DEMOCRACY SQUARES

Daily assemblies and collective self-care as seen in the practices of common dwelling and eating are variations of a bodily, affective, reproductive and prefigurative politics that not only places demands upon the delegitimized representative power but also seeks to enact the intended goals in practice. Square occupiers practice and even embody precisely what they are pointing at: unrest with political representation translates into a variety of experiments of collective voting processes and community self-organization. This practical dimension of representational criticism has led commentators all over the world to focus their analyses on the performativity of the protest – provided that performative acts are defined as not only representing a situation in the world (i.e. representing symbolic semantic systems with a referential relationship) but rather executing it. As German theatre scholar Erika Fischer-Lichte suggests in her book *Performativität: Eine Einführung*: »The concept of performativity describes certain symbolic actions that neither express nor represent anything preconceived but bring forward the reality they refer to.« (Fischer-Lichte 2013: 44)[1]

Hence, it is reasonable to think of the reality delivered by the democratic movements in recent years as a set of activities, gestures, affects, relations,

1 Translation by the authors.

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experiences, dances, formations, and articulations of the body and performative protocols. Thus, political action can be described with the aid of tools and concepts like presence and copresence, enactment, theatricality and performativity, experience, embodiment or cultural rituals/performances (cf. Singer 1959). According to Michel Foucault, the body is the paradigmatic site of the signature of sovereignty (2006: 233). The body does not relate to power as an external feature. This also applies to the current crisis of neoliberal governmentality and its modes of subjectification. Instead of satisfying a need for normative self-optimization, that is, connecting with others around normatively accepted experiences, a new space for experience in connecting to and gathering with others was created in the context of crisis and in the squares. This democracy *in actu* of gathered bodies strives to rethink and reconstitute sovereignty *in vivo* through its performances.

With Rancière, we can talk of the aesthetic character of protest in the moment when the order of distributing the sensible goes off the rails. In this case, going off the rails is to be understood as the visualization of a narrative track pointing back to the early history of political theatre: the *choros* as the protest of many. Protest is able to enhance the potential of the affected body by means of the aesthetic. The assemblies on the squares became a sort of political theatre, an *in actu*, that rendered the bodily protest readable, micropolitical, and manifold, a sort of anti-grammar of sovereignty: become minoritarian, become slower, become many. And it is this play of political theatre where we can be the dancing audience of an affective architecture and of the language of the commons.

BLOCKADE AND METROPOLITAN PANIC

Blockade and panic are the frightening potential of such assemblies *in actu*. Blockade takes place when the urban space, the public space of its inhabitants, turns against itself, when the movements that keep it bustling (street traffic, people rushing from place to place, the speed of vehicles) and the connections that keep it alive (daily rhythms, labor division, communications) are blocked to mobilize the space and the body as a means for assembly in action. Assembly and blockade are not the atomized (exhausted, self-employed) and administered (through interest groups or local parlia-

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ments) poles of urban society. Metropolitan blockade does not mean dissecting and cutting off space but rather reproducing it, knitting together different parts of the city, creating layers of calm and action. The city becomes an area outside representative political power and oligarchic democracy. Metropolitan blockades are cracks in established politics, allowing the future to enter. ›The system is approaching its end: Let's download the future here and now.‹ It is with this image that protesters often characterize the spirit of the assemblies in Athens, Madrid, Tripoli, Tel Aviv, or Istanbul. When urban space revolves against itself, it generates a monster, as seen from the perspective of the established rule. Yet in the eyes of those who do not share a given order of political representation, who instead are blocking this order with their assemblies, this enables true democracy.

Most Athenian real democracy protagonists joined the square occupation and the assemblies in the evening, after work, and came from the unorganized world of the precarious. Their political attitude has very little to do with the political realism of those who regard themselves as professional organizations in the political field (be they governmental bodies or NGOs) and who are reproaching the Outraged (English translation for the *Indignados*, as they called themselves in the square occupation in Puerta Del Sol in Madrid, or the Greek *Aganaktismenoi* on Athens' Syntagma Square) for their alleged lack of sustainable political organization and institutionalization. However, the latter, rather than producing a discourse of political disenchantment, express real democratic infra-politics, that is, an assembly infrastructure addressed against the tyranny of the rationality of neoliberal crisis management. In the context of the Arab Spring, sociologist Asef Bayat talks of the spectacular rise of the ›social non-movements‹, which claim the streets and the whole metropolitan space (Bayat 2013). With this term he defines collective actions of non-collective actors. The difference between such social non-movements and the daily resistance of the subordinates is decisive and points at the most important function of the urban commons in the moral economics of the precarious and poor: »For the struggle and progress of those acting is not at the cost of other poor or at their own cost (as occurs with survival strategies), but at that of the state, the rich and powerful« (ibid: 74), that is, the metropolitan elites and their urban privileges. In *Life as Politics: How Ordinary People Change the Middle East*, Bayat describes this political form of the urban poor as the art of presence:

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the courage and creativity to assert collective will in spite of all odds, to circumvent constraints, using what is available and discovering new spaces within which to make oneself heard, seen, felt, and realized. The art of presence is the fundamental moment in the life of non-movements, in life *as* politics. (ibid: 83)

Significantly, some years earlier, Saskia Sassen used the idea of presence to envisage the politics of the undocumented and underprivileged in global cities. Being *present* for each other in the urban space creates the possibility of street politics:

It is the fact of such presence, and not so much power *per se*, that creates operational and rhetoric open spaces. Such an interpretation strives for differentiating between powerlessness and invisibility/impotence, hence underpinning the complexity of powerlessness. (Sassen 2006: 317)

GESTURES, BODIES, AND CULTURAL PERFORMANCES AT SYNTAGMA SQUARE, 2011

Given our attitude regarding the notion of politics and its actualization on the squares, we would like to take a closer look at the gestures, performative protocols and affective body practices of real democracy.

The first thing that catches one's eye is that the body movements developed by the crowd of the Outraged are different from the usual gestures of protest, such as clenched fists or human chains. Instead, their repertoire is composed of moving hand palms and popular gestures of insult, of circular assemblies, where sign language is used and round dances on the square as well as the daily bodily articulations of the cohabitation of bodies, such as sleeping, eating, cleaning, etc. Across the globe, square occupiers were heterogeneous crowds trying to move beyond politically organized, registered fields, thus becoming hard to identify and represent, except as a crowd of many individuals. They developed new forms of community that were not based on a previously common language or a similar origin. Hence, they had to distance themselves from the old protest rituals, including their symbolic reference of political identification, as a multitude of the different and agree on new physical gestures. Such gestures allow the inclusion of anybody, no matter their social or political context. Given the lack of a previous unitary

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(political) identity, the crowd has developed this new willful performativity, which is operationally bound to physical presence, body movement and common affection, to embrace all attendants. In this respect, the above-mentioned body practices have to be thought of as ›cultural performances‹, to put it in the words of anthropologist Milton Singer. Singer used this term to describe »particular instances of cultural organization, e.g. weddings, temple festivals, recitations, plays, dances, musical concerts« (Singer 1959: XII-XIII), by which a culture creates and represents its own self-understanding and self-image. Social roles, cohesion, intimacy, solidarity, and integration are staged in rituals and performative acts that represent and display the shared symbolic and practical knowledge, presenting and reproducing it as social order. Understanding the practices of the Outraged as ›cultural performances‹ means taking them seriously as social and hence political processes that constitute both meaning and community. The cultural performance of the present *Aganaktismenoi* produced a »performatively generated, episodic, physical communality« (ibid: XIII), as the one also created, for instance, in festivals, parades, or football stadiums, that was able to work as a means of inclusion. The movements they had generated and that produced this inclusion were based on popular culture and Greek daily life, for example moving hands, circular assemblies, the insulting *moutza* gestures, or traditional round dances amidst a cloud of tear gas.

BODY FORMATION OF DEMOCRACY

In Western tradition, the circle of assembled bodies stands for the choreographic picture we relate to the idea of ancient democracy: all free citizens of a city – the so-called *demos* – come together on a square to discuss and decide on their matters. Within this formation, a genuinely political space is created corresponding to the model of the *polis*, as described by Hannah Arendt in her book *The Human Condition* (1958), as a setting between people speaking freely with each other, thus creating public space. Political action needs this space where people appear before each other in order to organize themselves, speak to each other and act. While Arendt can conceive of this space in its abstract form at any place where language occurs, Judith Butler points out in her 2011 text on square occupations (»Bodies in Alliance and the Politics of the Street«) the need of physical presence to split public space,

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in this case as a semicircle arranged amphitheatrically around the speaker's stage acting as a human microphone (Butler 2011). Even if the square itself is rectangular, the bodies physically recreate the architectures of parliaments or ancient theatres, and voting is also performed physically. The Outraged claim the identity of the citizen in the *demos*, who decides directly on matters of the *polis* by raising hands. As »agents of creating meaning« (Foster 1986: 78) for an articulate matter, as dance historian Susan Foster puts it, the bodies in circular assemblies refer to the well-known form of democratic discussion of the Greek *polis* in the *agora* and articulate the occupiers' political strife for real or direct democracy beyond the rationale of representation. Thus, they enact a cultural performance, an archaic ritual of grassroots democratic practice.

DIRECT DEMOCRACY AS THE PRESENCE OF BODIES

Based on the Spanish Outraged movement, Athenians operated with the slogan ›real democracy now!‹ or, alternatively, and by no means distinct in its definition, ›direct democracy now!‹ Like the Spaniards before, the Greeks expressed their unrest with present-day democracies and their lack of citizen participation, tying up with current criticism of representative democracy and buzzwords such as ›post-democracy‹ or ›representation crisis‹. Isabell Lorey interprets these aspects as putting into practice the criticism of representative organizations by the Outraged, quoting Rousseau's famous elaborations on the ›social contract‹ that considered the physical presence of the whole citizenship as the basis of democratic sovereignty as a criticism of representative democracy: »the sovereign [can] only act when the people is assembled […]« (Rousseau 2013: 100). »The sovereign [in this case, the people] […] cannot be represented« (ibid: 106). In the assembly practice of the *agora* on the squares, Lorey sees a practical implementation of the opposite of representative democracy, which states that it represents the non-present. Lorey talks of ›present-ative‹ instead of representative democracy, which is already expressed in the slogan ›real democracy now!‹ What is ›real‹ regarding this democratic practice is not that it is the only form of true democracy, but, as the interjection ›now!‹ indicates, it is a form of democracy taking place right now, in this moment (Lorey 2012: 43). A practice that is not already laid out but is rather executed *in actu* and hence physically enacted. The community

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of the *demos* sitting in a circle thus articulates its criticism of representative democracy performatively and physically.

BODIES IN CONFLICT

The round dances on Syntagma Square have a double: they were created in a situation of conflict with the police, and at the same time they were not meant as confrontation but rather as an end in itself to experience common joy. As a means of resistance to the operation of the police that aimed to clear the square from protesters, the Outraged started to dance traditional Greek circular dances together. While the air was filled with teargas that burned eyes and throat, people spontaneously took themselves by the hands and performed popular dancing steps that are known to everyone in Greece, synchronizing to the traditional partisan songs that were played through the loudspeakers of the assembly of the square. And the dance became more decisive and stronger, louder and the more intense the more teargas was thrown at them. The dancers seemed drunken but also pleased by this freaky setting that brought together crying and laughing, apocalyptic repression and joyful feast.

To Oliver Marchart, the two elements of conflict and acting for the common joy are hallmarks of dancing practices in protest settings. He considers dancing as potentially complementary to the revolutionary process, a non-utilitarian moment representing the necessarily excessive in revolution, as a replacement for terror and violence (Marchart 2013). On Syntagma Square, fun, joy, and virtuosity in movement were opposed to danger, fear, violence, and repression, yet much less strategically than what we know from declared dancing protest groups such as Rebel Clown Army or Pink Block. Different from dance used as a strategy for a planned confrontation with the police, round dances are rather part of some self-supply, a self-referential ritual of resilience of bodies in their vulnerability: jumping up and down in circles could offer a distraction from the teargas and set free unimagined energies, like in a trance.

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ROUND DANCE

The circular movement serves in turn as self-assurance of the common resistance and as a mutual representation of solidarity. The Syntagma Square round dances are not a strategy used instrumentally (as artistic practices are used in demonstrations to articulate certain messages more »creatively«), but stem from the political homelessness of the Outraged, who had to invent new protest forms and performances. The form is borrowed from traditional popular culture, a social dance where everybody can join in, and through which the heterogeneous singularities can become a commonality in action, a commonality in dancing.

Amidst the tear gas, the Outraged became a dancing community who, faced with confrontation with the police, chose to perform a popular folklore dance not as a conflict but rather a strategy of common resistance. Addressing the politicians – as the ›third people‹ – was less relevant than constituting the collective self by arranging the bodies looking towards the center of the circle and hence facing each other. The joining of hands is definitely the modest yet complex message of these dancing bodies.

DIFFUSION OF SELF-CONSTITUTION IN DAILY LIFE

To many commentators, not only conservative ones, the violent dissolutions of the camps of the many in Athens and Madrid meant the end of the short spring of real democracy movements. In fact, many activists fell into a post-traumatic mood. The loss of Puerta del Sol and Syntagma Square brought about a loss of feeling at home amongst the many in metropolitan space. Yet, this melancholy of the many quickly turned into the creation of decentralized forms of self-constitution, replicating the experiences of the many in solidarity-based economies and welfare infrastructures in Greece, such as social kitchens, social clinics, for-free supermarkets, open music or language schools, time-banks, new currencies and non-monetary exchange networks, new collectives for avoiding evictions like the PAH network in Spain, the creation of municipal electorate platforms like *Barcelona en Comú* and new infra-policies taking the protest character of the many from the assemblies to the vast terrain of new general social hegemonies of solidarity of the vulnerable bodies in everyday life.

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It was these social mobilizations and practices that created a climate in which a once marginal political force like the radical left coalition Syriza could become a true electoral alternative. At the same time, the election of Syriza did not stand for a return to naïve trust in representation. Syriza was elected thanks to the active many, who are much more than just ›voters‹ and have taken those representatives to power, who promised the potential of articulating before parliament the post-representative practices that have become hegemonic in society. The initiatives of self-constitution through self-organization are further developments of the politics of the squares and show that the election of a left government might be less progressive and transformative concerning the decolonialization of body and affect that can only occur through self-emancipation. The example of Embros Theatre might give some insights into the potential of these pre-figurative or performative politics for transforming life, but also theatre and art.

EXAMPLE EMBROS: POST-REPRESENTATIVE THEATRE

The EMBROS Theatre in Athens stands paradigmatically for the metamorphoses of the criticism of representation by the many into everyday performative politics of solidarity. The public theatre with the significant name of EMBROS – which translates as ›Forward‹ – was closed in 2007, remaining empty ever since. In November 2011, it was occupied by the activist collective Mavilli, comprised of well-known theatre makers, and reopened with a festival lasting several days. This opening festival was more than just a successful event: without any funding and organized within the shortest time, the whole of the Athens performance scene – from top choreographers to experimental newcomers – took part artistically or discursively in the ›reopening‹ (as the occupation was called). The theatre hall became the assembly space of the professionals who appeared as equals as a sign of self-organization, also because activities in the theatre were not restricted to performing or watching but also included common tasks like cleaning, serving at the bar, cooking, and maintenance. Theatrical acts of representation were complemented with moments of (re)production and reciprocal participation (cf. Malzacher 2015).

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The EMBROS Theatre was cleared by the police and reoccupied by activists several times. Over the last four years, it has been run by renewed collective constellations, the only decision-making body remaining the weekly assembly, which is open to everybody. Many different things take place at EMBROS: discussions on immediate political issues, solo events, workshops, rehearsals of major or minor theatre companies, musical evenings, or festivals of different collectives. Such an open program without any clear selection criteria may usually seem random and detrimental to quality. Yet the remarkable and even magical aspect of the EMBROS Theatre is that the setting as a self-organized place of open social articulation creates such a strong framework that it draws its raison d'être from itself and remains immune to judgements of taste. EMBROS is more than a theatre; it is a place where public matters are brought forward. The theatre is materialized as a place of assembly, a post-representative *agora*, an open meeting point for the heterogeneous many, for projects of the LGBT community (Queer Festival), for the Athens migrant community, for media makers on strike, or grassroots unions. Everything happening here is of social relevance: when reputable theorists like Giorgio Agamben come to Athens, their appearance at the EMBROS Theatre often makes a bigger impact than the lecture at the representative museum that has invited them. Relevant questions are asked at EMBROS by a community of a discursive *demos* who are really negotiating something and taking each other seriously, without any remuneration or representation. This special feature is created because EMBROS brings together many heterogeneous public opinions and individuals that are not gathering as an audience but as active participants. Theatre is practiced as social intervention and self-organization, and thus, along Rancière's lines, as true politics.

This architecture of the interventionist theatre cannot be re-neutralized by a cultural policy that merely places EMBROS on the payroll of the new left government, making it a new public theatre (it can also not be sponsored because the government cannot spend any resources except from repaying the debt). EMBROS remains a place that, according to post-representative politics, creates new relationships between the autonomous, self-contained social units as decentralized forms of social territories, thus allowing a new relationship with the state – whose character, as was envisioned before the election, would undergo change in post-representative hegemony – precisely through initiatives like EMBROS.

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THE SYRIZA-GOVERNMENT AND THE HORIZON OF POST-REPRESENTATION

Like EMBROS, comparable self-organized structures in society professionalized and radicalized themselves over the years, creating tools for the concrete transformation of politics that go beyond the national-international dichotomy. They introduced the possibility to combine and integrate the separated dimensions of politics of representation, participative forms of democracy and autonomous self-determination into a new concept of organizing the productive sphere.

But this potential was not actualized by the agents of political representation. Democracy, even in its most traditional liberal sense, was not extended into the everyday but instead was effectively abolished, since the last bailout in Greece introduced the condition that every law has to be approved by the Troika and thus rendered the legislative sovereignty of the Greek parliament obsolete.

Thus, today, we are left with the politics of the everyday, the ›social-non-movements‹, as the only form of the political that can be considered ›politics‹ in a Rancièrian sense. It is these non-official structures of self-organization that can re-distribute the sensible, understood as redistributing speech acts, power, spaces, names and positions in society. In an unforeseen speed, the political form of representative parliaments degenerated into that of a police that can only think of itself as having the duty to manage the neoliberal status quo.

The SYRIZA-leadership focused on the strategy of dialogical negotiations with the creditors and has considered the potential from below as a mere supporting chorus of the government-project.

After the government had voted for the bailout on August 8, 2015, Tasos Koronakis, back then still the secretary of the party, said in an interview:

> as party, parliamentarian group and government we were sedated by the negotiations and did not put all our forces towards a more participatory model of governance, towards an entirely different plan of social activation that would utilize people, skills and possibilities and would have given us power during the negotiations, by achieving victories on the level of the everyday life of the citizens. [2]

2 http://news.in.gr/greece/article/?aid=1500017621, accessed January 26, 2016.

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Indeed. We can see today that with this mere statist approach to politics – meaning a politics that thinks it can act as a transformative agent in society by obtaining the rule over the state and the government – could not mobilize enough power to implement alternatives to neoliberal austerity in the European Union.

The words of the former party secretary (in the end, Koronakis left not only his position but also the SYRIZA-party) about the mistakes of the government show the impact of the participative, embodied, affective and performative imaginary of the occupied squares as a leading vision for contemporary politics.

Beyond the dead ends of European solutions for the crisis and the enforcement of austerity programs, there is a need today to take the protagonism of the popular factor seriously. Because it is the radicalized population of the squares and their potential to build common experiences and relational mutualist togetherness that opened new spaces of possibilities and popularized the still valid agenda of real democracy, anti-austerity, solidarity and self-determination. Thus, the post-representational politics of the squares are still the horizon – no matter which government takes power. They define the diachronic criteria with which all the future notions of politics have to keep up. The experiences on the squares created an imaginary that cannot be erased. Their potentialities towards new ecologies of existence are still waiting for their fulfillment, for their materialization in the future - anything less is doomed to failure.

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The Art of Being Uncanny

LIGNA

1

LIGNA were never interested in performing *for* somebody; instead, we like to establish an apparatus that enables the collective of listeners to become a collective of producers producing a situation which is not controlled by us. In *The Art of Being Many* we held the same talk twice. Simultaneously, two other members of the working group on sound in assemblies, Kathrin Wildner and Ernesto Estrella, gave talks. We were interested in the mediated, heterogeneous situation. We did not know if someone listened, we were not interested in centralizing the situation, we liked the fact that no one could listen to all three contributions to *The Art of Being Many*. At the same time, the audience was invited to listen to the same talk twice. And, as we heard at least from one listener, the talk was for sure not the same the second time. Strictly speaking, it was another text. Therefore, it could seem inappropriate to publish an edited version of our talk in this volume only once.

2

LIGNA is a collective, originally from Hamburg. We met in the local, non-commercial radio station FSK, *Freies Sender Kombinat*, where parts of our group regularly attended the assemblies that organized the station and discussed its political agenda. There were lots of different groups involved. Free radio in the 1990s seemed to be a good place to argue about the failures of 20th century left wing politics. As one might imagine, this involved many struggles, even exclusions, since free speech in the perspective of the station

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could not mean to reproduce freely all the sexist, racist, antisemitic or even fascist speech acts that are so common in German society. But though political opinions were diverse, most people agreed that through free radio one could enable a direct relation to the audience, that you could address their consciousness and change it by conveying information, by talking: By only paying attention, by only listening closely, they might change the world...

This notion of direct communication relies on the idea of the presence of the voice in radio, a notion that has a rather dubious history in radio theory (cf. Frahm 2013: 206-212). The idea – though bizarre, and not quite intuitive – that the medium of radio does not change the voice but preserves it and therefore can have a certain, direct impact on the listener, has also been applied to assemblies. Assemblies often rely on an idealized concept of the act of receiving, in which nothing else but the understanding of the message takes place: since we are now here listening. A listening without distraction and beyond all power relations. A notion of speaking and listening that does not acknowledge the mediality of language but relies on the presence of the one who speaks and the one who listens.

Our collective started with a critique of these notions. To talk, not only in radio, but in radio most visibly and audibly, means to become absent. To talk does not mean to gain, but to loose presence, even in a gathering. The materiality of language, the situation of communication, the historical constellation we are in – they all escape the control of the one who speaks. Every act of communication is subjected to this residue of mediality, which disrupts the animated continuum of expression from the speaker to the listener. We would like to call this process, this disruption, *Zerstreuung*. *Zerstreuung* – we prefer to use the German term here as authors like Walter Benjamin and Siegfried Kracauer introduced it in its fascinating ambivalence, since it has all the connotations of dispersion, distribution, dissemination, but also of distraction as associated with entertainment.

Zerstreuung is often devaluated while the presence of the present is appreciated. A famous example might be Jean Baudrillard's critique *Requiem for the Media*. While Baudrillard does not agree with Hans Magnus Enzensberger's notorious hope to use media for emancipation, he comments on Enzensberger's examples:

> In effect, an immediate communication process is rediscovered, one not filtered through bureaucratic models – an original form of exchange, in fact, because there are

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neither transmitters, nor receivers, but only people responding to each other. (Baudrillard 2003: 286)

It is our impression that this rediscovery of an immediate communication process indeed fuels many assemblies. The exciting presence of responding people seems to make a cut through the cybernetic model of communication with its feedback loops to control the outcome, a situation of production that produces something uncontrollable. In the assembly society seems to become a public situation of presence and thereby it excludes all the specters that could haunt this situation and would ask for a very different response and responsibility. We do not want to denounce the desire to look for a model of communication that gets rid of the nowadays dominant cybernetic model that still controls not only most of our communication (here we agree with Baudrillard) but all areas of the everyday. But is the celebration of presence (and the exclusion of the rest, with everything that disturbs this pure presence) really the only alternative? Or can we think of models which assemble, or disperse, differently, and thus open a space that welcomes the specters, the uncanny materialities of the non-present, which ask for a different responsibility as well as for a different economy?

3

We, as a small collective, cannot provide an answer. But we know that for Baudrillard's notion of response focused, concentrated listening is vital. Dispersed listening, *Zerstreuung* – as we established it in the parallel broadcast at *The Art of Being Many*, and as we tried to establish it in performative interventions in public space many times – often is seen as less valuable than a centralized assembly. Most would agree that a demonstration on a street is more powerful than a dispersed crowd. Direct communication is valued more than remote communication, concentration and contemplation more than *Zerstreuung*.

But why is this devaluation of *Zerstreuung* so common, why is it reproduced in many left wing discussions and organizations? We would like to answer rather simply: *Zerstreuung* makes the act of communication uncontrollable. For sure, there are many discourses (the importance of the author),

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norms (talking in a way that makes ›sense‹), projections (the intention is governing the field of understanding) and regimes (everyone is *one* subject and not several) that try to reassure us once and again that we could control this previous *Zerstreuung*. (And, for sure, everyone who is arguing in favor of the capitalist economy is convinced that we can control ›the system‹ and its previous accumulation, to make it more human and so on). But we cannot. Though discourse, norm, projection and regime are meant to repress this fact, it is still beyond our control. This is what makes it uncanny.

Why uncanny? Here we come back to radio: Our voice is in a way always already ›dead‹ when people are listening to it. It has lost the ›spirit‹ we were inhaling to speak, and instead gets possessed by other spirits. We as speakers are drowned in the materiality of the spoken word – structurally dead. Or you might say: The spoken word gains a life of its own, which we, the speaking subjects, are unable to dominate – like a specter. And though this may seem to be a disadvantage, that our word is severed from us, functioning like a continued castration, we should remember that through this process the spoken word can haunt situations no one has ever dreamt of (cf. LIGNA 2006).

4

From our point of view, it is decisive how we deal with this uncontrollable and uncanny moment in assemblies. Most traditional strategies for assemblies repress the mediality of the voice and try to replace it with the idea of the presence of speaking, the presence of the community, that recognizes itself here and now. The evil spirits of mediation are often exorcised by expelling the media in favor of authentic face-to-face communication. This argument is often used, as Baudrillard does, in coalition with the critique of mass media and culture industry and not seldom tries to find an isle of pure communication within the dirty ocean of mass media.

This traditional strategy can be understood as a certain way of producing the subject of the assembly. There is a certain interpellation, emanating from what Louis Althusser calls an ideological state apparatus that is at work in the mode of recognizing each other as subjects and the assembly itself as a community.

Could we think of other kinds of productions, other modes of production of the subject, other modes of speech acts and other modes of producing an

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assembly that are taking the *Zerstreuung* into account without controlling it (since in the last instance this is structurally impossible)? Could we welcome or even enjoy this uncontrollability of *Zerstreuung* instead of repressing it? Could we think of a society without this kind of an ideological state apparatus?

We would like to pose these questions again, since our impression of the event (or spectacle or assembly of assemblies) *The Art of Being Many* was that these questions remained undiscussed and that still a certain kind of communication, of understanding, of image production, of media usage (as pure means and not as a means without an end) seemed to be so natural. Again, we do not know an answer, since we are convinced that answers could only be given historically and collectively, in practice.

These questions concern the power of the assembly, as well as its structure. For sure, and we would like to stress this, an assembly provides a certain important empowerment. The presence of people, the humming of many conversations, the being together, the enabling of a certain speech act in a newly produced public of course provide a certain apparatus that allows a certain, otherwise unknown agency. But as exciting as this kind of assembly can be, we would like to emphasize that today's society is ruled by a dispersed spectacle, with an everyday-life that is reproduced in a dispersed manner. Considering this power regime, would it not be apt also to think of modes beyond the gathering, modes of a different *Zerstreuung*, modes that are always already at stake in a gathering, an assembly, already at stake while we talk – modes of multiplied absence.

5

Thus, LIGNA as a collective has been looking for strategies that, rather than producing presence, are multiplying absence. Such strategies start from a dispersed situation of reception (as the precondition for radio), which has been called (Enzensberger quoting Radio Alice) the »dirty« situation (Enzensberger 1982: 52; A/Traverso 1977: 119). Is there an agency in *Zerstreuung*, an empowerment through dispersion? Could the constellation of dispersed individuals be turned into an association that has political impact?

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With *Zerstreuung* or the *radio ballet*, as we called it, we developed a format that we did not regard as a gathering, but a public dispersion, a collective *Zerstreuung* in privatized public spaces – where every gathering would face immediate measures, like being expelled by security or police. In a way we were bored with being expelled by security guards and all the images of security services expelling people (as well as images of water cannons as they were screened at length during *The Art of Being Many*, reproducing a certain stereotype of struggle), even if we acknowledge that these fights cannot always be avoided, for example when you try to prohibit the construction of another shopping mall that destroys a park. Nevertheless, this kind of direct confrontation often produces victims, even martyrs, and with it the logic of resentment and repression.

Some of our interventions such as the radio ballet try to establish a different starting point. They enter the already existing shopping malls that we see as a central space of capitalist economy, its production and reproduction: There we learn how to behave ›correctly‹, there we learn to follow rules, outspoken ones such as house rules and implicit ones such as how to do window shopping, at what pace, with what kind of gestures and so on (cf. Frahm 2011). And we learn to behave as a commodity and to unconsciously enjoy this active subjection. Our performances propose that we should visit – or rather haunt – these places with a different kind of *Lehrstück*, being empowered by a collective, invisible and conspirative practice of radio listening. The audience or participants are listening to a radio broadcast via headphones. The program reports observations about the place, intended to sharpen the sense for the ways in which perception and bodily experience are shaped in shopping malls (one important issue is the so called Gruen effect [cf. Baldauf, Margreiter 2006]). The program furthermore analyses the rules and norms of the space and proposes gestures and actions that are not complying with them.

However, the synchronous listening surely already produces a certain deviation since listeners are not listening to the shopping mall music anymore but to dead (recorded) voices. When the listeners for example stop at the same time, since one of the voices proposes this simple gesture, they produce an enjoyable and uncanny situation. On the one hand, they just repeat the most common and normal gesture of this kind of space – stopping in front of a shop window; on the other hand, this gesture normally does not occur in a synchronized manner. The synchronized collective repetition of this gesture

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could be understood as a parody of the many not synchronized repetitions of this gesture that happen constantly. Listening to the radio, the listeners play, or more precisely, act, as Brecht put it, in the »third person«, with a certain distance that makes different postures possible (Jameson 1998: 58). They become empowered in the moment they stop believing in the notion of free will, the presence of the ›own‹ decision, the autonomous subject, but challenge the power relations of the everyday. By listening to the radio ballet they explicitly follow voices while they ›normally‹ mostly obey ›other voices‹ unconsciously. The radio program also enables the listeners to test different gestures, which they would not dare to try out individually: walking backwards, lying down, exchanging notes, hiding, running. Collectively, they establish a different agency for the duration of the broadcast: In the shopping mall all means have an end, all gestures in one way or another obey the imperative of shopping (even if malls such as the largest Dutch mall Hoog Catharijne in Utrecht nowadays advertise that they also provide the ›non-shopping experience‹). The gestures of the radio listeners are means without an end. In this dirty situation, they and their gestures provide a »pure means« (»reines Mittel«) and indirectness (»Mittelbarkeit«), as Giorgio Agamben reads Walter Benjamin (cf, Agamben 2000), and evoke an agency that does not function by presence, but by mediation and absence.

During such interventions the dispersed crowd is able to temporarily change these spaces and to appropriate them at least for the duration of the radio program. The listeners turn into a conspiracy of flâneurs, acting intransparently for the video surveillance. They are watched, but what is watched is hard to believe. Through dispersion, they are there and not there. Thus, the listeners are empowered to act collectively beyond the repression of the control apparatus. By exploring this agency below the radar, the surveillance apparatus can be experienced as powerless. These interventions may not challenge the system of power in the same way that squatting does, but they make us consider how ongoing interventions could be established that let the apparatus of control appear powerless forever.

Everyone who performs the gestures in this mediated situation performs the isolation in the crowd that is the essence of modern life. But spread out all over the place, acting synchronically, this dispersed collective action changes the situation for everybody – for the participants as well as the passers-by. This allows us to not only analyze these non-places, how they shape our subjectivity and how they design a certain everyday-life; moreover, by

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proposing different agendas, we find ways of producing other subjectivities, other modes of production. What would a dispersed assembly look like, what kind of agencies could a dispersed assembly develop, an assembly that performs activities which traverse the regimes of power and control and neutralize their power? How to develop not only the art of being many, but the art of being uncanny?

(please repeat)

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Un/Easy Resonance

The Critical Plural

ULRIKE BERGERMANN

The following considerations will examine the un/easiness in the experience of a human microphone in three steps: 1. Current political philosophy tells us to start from singular experience; 2. Artistic research scrutinizes the human microphone as a bodily technique of a critical mass; 3. Additional philosophical positions discuss the many with respect to the question of difference. Ultimately, my three readings will resonate with my singular experience as part of a human microphone.

I AS IN EMBODIMENT

Everything is illuminated, enlightenment has gone full circle, we can see everything but are hardly able to act on it: This is how the Spanish philosopher Marina Garcés (2006) pictures the vantage point of critique today. We know so much about the world, but can do so little, she claims – a point of view, of course, that reaffirms the spheres of visuality and information on the one side and agency and embodiment on the other by a division that is in itself heir to our history of rationality. But there is more to Garcés' demand of an »embodiment of critique« than this old duality suggests. It is about the one and the many, the singular and the plural.

In our highly individualized culture, new forms of communalities need to be conceived, or are emerging already and need to be recognized. While the individual life, the singular existence, is being privatized through various economies, the questions about possible forms of being together become

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more urgent. Where problems are individualized, there is hardly a ›we‹ to share them. In a networked society, every single one *is* insofar as she is connecting, connected to other nodes, investing in communication; the ›I‹ no longer exists unless it is networked – a form of being together that Garcés describes as ruled by control and (self) repression. The traditional mode of critique had pictured its starting point as distanced from the world, from a position that is no longer possible today ... therefore, it comes as a surprise when Garcés turns to the individual once more: »To ask for this ›we‹ requires starting from the only thing we possess: our own experience.« (ibid: n.p.)

How could that be, considering that these ›selves‹ cannot even conceive of themselves outside of all networked economies? Should we return to the contaminated category of ›personal experience‹, as if deep inside and beyond the intellectual there was a realm of the genuine? No. It is just that it is the only thing left to do, the last remaining position to take off from. »The fragmentation of meaning contains this paradoxical virtue: we are obliged to start with ourselves.« (ibid) Garcés proposes to »attack the ›I‹«, to challenge the privatization of the existence of the ›I‹ and, at the same time, to make use of it. »The quest for the common today requires the courage to drown oneself in their actual experience of the world, even if it is naked and empty of promises. This is what it means to embody critique.« And the notion of embodiment, here, is in no way a metaphorical one. »[T]he problem of critique is no longer a problem of conscience but of embodiment: it does not concern a conscience facing the world but rather a body that is in and with the world.« (ibid)

Garcés, then, turns to a range of political events and movements from Barcelona; I want to follow her provocative »enunciation« (ibid) of the embodied singular experience in remembering one that I had during a demonstration which made use of the human microphone.

I AS IN HUMAN MICROPHONE

The human microphone regained political and theoretical popularity during Occupy Wall Street's occupation of Manhattan's Zuccotti Park in the fall of 2011 (cf. Graeber 2011, 2013; Geiges 2014; Bryne 2012; Blumenkranz et al. 2011; Schwartz 2011; Mörtenböck/Mooshammer 2012). When cut off from

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electricity and in need of amplifying their voices to communicate, the protesters of OWS reactivated a tactic from the 1970s and used the form of the ›human microphone‹ in their assemblies. Whoever spoke had to pause after some words, so that the people standing close enough to hear would repeat together what had been said. Many voices amplified one and could be repeated again for those standing even further away. Response had to be slow and was managed through hand gestures and lists of speakers. The human microphone was seen as a tool of real democracy where everybody should have a voice, as opposed to only one voice being heard as representative of the many. It can be described as an assemblage of bodies and techniques, of spatial and vocational politics.[1]

»Democracy, not representation« is the interpretational formula of OWS discussed by political theorist Isabell Lorey. She unfolds the European model of democracy as grounded on principles of the representation of the people, designates these representational principles as an enclosure of a »power of

1 Not everybody had equal access to the human mic, though. As activist and participant observer Michael A. Gould-Wartofsky (PhD candidate in NYU's sociology department) wrote after taking part in OWS, collecting heaps of footage, writings, photographs, and conducting 40 in-depth-interviews, race and class issues often excluded the non-educated and the non-white from resources and participation. The group POCupy demanded diversification of OWS and argued that to speak of the 99% was not coherent at all in economic terms, as an average white US-household owned 20 times as much as the average black one (Gould-Wartofsky 2015: 98); a Jamaican participant at Occupy Oakland was quoted saying the occupiers would not speak for those who needed it most; facilitators or organizers mostly were young white people with an education that made it easier for them to handle the new modes of communication. Michelle Crentsil, member of POCupy, reported: »We could walk through the park and yell ›Mic check!‹ And we're like, ›People of Color Working Group!‹ And all of a sudden it gets all muffled and nobody's repeating you anymore. I remember that one. That one really hurt.« (ibid) Gould-Wartofksy continues: »Operational funds flowed freely to every group but the POC. Many who had come to the occupation to speak out found their voices silenced, their views sidelined by the facilitators and the drafters of key documents – often on the pretense that they had not gone through ›the right process‹ or spoken to ›the right people‹. [...] Throughout the occupation, I often witnessed white speakers seize the People's Mic from people of color.« (ibid: 99)

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the many«[2] (Lorey 2012: 30) and of the fear of the masses (ibid: 16-20, 27-28), and she explains the occupations as a symptom of a »desire of the many«[3] (ibid: 27) towards a non-representational democracy in search of its form. Lorey's emphasis on depicting a proper, underlying will of the people and her clear-cut interpretation of a somewhat murky situation notwithstanding, the scope of the activists' critique becomes palpable. One does not have to follow the romanticizing idea of a ›creative power of the multitude‹ or the idealized, homogenizing look at the incidents (where *desire, praxis, and process* stand for an opposite of representation) in order to appreciate the challenge the absence of an explicit agenda poses for traditional political theory and practice.

One of the most disturbing characteristics of Occupy Wall Street was the denial of the customary list of demands protesters usually take to the streets for[4] (supported by Slavoj Žižek (2011a): The vacuum within the hegemonic discourse should not be refilled too early in order for something really new to be able to emerge). The second characteristic, closely related to the first, concerns the ways in which to discuss, to take decisions, and to test new procedures of not only letting some chosen representatives speak, but to radically include the many. The new keyword is ›horizontalism‹.

Philosophers of various genres discussed the human mic in terms of the singular and the many (cf. Nancy 2000; Kastner/Lorey/Raunig 2011; Marchart 2013), artistic research analyzed its sound practices (Woodruff 2014; Kretzschmar 2014), and it might be related further to cultural histories and discursive figures like the chorus, interpellation, or call and response (Bergermann forthcoming).

›Composer-theorist‹ Jeremy Woodruff wrote his PhD at the Department of Music at the University of Pittsburgh in 2013, comprising a composition

2 Translation by the author.

3 Translation by the author.

4 Another one would be the slogan ›We are the 99%‹, as Jens Kastner argued: You cannot assume a unity of the 99%, neither theoretically nor empirically, but a unity should be considered as one always ›under construction‹, in constant *becoming*. Nonetheless, it is the majority who suffers from the financial crisis, so one might think of a metaphorical 99% (a metaphor for ›almost everybody‹). The majority, however, does not share *one* point of view, not a *single* voice (Kastner 2012: 67).

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and a written work about the human mic[5] and performance artist Sylvie Kretzschmar from Hamburg writes her doctoral dissertation in the context of an academic/artistic PhD program. Kretzschmar argues that public address systems (PAs) produce a certain space and choreograph speakers as well as the public/the collective. There is a certain authoritative trait here, as PAs configure whose voice is amplified, and, in that way, they ›dictate‹ the structure of the public. Amplification organizes participation and silencing. The new assemblies of the 2010s rely heavily on the voice in that the spoken word is part of a multimedia network of computers, smartphones, and the social media and in that the idea of ›direct democracy‹ calls for presence and orality.

MODES OF MERGING

The use of the human mic starts with somebody shouting »mic check«, and the crowd answers »mic check«, as if one was talking into an amplified microphone. The second repetition of the phrase, as Kretzschmar and Woodruff mention, does not only wait for the first one to end, but also pauses for as long as the sentence was, thus (automatically) producing a rhythm in a collective use of speech melody, asserting that there was a simultaneity of sending and receiving where words were received through the ears and sent out through the mouth/voice.

This, of course, calls to mind not only the old concept of the proximity of *logos* and *phone*. The romanticization of a collective experience amounts to the final realization of the figure of hearing-oneself-in-speaking, or rather: hearing-oneself-and-the-other-in-speaking. A set of hand gestures is supposed to indicate if the listener/speaker objects or agrees, even while repeating what was said, so that speech never has to be disrupted. It is left open how, then, possible objections can be seen by all, how they might affect the flow of speech etc.; the author even welcomes the amplification (not only of sound, but also) of affect through the human mic (Kretschmar 2014: 155); the crowd would be »bodily taken over by the spirit of the speech«[6] and

5 I thank artist Anna Bromley for this information; cf. Bromley 2013.
6 Translation by the author.

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would »throw back this enchantment immediately«[7] (ibid: 157).[8] ›Authenticity‹, in any case, remains coupled with the voice (even though the ›pathos of presence‹ goes hand in hand with an overload of documentary practices, pictures, protocols, video clips etc.). Even the gross simplification of transmitted messages in the human mic does not worry its advocates, who argue that it was within the pauses between repetitions that people would think and formulate precisely that the need of short messages would lead to a concentration and compression of content, and that the slowing down of communication, the conscious deceleration, would postpone the moment of political positioning, in a step back from points of view that seem available all too readily (ibid). The linking, even short-circuiting of traditional polarities – understood as a new political aesthetics – belongs, I would argue, to the human-technologies-imaginary-network called human mic.

Jeremy Woodruff's »Musical Analysis of the People's Microphone« starts from the mic's ›political speech‹ using »the fundamental linguistic/musical principle of imitation.« (2014: iv) Woodruff examines musical parameters of the tones of voice in the human mic, this »crossover between music and speech«, to find its »musical tactics« (ibid: 1)[9]; he considers the specific words of messages less important than the sound and »its musical dimension in political struggle and society« (ibid: 7), identifying synchronizing effects

7 Translation by the author.

8 »Die Menge wiederholt die Worte, ist dadurch vom Geist des Gesagten körperlich besessen und wirft diese Be-Geisterung unmittelbar zurück.« – In political theory, the importance of the *liveness* of speaking has been underlined since the French Revolution, as orality has been seen as an antidote against the corruption of the Ancien Régime; Mladen Dolar, then again, has criticized the »political fiction« that democracy was a question of immediacy and as such a question of the voice.

9 Woodruff used mobile phone videos (by protesters, via YouTube, or leaked police videos, illegally uploaded by Anonymous via web torrent) to measure wavelengths, time codes, frequencies, volumes, the kilohertz measurements registered in a chart, inventing scales of »intensities« ranging from 1 to 8. Close »readings« of recordings minutely describe the pitches in the sound, the more assertive phrases (in which the leader cannot be heard, the repetitions vary more; they are more in unison where people share the same opinion), etc.

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of this speech.[10] In his final analysis, the human mic is a sonic tool moving between unison (harmonies, repetition, sameness) and dissonance (alterations, differences). While identically embodying a message, there is, at the same time, »a critical distance from the source voice«, there are measurable »differences in types of critical distance« within the »process of dissemination and invention« (ibid: 142). Black feminist activist and theorist Angela Davis, in her use of the human mic, criticized its unifying mode of speaking and proposed to produce »dissonance, not unity, a noise in the system«.[11] Nevertheless, more often than not, the opposite has been praised.

Woodruff asserts that the human mic often delivered »more lyrics than prose« (ibid: 9). Kretzschmar states that the sense of the messages was often acoustically diverted into the bodies of the many »up to the suspension of the sense of the words.« (Kretschmar 2014: 157) Mattathias Schwartz, the *New Yorker*'s conservative commentator, conceded that the point of OWS was its form and the slogan »We are our demands« (2011: n.p.): The medium was the message, form followed function. Some writers hail the suspension of difference, as if Derrida's well-known critique of phonocentrism had been overcome: Extend a repetition of something spoken to many people, and regardless of the space in-between them, a sort of hearing-oneself-in-speaking, or hearing-oneself-and-the-other-in-speaking, would occur, collectively. However, Derrida's reading of Husserl brings up a differentiation between the outer and the inner perception of one's own speech act which allows for the perception of the spoken words as self-produced and thus to perceive the other as the own (Linz 2006: 58; Derrida [1967] 2000); the break (*caesura*) is fundamental here.

10 Again, this seems to happen automatically: To form »resonant bodies« – a term by Brandon LaBelle – would appear to be hardwired in the human species and its »sonic unconscious« (ibid: 18).

11 Angela Davis at Zuccotti Park, 30.10.2011: »How can we be together/ In a unity/ That is not/ Simplistic/ And oppressive...«. In: Woodruff 2014: 145. Cf. Žižek's (2011b) speech at Zuccotti Park, »Don't fall in love with yourselves«, September 13, 2011.

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I AS IN WE

While a romantic desire of merging the one and the many may be part of the imaginary of the human microphone, there are other images and readings as well: The manifold (*Mannigfaltigkeit)* of voices, as Gerald Raunig notes, promotes an ongoing enfolding of the utterance (2012: 123-124). The single voices are not in *uni-son*, but resonate in different ways: in synchronization.

This is not to say that the synchronized parts need one common pulse generator. Kai van Eikels finds collective forms that have no representation as a whole (as group, party or even ›movement‹, and even without the parts being aware of being a part) to be necessary (2013: 12) and, what is more, finds the difference between the ›parts‹ of these collectives to be essential, too: without it, there would be no synchronization.[12] When passing information in a synchronized manner, bodily affections can very well ensue; but instead of naturalizing or somatizing their effects, van Eikels sees the synchronized elements as oscillators. There is not only a relation between the elements, but also a relation to the element itself (ibid: 164). It is not nature that governs affects – oscillators pass their meanings horizontally among each other. Could there be a better description of what happens during the use of the human mic?

Another conception of ›parts and the whole‹ also reads like a theory of assemblies and their manifestations. A retroactive reading of Jean-Luc Nancy's ontology of being-with addresses the one and the many of the assembly. His notion of being-with conceives of no temporal (or logical, or any other kind of) priority of one over the other; there is no ›we‹ prior to the subject, and no ›I‹ before the community. Existence is always already coexistence, the singular does not come after the plural and vice versa: The world

12 In talking about the politics of the streets, Judith Butler reminded us that »we can only be dispossessed because we are always already dispossessed«; Greek philosopher Athena Athanasiou replied that it is not the same to ›be‹ dispossessed, on the one side, and ›to become‹ or ›be made‹ dispossessed, on the other. The language of philosophy here is just not *in sync* with the language of political life (Athanasiou / Butler 2013: 5).

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is »singularly plural and plurally singular« (2000: xiv).[13] The price for this ›horizontalism‹ is mediation: In theorizing the ›with‹, there seems to be little to no concern for the ›through‹; difference is not crucial. There is no *mi-lieu*, writes Nancy, nothing in between the one and the other, no instrument, no medium: »Everything passes between us.« (ibid: 5)[14] The materiality of communication gets out of focus here, but even speech acts are based on such a materiality. Seen from Nancy's perspective, the sound of the human mic may be eventful, but it passes through bodies, space, resonances without any impediment whatsoever.

MODES OF UNI-SONIZING

Van Eikels sees no need for a common script for the many; Nancy sketches com-munity as the effect of a continuous passing, but Raunig goes for a different interpretation. He proposes a Deleuzianian »new schizo-competency« in making use of the »social-machinic relations out of which the enunciations of the multiple emerge« (2013: n.p.; cf. 2012: 124-125). Whoever says ›I‹ in speaking, listening, repeating, speaks as a machinic subjectivity; this ›I‹ does not aim at a perfect, unequivocal unison, but enunciates her own position, blurs author and audience, produces noises and multiple sounds as well, not in accordance but in consonance (2012: 125). And this holds true for the

13 »The Being is singular plural. You always start within the alterity of someone. Co-appearance does not mean to come out into a light, but being in the simultaneity of being-with, where there is no being as such (*an sich*) which was not instantaneously *with*.« (Nancy 2000: 107).

14 »This ›between‹, as its name implies, has neither a consistency nor continuity of its own. It does not lead from one to the other; it constitutes no connective tissue, no cement, no bridge. Perhaps it is not even fair to speak of a ›connection‹ to its subject; it is neither connected nor unconnected; it falls short of both; even better, it is that which is at the heart of a connection, the *interlacing* [*l'entrecroisment*] of strands whose extremities remain separate even at the very center of the knot. The ›between‹ is the stretching out *[distension]* and distance opened by the singular as such, as its spacing of meaning. [...] ... there is no intermediate and mediating ›milieu‹.« (ibid: 5).

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scholars whose desires are part of this machine as well, be it Woodruffs frequency measurements, Lorey's chain of revolutions, Kretzschmar's melting pots of sounds and activism, Raunig's notion of the manifold.

Of course, it is easy for myself as a scholar to comment on these philosophies, explain my reservations regarding figures that merge positions, or explain preferences for a diversity of antagonisms. The greater challenge, however, is posed by Garcés' quest for »the courage to drown oneself in [the common's] actual experience« (2006: n.p.). The experience of reading and thinking can feel like drowning oneself or at least like diving into something. But this is not the experience Garcés describes. Being part of a demonstration that used the form of a human microphone – as a means to express solidarity with the Occupy movement, although loudspeakers were available[15] – was an experience that made me feel very uneasy, and, following Garcés, I briefly want to consider that un/easiness.[16]

To cut a long story short: International capital pours into cities in search of places for investment, and expensive housing estates expel people from their homes; housing becomes the site for a struggle between public concerns and the free play of capital. Cutting it even shorter means taking demands for a change of these policies to the street. One protester does it, and then we all do it, on the Reeperbahn in Hamburg. – Repetition. – The first impression was the feeling of obeying a rule, of simply repeating words, following the sound of one leader, and reminded me of the church I went to as a child. – Trepidation. – Coming of age and saying I had been part of the very act of rejecting repetition. Besides, I was critical about the fact that, at that time, it was likely to have the same small range of male (and white, eloquent, smart)

15 The anti-gentrification demonstration *SOS St. Pauli*, Hamburg, November 28, 2011.

16 The uneasiness does not stem from a rejection to be part of a group, or of a mass of people as such; I mostly like to identify with a certain bunch of people, and I would follow Nancy insofar as »[w]e do not have to identify ourselves as ›we‹, as a ›we‹. Rather, we have to disidentify ourselves *from* every sort of ›we‹ that would be the subject of its own representation, and we have to do this *insofar as* ›we‹ co-appear. Anterior to all thought – and, in fact, the very condition of thinking – the ›thought‹ of ›us‹ is not a representational thought (not an idea, or notion, or concept). It is, instead, a *praxis* and an *ethos:* the staging of co-appearance, the staging which is co-appearing.« (2000: 71).

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speakers at the mics (though I agree with their analyses and postulations); I was part of a choreography I had not opted for. (Of course, walking in the line of a demonstration has a similar quality of following. But at least it visually translates something to the public whereas the Reeperbahn's human mic did not have to translate anything acoustically to the protesters). The ›I‹ I am used to prefers to consider itself as someone expressing ideas more sophisticatedly; this vanity feels more at home in gestures between irony and appropriation, in a non-space, as in joining the male gay guys at Christopher Street's parade in singing Udo Jürgens' song »Aber bitte mit Sahne« (»With cream, please«).

Of course you could argue that it was up to me, that it was my freedom to choose whether I wanted to consider myself as a symbolic speaker, as part of a staging of solidarity, etc., but it did not work. I was not able to perceive the situation as hearing myself (and the others) in speaking, to enjoy the sound in and over the distance between the statement and its repetition. Difference, I feel, is as little a given as is unity. I could not work through, learn, perform, and join a mutual understanding of this practice with my own practice of speaking at that time. To me, one learned practice is as embodied as another one, so my reaction might have been different. Even if I would have agreed to Garcés' concept of starting at my individual privatized self, I could not find it there. The ›I‹ on the street, that the writing I is trying to reconfigure, was neither addressed or enunciated through the human mic nor became aware of itself in rejecting the repetition.

If there is a process of unfolding the I and the many through practices and exchanges, learning to be part of this process must have changed during the last decades. I am part of a generation that was politically socialized during the 1980s and 90s, and my model of a praxis of ›the one, the many and their techniques‹ would be karaoke, with its form of repetition that is at the same time devoted and blunt. The 21st century, now, develops new modes of being (part of) a critical plural. The art of being many is practiced not so much in actualizing a past and expressing itself in its critical and changeful repetition, but in actualizing a present. So, in practicing, the many are produced, and the ›I‹ will be produced, as in hindsight, though »[t]he one never enters into an exchange with the multiple as unity, as identity« (Raunig 2013: n.p.), not as the known I, and: »the subject of enunciation of critical thought« today is »an anonymous and ambivalent subject« (Garcés 2006: n.p.). Therefore, the ›I‹ that I know will not have been the same, and ›embodied critique‹,

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which emerges when the self is drowned in the actual world, will be a distributed body. In writing about it ›now‹, I make up the utopian move I was not able to perform on the street. *As* critique, Garcés' »actual experience of the world, even if it is naked and empty of promises« does not sound as poetic and full of resonating harmonies as many writings about the human mic did. Being many, or rather: having produced the many by becoming the many does not necessarily sound like a song. I beg your pardon: The assembly never promised me a rose garden. – But many roses.

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Materials of the Assembly

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Coming Together, Coming Apart

A Soundtrack for the Journey to an Assembly

RANDOM PEOPLE (DANIEL LADNAR/ESTHER PILKINGTON)

There is no assembly without the journeys that all participants have to undertake to get there. These journeys are the precondition of any assembly, yet they are usually not considered part of the assembly itself. The journey to the assembly, then, is an ideal occasion to ask how the assembly is framed, or, put differently: when it begins and ends, how it relates to the rest of the world and who will actually be able to participate.

To this end, we have made a soundtrack for the journey to an assembly, on the occasion of *The Art of Being Many*, and thus with a specific context in mind, but with the intention of keeping it open for journeys to and from other assemblies[1]. Since the journeys of different people will necessarily be different, we have decided to make different tracks available to be listened to in different moments on the journey rather than one continuous soundtrack. There are three tracks for the way to the assembly and one for the journey back. The music on the tracks was provided by Umherschweifende Produzenten, the soundtrack was recorded and mixed at Alien Studios in Hamburg by Ronnie Henseler, and all tracks are available for download at the-art-of-being-many.net.

1 Because all these assemblies and journeys will be different, some things will make more or less sense in different contexts, and some assumptions will be wrong. For instance, the whole format assumes a listener travelling with relative ease, having some sort of mobile device ready to use, and with nothing more pressing to do than listen to these tracks on her way.

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As performance makers, we have become increasingly concerned about performance's obsession with the present, with notions such as experience, immediacy, liveness or eventhood – because they impose a logic of exclusivity on performance, a diktat of having to be there, which in turn excludes anyone who, for whatever reason (because, for instance, they had other commitments or had not been born yet), could not make it to a performance, or at least deems their access to a performance secondary or inferior. We know that the live moment is unlike any other possible encounter with the work – we love being there – but to privilege it over other kinds of encounters perpetuates this logic of exclusivity. Hence, the different ways in which performance transgresses or exceeds its own eventhood have been an important focus of our work in recent years. *The Art of Being Many* seemed an interesting context to continue this investigation into an *art of not being there* and thus into the different ways in which performance circulates beyond the frame of the singular event – via documentation, hearsay, the journeys to and back from the event, or in a book – here, we have decided to include excerpts from the texts we have written for all four tracks.

Being there, of course, is a constitutive element of any assembly, not just the assemblies of theatre and performance. And this is especially true for the assemblies that informed and motivated *The Art of Being Many*, the practices of assembling, of occupying, of deliberating that real democracy movements across the world introduced and adopted as ways of enacting alternatives to representative democracy. The idea behind this soundtrack for the journey to an assembly is not a questioning of such practices; it is merely an attempt to highlight the importance of forms of participation and circulation that extend the spatio-temporal frame of the singular event.

Maybe it helps to think of this as a rehearsal: the repetition of something that has not yet happened.

TRACK 1 > A BLIND DATE WITH THE MANY

a track to be listened to just as you are about to step out onto the street to start your journey to the assembly

One. Two. One. Two. Check Check.

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Hi. Hello. Hello, wherever you are. This is a track to be listened to just as you are about to start your journey to the assembly. Just before you step out onto the street. Soon, you will be many. Soon, you will come together. Soon, you will meet. Democracy is like a blind date: You just don't know who will turn up. Are you ready? Are you ready for your blind date with the many?

One. Two. One. Two. T minus 1. Two. One. Zero. One Zero.

It begins now with a first step. It begins now with the word now. It begins with an exclamation mark marking the end of the phrase: Let it begin! Let it begin exclamation mark. It begins now with a beat. It begins before it begins with you walking. Off you go. Have a safe journey!

On a journey, the future is always elsewhere. On a journey to the assembly, the future is other people. Whenever an assembly begins, people have already assembled. Every assembly is the destination of many journeys. This is not a journey of self-discovery. You will not be by yourself for much longer. Soon, you will be many. Off you go. And take care!

You are already many, but soon, you will meet. Democracy is like a blind date: You know where you are going, but you don't know where you're gonna end up. Off you go to your blind date. And good luck!

Did you bring the right shoes? Will they take you where you need to be? What are these boots made for? Come together, right now. But right now, you are somewhere else. Coming together, walking towards right now. Right now. Soon, it will be right now. Soon, you will have come together. Soon, you will have assembled. It has begun before it has begun with you going on a journey. Off you went.

These are one of many steps. This is one of many journeys. This is one of many streets. What are these streets made for? Will they take you where you need to be?

Look back at what you are leaving behind. But keep going. Listen and keep going.

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One two. One two steps. One two. One, two, three. One, two, three steps. Come together, right now. Right now.

TRACK 2 > THE ASSEMBLY OF ABSENTEES

a track to be listened to somewhere along the way to the assembly

One. Two. One Two. One Two Two. Check Check. Mic Check. Welcome back. Welcome back on track. This is a track to be listened to somewhere along the way to the assembly. Welcome on track to the assembly. This is a track to be listened to somewhere on the road. Somewhere on the move. Somewhere in transit. Somewhere out there.

Check Check Mic Check. Check Check Reality Check. Check Check Border Check. Test Test Protest.

This is for everyone out there. This is for everyone on the move. This is for everyone on the road. This is for everyone in transit. This is for you. And this is for all of you. The assembly will be one stopping point on many journeys. This is for you and this is for all of you.

This is one of many journeys. This is one of many journeys connecting the assembly to the world out there. The assembly is one of many destinations. The roads that lead you to the assembly also transport tourists migrants commodities commuters.

Check Check Border Check. Test Test Protest. Take one, take two. Take it to the streets. This is the assembly of absentees. Welcome to the assembly of absentees.

Tell somebody where you are going. Invite somebody to come with you to the assembly. Hello, stranger. What's your destination? Hello, fellow traveler. The journey is not the reward. Hello, fellow traveler. This is a blind date. Hello, stranger. Where are we going?

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Or: You can still turn around. You can still get off. You can still go somewhere completely different. You can still go off track.

Take one, take two. Take it to the streets. This is the assembly of absentees.

TRACK 3 > RIGHT NOW IS ALMOST HERE

a track to be listened to when you have almost arrived at the assembly

One. Two. One. Two. Three. One. Two. One. Two. Three is a crowd. One. Two. One. Two. Three. Four. This is a track to be listened to when you've almost made it. When you're almost there. Maybe you can count the steps? One. Two. One. Two. Three. Four. Five hundred. How many will there be? Does it matter how many? There is always many more. One, two, three is a crowd.

Think of the people who cannot make it: Their number always exceeds that of any concrete gathering of people, because everybody is invited. Remember that there are different manifestations of the many, that this future gathering is only one of them: There are those who turn up, and those who turn on, those who tune in, those who participate without being there, virtually, in spirit, but for real. Those who can't afford the train fare. Those who have others to care for. Those beyond the border. Those who didn't get the invitation. Those who send their message of solidarity. It's everybody who's here and it's everybody else. It's all of us together and it's everybody else.

You are almost there. You are about to be many. You might have noticed already that there is some ambiguity here in how you are being addressed: it is not always clear if that ›you‹ means you individually or ›you‹ in a larger group of people, ›you‹ in a collective, a public, the *many*. It can mean ›you‹ who is arriving at this moment, alone perhaps, or it can mean ›you‹, all the people who are on their way. Let's enjoy this uncertainty for a moment. It will never completely go away. And that's ok. This means you. And this means all of you: participation, not belonging.

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It's everybody who's here and it's everybody else. It's all of us together and it's everybody else.
A network of dispersed assemblies, following a rhythm of delays and feedback, deferral and urgency, resonating with each other across the dimensions of time, space, and ideas – it might not all be happening at the same time but it's all happening now.

It's everybody who's here and it's everybody else. It's all of us together and it's everybody else.

You've almost made it. You are almost there. Right now is almost here. You're about to step into the frame of the assembly. There might not be a physical frame, no threshold, no door, no border. You might just be stepping onto a square, or onto another street. But when you do, you are leaving others behind.

It might not all be happening at the same time but it's all happening now. Are you there?

It's everybody who's here and it's all of us together. It's all of us together and it's everybody else.

Are you there? Are you there yet?

TRACK 4 > BETWEEN IS WHERE IT'S AT

a track to be listened to once you're back on your own after the assembly

One. Two. One. Two. One Two. One is the loneliest number. This is a track to be listened to when you're back on your own.

This is you leaving. This is you being private again, wearing headphones, walking away. And nobody else knows what the voice in your head is saying. Off you go. Farewell. Take care.

The many are many without you. But without is where it's at.

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When have you stopped being many? Have you really stopped? How much space can there be between us before we stop being many? How much distance, how much time, is required for this to be over? When are you out of range? Are we coming apart right now? What is it that will bring us back together?

Do we need to be together for something to happen between us, in the space between us, which is only getting bigger now, the space between us growing, the scope of our togetherness extending, until there's night and day between us, oceans and continents, until we are becoming a constellation of planetary proportions. A world between us.

Between is where it's at.

Are you still there? Are you still out there? Are you still listening?

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The Art of Being Many

A Critical Review

CHRIS ZISIS

INTRODUCTION

Around the last weekend of September 2014, activists, researchers and artists from all over Europe gathered and fused in the so called a*ssembly of assemblies, The Art of Being Many*, which took place at Kampnagel Internationale Kulturfabrik in Hamburg[1]. A call for the assembly launched by the website of the organizational team accompanied by a newspaper produced for the event had served as an initial informational guide of what was about to happen in those days in a theater hall of this huge cultural center in the city of Hamburg.

Not only as a historical conjuncture, but as an occurrence in the given time period, I can definitely argue that this was a proper chance for all activists, artists and researchers (and not only), involved in direct-democratic and new social movements from all over the world, to gather in this experimental set-up in order to share and exchange experiences, knowledge, as well

1 The assembly was organized, among others, by geheimagentur, WAV, artists from Gängeviertel Hamburg, FREIFUNK, Showcase Beat le Mot, the Institute of Sociology, Hamburg University, and the graduate program Assemblies and Participation (http://the-art-of-being-many.net, accessed January 23, 2016).

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as to explore new paths of collective action. This new multitude[2] had already, directly or indirectly, been involved in major uprisings and public protests in these last four years: In 2011, from the Indignants' movements of the squares in Syntagma, Athens Greece, the M15 and PAH in Spain, to the historical ›Arab Spring‹ of Tahrir square in Cairo, Egypt – additionally, from the tremendous and bombastic riots and uprising that took place at Gezi Park in Istanbul, Turkey (2013), to the Occupy London and Occupy Wall Street and other related international mobilizations[3].

2 A favorable ›Spinozian‹ term used by new social movements, coined and reappeared by Hardt/Negri (2000) and Virno (2003). Here I choose this quote by Virno which also features in the article »Chaos: Our Own ›Gun on The(ir) Table‹ (Gavrilides/Lalopoulou 2014) that fits our essay: »The Multitude obstructs and dismantles the mechanisms of political representation. It expresses itself as an ensemble of ›acting minorities‹, none of which, however, aspires to transform itself into a majority. It develops a power that refuses to become government. Now, it is the case that each of the ›many‹ turns out to be inseparable from the ›presence of others‹, inconceivable outside of the linguistic cooperation or the ›acting-in-concert‹ that this presence implies. Cooperation, however, unlike the individual labor time or the individual right of citizenry, is not a ›substance‹ that is extrapolatable and commutable. It can, of course, be subjected, but it cannot be represented or, for that matter, delegated. The Multitude, which has an exclusive mode of being in its ›acting-in-concert‹, is infiltrated by all kinds of Kapos and Quislings, but it does not accredit stand-ins or nominees« (Virno 2003: n.p.).

3 For the relation of these movements with practices of the rising squatting movement in Europe, I quote from the preface of Squatting Europe Kollektive's *Squatting in Europe: Radical Spaces, Urban Struggles*: »Thanks to the Occupy movement, the call to squat is once again raised more widely and acted upon with increasing frequency. The movements of the Arab Spring and the 15M movement in Spain, which catalyzed similar ›real democracy‹ movements of *Indignados* in Italy, France, the Netherlands, Germany and Greece, as well as the Occupy movement in the US all started out with taking over – not buildings but – public and private squares and plazas. Most of these movements used the (re)appropriated spaces to set up tents, kitchens, libraries, and media centers to collectively organize their assemblies and working groups, their rallies and marches, as well as their everyday lives in a horizontal, self-managed, and direct-democratic style. In the process, they have transformed public spaces into commons – common spaces

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Hence, a massive accumulated experience has been generated and there has been substantial anticipation, expectations, as well as curiosity, enthusiasm and bewilderment for this post-critical[4] assembly that would bring together all these emerging new subjectivities, which criticize neoliberal capitalist strategies and struggle to configure alternative practices against this devastating global capitalist system. In this essay, I will discuss and share my experience, insight and critical thoughts on both my participation in one of the working groups entitled *Blockade and Panic*, and the whole endeavor of this ›lab-type‹ encounter. Apart from personal interpretations and input generated through the aforementioned working group and its subsequent presentation in the ›public days‹ of the assembly, I will strive to conduct a critical inquiry of the whole project, whilst approaching the following key questions:

a) What was the gain and benefit of such an experimental set-up, laboratory and fusion of politics/performance, coupled with mixed and hybrid media for gatherings of political action, new social movements and effective anti-capitalist strategies?

b) Were any new strategies/practices developed and elaborated during these four days of the assembly, and if yes, what are they? How can such endeavors influence and distort institutions (financial, political, ideological), as well as propose new ways of contributing to emerging new social movements, solidarity networks, and resisting the multilateral attacks of actors of the late

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opened up by the occupiers who inhabit them and share them according to their own rules. As with squatters of social centers or large buildings, the occupied squares represent(ed) not only a collective form of residence on the basis of shared resources, but also a political action: in this case laying siege to centers of financial and political power. Importantly, they have also served to explore direct-democratic decision-making, to prefigure post-capitalist ways of life, and to devise innovative forms of political action« (Mayer 2013:1).

4 Perhaps in the sense that Dewdney et al. discuss the notion of the ›post-critical‹: »The position of the post-critical is intended […] to develop a position which brings together academics, [museum] professionals and others in productive ways in order to open up new avenues of meaning and purpose through the agency of audiences« (Dewdney et al. 2013: 2).

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neoliberal capitalist chimera? Last, but not least, some special moments from the assembly will be shared and highlighted.

DAY 1: BLOCKADE AND PANIC
MY EXPERIENCE

I had the opportunity to participate in the working group *Blockade and Panic*, one of the six that took place in the preparatory phase of the encounter on the very first day in Hamburg. This group was comprised mostly of comrades, researchers and activists related with Greece (among them, Christos Giovanopoulos[5], Margarita Tsomou, members of the occupied Embros Theater in Athens, Thessaloniki Social Lab and others), Spain (Podemos, M15, the PAH housing movement, Enmedio Barcelona), Turkey, Slovenia (students from Occupy Ljubljana), Bulgaria and Bosnia-Herzegovina. The preparatory phase consisted of two extensive round discussions on the main topics of our panel, as well as the form of presenting our contributions in the days of the ›open assembly‹. The working group had a primarily ›Mediterranean‹ focus, regarding the status and actuality of social movements in Greece, Spain and Turkey, but what I found extremely invaluable were the contributions and reports by comrades from Bulgaria, Slovenia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. Witnessing accounts from actors of the public protests in Bulgaria, Slovenia and Bosnia-Herzegovina – specifically from Tuzla, informing about the student mobilizations that had taken place that year – with all their resonances, differences and particularities made me realize the intra-European connections of social struggle and acts of resistance. Furthermore, considering that there has been a significant ignorance regarding the status of public revolts in these countries – taking into account their specific socio-political and economic context, namely the brutal ›post-socialist‹ transition and the advent of rigorous neo-liberal policies – it was a great opportunity to not only grasp this practical knowledge, but to also find ways of building networks, of adjoining these ›resistance circles‹ (cf. Giovanopoulos 2012) within the European sphere.

5 Gionavopoulos is a member of Solidarity 4 All (cf. http://www.solidarity4all.gr, accessed October 1, 2014), as well as the coauthor of *Democracy under Construction: From the Streets to the Squares: Experience, Analysis, Documents* (2011).

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Additionally, ›what is at stake‹ was the igniting question that fueled the discussion – among the participants – as well as everyone's personal accounts of their moments of ›blockade and panic‹ in demonstrations and urban uprisings in their respective contexts. One of the main topics, set by Christos Giovanopoulos, was ›how to decolonize the geopolitical map of the world (not only of the EU)‹ and after all the pleasantly exhausting talk, we finally decided upon the form of our presentation in the public assembly. It was no surprise that it was decided to simply open up the discourse to the assembly, initially bringing up the crucial questions we had collected.

The panel was comprised of two to three moderators, several lectures that could only be heard via headphones on two channels, and, in the beginning of the session, there was a live streaming on a gigantic projection wall of the benefit concert in Skouries, Chalkidiki, connected with the anti-gold mining struggle there, which finally gathered about 30-40.000 people – SOS Chalkidiki was of course one of the prominent guests of *The Art of Being Many*.

Blockade and Panic eventually evolved into a more dialogue-driven, polyphonic discussion among the participants of the assembly with a parallel distinctive use of digital media (projectors, social media) in a balanced proportion, something like a group conversation in a live installation sequence.

Many challenging matters were laid on the ›table‹ of the assembly: from the issue of the rise of the extreme right-wing in all its transformations and versions within the European sphere, related policies and practices that are already ›here and there‹, the EU elites' financing of such extreme right-wing groups (e.g. Ukraine), to EU practices against migration. Equally important, local struggles on environmental issues were discussed, which are simultaneously global (SOS Chalkidiki), as well as ways of assisting these struggles – to put it in the words of Angela Melitopoulos: »How can we connect with each other and be helpful there«. Moreover, topics such as the paradox of building the struggle against capitalism while using the old terminology (class struggle etc.), the question of »how to occupy institutions in an anti-institutional way«, as well as the strategic discussion about how to access the institutions and the state apparatus without becoming the same as our adversaries (as articulated by the dynamic members of PAH) laid some crucial ›fertile soil‹ in the discussion in terms of proceeding with this *reinvention of politics* that the movements of the squares had performed worldwide. Similar ideas were resulting in a constructive discussion among all participants,

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about how ›we‹ should create new discourses with these models of resistance/disobedience to global capitalism and its materializations and repercussions, and about how new forms of political agency are configured.

Provocatively enough, when the question of how to deal with the materialization of state power was discussed, media artist Ilias Marmaras made an intervention, asking emphatically »What will happen when some of the movements of solidarity (e.g. in Greece) will finally take over the role of the State? What do we do then about the transformation and modification of these foundations?«. This statement proves more than realistic, given the actual circumstances in Greece.

I also found the contributions from our fellow activist I mention the respective collective in the next part) regarding the ›post-revolutionary trauma‹ in Tahrir square pivotal, in terms of how we ›read‹, conceptualize and filter the experience(s) from this historical revolt in Egypt through our ›western/Eurocentric‹ prism and tradition. The words of Zehra Leil Mortada (an activist from Tahrir Square) still echo truly and bluntly, concerning questions such as ›how to reject capitalism, end the border regime and talk about migration‹:

> We can take tiny little actions, initiate an individual basis that can make a difference in the lives of the people who are coming (crossing the border). Migrant workers, refugees, asylum seekers need help with German bureaucracy [...]. Everyone should perform acts of civil disobedience on a daily basis.

Last but not least, means of inventing and re-creating ›commons‹[6] emerged as another focal point for the panel: how to build new or reuse existing materials instead of being passive consumers of a global consuming market mechanism. All in all, I would argue that some of the most crucial aspects of the assembly were set in motion, covering a wide spectrum of topics around political action, creating expectations and anticipations of developing further common strategies and interconnections within these communities of practice that had gathered at Kampnagel.

6 As raised by a participant involved in the Degrowth Congress in Germany (cf. http://www.degrowth.de, accessed January 30, 2016).

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SPECIAL MOMENTS OF THE ASSEMBLY

Before moving to the critical inquiry of this gigantic project, I would like to share in this section some of its special moments, some highlights that still function as strong enduring memories and ›snapshots‹ of this encounter. These ›affective‹ moments belong mostly to the Affects and Documents panel that took place on the last day of this convocation. As it was written in the website announcement,

> international guests from the real democracy movements, media makers and their documents will open a multiperspective living archive by using, presenting, narrating, conveying and exchanging political experiences as well as strategies of representation and testing their potentialities of political affects (The Art of Being Many 2014).

Indeed, the first part of the panel kicked off in the best possible and effective manner: a 21-minute joint performance, mixing sound (both live acoustic guitar and audio from the documentaries), images, spoken word/narration, which I assume engaged everyone in the ambience and vigor of the projected pictures. This piece, which evolved as a peculiar alternative orchestration under the ›conduction‹ of Angela Melitopoulos, fusing the ›raw‹ power of images from the demonstrations in Gezi Park, Istanbul (summer 2013) with a low-key narration of two participants, accompanied by a Turkish comrade's quiet singing – playing a repetitive guitar chord, sometimes reminiscent of a lament and sometimes a silent and patient howl – managed to create many emotional reactions. This performance brilliantly blended analogue and digital media, but also delivered a strange and compelling array of moving pictures: the ritualistic notion of the protests in Gezi, moments evoking folk festivities and celebrations, the mourning for the loss of the ›loved ones‹, the victims of police and army brutality, the explicit state violence, the massive solidarity waves of the people, old women pounding pots and making noise, expressive, uptight and anticipating looks on people's face. In short, a palimpsest of facial expressions, emotions and connotations, indicative of massive demonstrations like the one in Turkey.

The second ›hit‹ from this panel came from the contributions related to the public protests in Cairo, Egypt (2011). Zahra Leil Mortada, the activist from Egypt mentioned above, introduced the works of two collectives: the

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Cairo media Collective Mosireen[7], which is monitoring protests, police abuses, illegal military trials, and creates a stream of information about the ongoing revolution in post-Mubarak Egypt (cf. Żmijewski/Warsza/Voina 2012: 12), and Words of Women from the Egyptian Revolution[8]. After stressing once again that »we need to keep in contact and stay together«, he presented two video works and stood for the follow-up dialogue. One of the works focused on the participation of women, on and outside of the square (connected with the YouTube channel of the same name that the group has initiated), delivering fierce images from the historic revolt in Tahrir Square. The interplay of words of rebellion (»revolution, resistance«) and the senses (»hear, see, taste, touch, smell«) constructed a narrative for the moving pictures, and I certainly cannot forget the clean-cut political statements of the two women (activists, political prisoners) who spoke in the documentary: sharp comments concerning organized state violence, remarks on ›pacifism‹, what people eventually achieved during the riots and defined as ›revolution's media‹ (Rasha Azab 2012), as well as the poetic monologue at the very end, with a female voice-over enunciating words, thoughts and rhetoric questions regarding state violence, revolt, peace, life and death. The ending of the video left me, and, I assume, many fellow attendants, numb and skeptical.

The ensuing discussion showcased a self-reflexive stance, a critical inquiry of the participants and those activists involved with media practices, echoing questions such as ›what pictures do we use to document the struggles‹ and topics such as the ›temporarility of the events of revolt‹ (as an activist from Madrid put it). It would be unbalanced, though, to neglect in the framework of this account, the visual footage shown by PAH (Platform for People Affected by Mortgages) from Spain[9]: particularly, two videos demonstrating acts of civil disobedience by the group after the brutal evictions that the Spanish special forces had implemented between 2012 and 2013, ousting people (mostly underprivileged social groups) from social housing they had been granted. The images from the bottom-up assemblies, the symbolic occupation of the town hall, the organization of the social struggle by

7 For a detailed account cf. http://mosireen.org/, accessed January 24, 2016; Baker 2014.

8 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NamUZHWJem0, accessed January 24, 2016.

9 http://afectadosporlahipoteca.com/, accessed January 24, 2016.

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local citizens' initiatives was depicted step by step, functioning as an inspiration and a prototype for similar cases, not only in issues of social housing, but also education, health, food, labor rights and so on (cf. Tse 2015).

Last but not least, scenes from the struggle of the anti-miner's movement SOS Chalkidiki were screened, showing, apart from the sheer scope of the environmental disaster the natural landscape has suffered, clashes between the police and the citizens' movements coupled with the laments of elderly women. The anti-heroic figure of an old woman shouting at police forces appeared as an ›archetype‹, a motif that was featured in almost all the projected visual works. In addition to the intense moments generated by the films and discussion of that panel, I can certainly postulate that this panel, along with Blockade and Panic and Real Fictions seemed to me the most politicized of the whole encounter, in terms of discussion and input, both in content and form.

All things considered, a strong foundation was laid for building intra/trans-European activist networks, long-standing zones of collaboration and solidarity. In the following part, I will elaborate more on this aspect. Additionally, it seems appropriate to point out the sense of ›togetherness‹ that emerged during the days of the assembly, especially for those who stayed on the premises of the do-it-yourself camp set up by the organizers. Sharing experiences from social struggles and self-occupied projects (from Factories like VIO.ME in Thessaloniki[10] to theaters as we saw in the Real Fictions session), realizing the interconnections of our struggles, the need to build and strengthen more entangled networks of civil disobedience, anti-capitalist practices and ›dissonance‹[11], which is more urgent and pertinent than ever.

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10 A recent documentary, titled *Antidrastirio* (22 July 2015), by the Greek public broadcasting network ERT1 is available at http://webtv.ert.gr/ert3/22iol2015-antidrastirio/, accessed 15 September 2015.

11 In the introduction to Stefano Harney's and Fred Moten's *The Undercommons*, Jack Halberstam writes: »When we refuse […], we create dissonance and more importantly, we allow dissonance to continue – when we enter a classroom and we refuse to call it to order, we are allowing study to continue, dissonant study perhaps, disorganized study, but study that precedes our call and will continue after we have left the room […] Our goal – and the ›we‹ is always the right mode of address here – is not to end the troubles but to end the world that created those particular troubles as the ones that must be opposed. Moten and Harney refuse the

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Last but not least, as a special feature I certainly would like to acknowledge the graphic comics of Enrique Flores, who was sketching the ›Many‹, commenting with a characteristic and lucid style, expressing at times, if not always, more than words can ever possibly describe[12].

CRITICAL OVERVIEW

In the attempt of articulating a constructive and fruitful critique of the whole project, I can start by admitting that this was an immense project, bringing together almost 400 people, trying to discuss a wide range of topics and collaborate in an assembly related to direct-democratic processes and political action in this age of global economic crisis in three days in a non-hierarchical, participatory and experimental mode. Undoubtedly a difficult, if not impossible undertaking, considering all practical and organizational impediments that could appear. Hence, a massive gratitude and applause goes to the organizers. Somehow, a source of hope for the future of new social movements and this crafting of ›agonistic‹ practices (Mouffe 2007) arose through this encounter. However, I still ask myself how the assembly and the panels pushed the discussion forward and if new strategies or practices were developed and elaborated during these four days. How did the ›experimental‹ setup and the so called ›performative‹ frame of the assembly assist in that endeavor? How did it function throughout this conference that was repeatedly declared to be ›non-conventional‹? What was the goal of the entire encounter? At this point, it seems appropriate to voice my critique of the project:

First, I personally felt disappointed and skeptical because of the things we did not extensively discuss:

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logic that stages refusal as inactivity, as the absence of a plan and as a mode of stalling real politics. Moten and Harney tell us to listen to the noise we make and to refuse the offers we receive to shape that noise into ›music‹.« (Halberstam 2013: 8-9).

12 http://www.4ojos.com/blog/index.php?s=art+of+being+many, accessed January 24, 2016.

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1) How can we cope and struggle with augmenting currents and transformations of extreme right-wing practices and politics emerging in Europe during the last years?
2) How can we create anti-fascist and anti-racist structures within our contexts (education, housing, work, health care, academia)?
3) How can we engage with the turbulent questions raised by refugee/migration issues and the persistence with which EU policies rely on the remilitarization of borders and all the strategies of ›state violence‹ that we have explicitly observed on every level during these last months in 2015?

The problem of undocumented migration and EU border politics is not new. However, as I said earlier, some of these issues were mentioned and no one would expect ready-made or absolute solutions, but my concern is with the absence of a strong focus or elaboration of solidarity practices regarding this topic. Despite the presence of so many activists, researchers and artists involved with these topics, there was not even a workshop dedicated to it, nor a panel on shared experiences (e.g. No Border Camps). Obviously, the presence of the Lampedusa Group and Schwabinggrad Ballet were an important contribution on an aesthetic, political and symbolical level, but it is my humble impression that questions of migration and refugees, as well as issues of institutional racism and extreme right-wing State policies and ways of battling those, were totally absent from this huge meeting.

Secondly, I argue that there was no extensive discussion on cooperation between activists and academia. There is a great gap, especially in the European North, where political action and activism are disassociated with academia, despite the numerous and constructive efforts, networks and groups being built inside the university field – at least from my experience in Germany[13] and in other countries, such as Italy, where there is a huge tradition, especially in some cities (Bologna, Milan). Admittedly, many of the participating groups are intermixed with academic researchers – for instance, some of the organizers form a part of a PhD program – yet my observation is in

13 At this point I would like to accentuate the great difference to the Greek academic reality, where radical left-wing, anti-authoritarian and related activist groups were marginalized and regarded to be a threat, endangering the stability and safety of academic regulations. Official academia was never part of social and student mobilizations, apart from some affinities with political parties of the Left.

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regard to the social structure, hierarchies and ideological mechanisms of the university as an institution, its dependence on a neoliberal capitalist logic (labor market, private corporate funding, etc.) and the subsequent exclusion of activist-radical practices. The example of ›co-research, militant research‹ from Argentina[14] and related international cases would be beneficial in terms of how to open up and distort academic sites of knowledge production or even create ›third‹ or in-between spaces among established elite institutions and activist research initiatives. Moreover, the question is what kinds of experience we can gain from networks of cooperation and groups from the Global South in order to bridge this unwritten gap with the Global North, a point of reference that I saw in many discussions with fellow activists (regardless of base and origin) taking place in the breaks.

Another remark can be made regarding the call for experimentation and the imperative of being ›not-conventional‹, which was omnipresent in the project, and which in my impression exhausted many of the participants. There was a slightly problematic aspect to the announcements and the website that read like a random flow of arbitrary statements. Thus, what ›we‹ were exactly about to do was not clear from the beginning and for some people remained blurry to the very end. It is true that this fluffiness[15] of the ›many‹, too much arguing for experimentation, innovative and unconditional ways of performing and acting within this encounter, eventually had an awkward counter-effect for many of the ›assembled‹ members. This agitation to ›act here and now‹ without a clear structure and more detailed prior information, and within the constraints of a cultural venue led rather frequently to a mixture of ambivalence and puzzlement. As has been noted, there was no sufficient structure on the panels, or accompanying detailed information on what

14 An elaborate analysis by the Argentinian activists Colectivo Situaciones can be read in the Chapter titled »Crisis, governmentality and new social conflict: Argentina as a laboratory« (2014: 395-409). The introductory note from the translator Sebastián Touza is also helpful (ibid: 391-393).

15 It is useful to note the political connotations of the terms »fluffy« or »crusty«. As Alan W. Moore suggests, they »denote differing positions in demonstrations in movement lingo. ›Keeping it fluffy‹ means no one is looking to be arrested. Crusty demonstrators are willing to battle with police, and do audacious things like ›unarrest‹ demonstrators taken by cops. The usage may derive from the UK« (Moore 2015: 13)

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we were exactly about to do, regarding agenda and schedule (apart from a very broad plan), with a goal of reaching some sort of results and conclusions (not in a technocratic sense) to at least see how ›we‹ can move further, in theory and practice.

For example, in the Real Fictions panel we were divided into groups to work on fictions we all eventually want to realize. One such example would be the process of the collective writing of the Charter for Europe, one of the huge and strongly anticipated open-process projects, which would apparently require a great amount of time and energy. How was this possible to happen in half an hour, to discuss and exchange views on topics as broad as those raised by the Charter of Europe? Not to mention the swift interruption by loud music and a dance by a duet in the middle of the hall after having been informed that we only have 10 minutes for a conclusion. These and other moments added to the sense of arbitrariness and confusion.

Proceeding with the question of how we interconnect our experiences and form new networks on an international level, it is striking to note that ›regime apparatuses‹ move faster, interrelate and collaborate in forms of ›technical know-how‹ exchange, seminars on surveillance, bio-metrics, state security – as in the case of Egypt according to comrades' accounts (e.g. the German Federal Security Agency training Egyptian-Tunisian regimes, Frontex Europe's presence against the protesters in Tahrir square) – and consequently, the movements and networks should aim to move faster as well. To illustrate this, why was there not any concrete, hands-on workshop on counter-media, alternative modes of dissemination of information or independent media activism since there was a plenitude of experienced groups present? The transfer of know-how, of ›infra-political‹ experience between activists from such diverse public protests is invaluable so that social movements advance in their tactics and techniques. This matter of the »infra-political« (Mitropoulos 2012:115)[16] was present, of course, but not fully scrutinized in the working groups and the public days. As Mitropoulos demonstrates, the infra-political

> formulates vocabularies of reconfiguration rather than foreclosure and standardization; delivers health care to no-border protests and undocumented migrants. [...] the

16 Cf. Shukaitis 2012, Harney/Moten 2013, Easterling 2014.

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infra-political revisions activism not as representation but as the provisioning of infrastructure for movement, generating nomadic inventiveness rather than loyal expertise (ibid: 117).

So, to think politics as infrastructural and the materialities of infrastructures as the pertinent political question means setting aside questions of identity, demands, promises, rights and contracts (ibid: 118).

Equally important, the fact that there was no connection with the real, the ›outside world‹, no actions and interventions in the city of Hamburg was also problematic – perhaps some sort of interactions with people from ›daily life‹, who are probably not entangled with any solidarity networks or activist groups, but who could potentially be engaged in issues of the assembly. The city of Hamburg provided a unique opportunity considering its strong riot legacies[17] and its many activist groups and grassroots initiatives, which were also present at the assembly. Why did we not sporadically leave our ›agonistic cultural container‹ and go into the city? A multiplicity of actions, talks, walks and other interventions could have happened. To reformulate a question put forward in relation to the postgraduate program Assemblies and Participation that co-organized the event:

to what extent do these assemblies – which in many cases involve or incorporate people from very different backgrounds, not only artists and scientists but also so-called ›experts of the every-day‹, children, seafarers, activists – feedback into sociopolitical contexts from which they emerge, to which they respond and with which they interact?« (Pilkington 2014: 5)

This question was left unanswered in *The Art of Being Many*.

In the long run, every attendant and part of the ›many‹ more or less shared a common framework, in terms of trying out alternative anti-authoritarian stra-

17 As Moore points out »popular resistance to the urban manipulations of wealthy rulers is a proud Hamburg tradition that has taken on new forms in the 21st century« (Moore 2015:114); Furthermore, »the authors [Novy/Colomb (2013)] claim that what protest movements ›need to be judged upon is their commitment to build and expand solidarities and collective actions with other social groups and actors‹« (Moore 2015:118).

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tegies to effectively combat capitalism in its materialization and configurations, and in exercising different forms of collective decision-making and action, eventually denouncing the ›old‹ values of representational and parliamentary democracy and continuing the legacy of the social movements of the squares and the Occupy movements across the world. In the end, the crucial question is whether the invention of new anti-capitalist strategies or the reassertion and development of existing ones took place in such assemblies, or whether it will in similar future cases. According to the collective Connessioni Precarie, the question is »with which forces, and with which discourses, will we face the next shake, the next rift on the surface of the European financial capital?« (Connessioni Precarie 2015a: n.p.), taking into account what happened in Greece in this ›summer of dismay‹ (ibid), as well as the side-effects and repercussions of a global economic crisis in general.

It is true that the capability of such ›experimental gatherings‹ lies within its very challenge, to bring so many people from heterogeneous backgrounds together, with simultaneously diverse and similar experiences from all these enormous battles against neoliberal capitalist strategies, and to share their engagement and embodied knowledge. Furthermore, characteristics such as the transformation of the notion of the political and conventionally organized political agility (action, strategies, actors, politicians-technocrats, hierarchical parties, forums of representational democracy), avoiding old terminology, creating new paths and ›ephemeral zones‹ through experimentation lead to new horizons and entanglements. Making connections, creating and regenerating networks, ›communities of practice‹, networks of knowledge and mutual support are the most crucial elements of such attempts. As Connessioni Precarie argued after the Expo in May 2015 in Milan:

> We must say loudly that someone thinks that it is necessary to build everyday connections within struggles and among the different figures who struggle, rather than actively replicating the individualization that neoliberalism imposes. We do not have to establish links between our own singular everyday condition and the one-day-riot, but rather among the multiple and in-homogeneous singularities that are everyday forced inside and against precarious, industrial and migrant work. (Connessioni Precarie 2015b: n.p.)

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Yet, the future of such assemblies remains to be seen. I would suggest that future projects try to encompass an even wider plurality, not only from Europe, but also South America or other regions with on-going social struggles, and incorporate more concise, organized and focused workshops for exchanging practical knowledge from our ›battles‹: from media to housing, to environmental issues, clashes with or resistance to state authorities, migration/refugee solidarity practice and actions, solidarity health care, food, education, ›bottom-up‹ direct-democratic congregations.

Additionally, it is crucial to avoid the dichotomy in critical artistic practices, for example between institutional critique and operating outside the system, as there is a necessity to adopt fugitive positions[18]. Again, concerning an issue apparently raised during the days of the assembly, a sort of division between activists and artists, or politics and art, I suggest that such a division is problematic and adds nothing to the discourse. There is an aesthetic dimension in the political and a political one in art (cf. Mouffe 2007: 4). These fields are not different, they can overlap and are interrelated (ibid) and as argued above, we should find common grounds, as well as strengthen and expand our networks and means of daily resistance and civil disobedience against all facets of neo-barbaric neoliberal hegemony. At the same time, constructive critique (as is the effort of this essay) constitutes a due demand of every element and ingredient of social movements. To quote Irmgard Möller:

> It is not sensible to repeat the crucial mistake of not conducting critique for many years in order not to hand in arguments to the opponent, unless this ›muteness‹ is owed to political incompetence or weakness or incapability. In any case, history is not repeated, it is continued, as has been righteously said. Only that a continuity without a sincere, bold and ground-breaking assertion of that which preceded, a continuity that will pretend as if nothing had happened in between, is rather doomed never to inspire

18 »Fugitivity is not only escape, ›exit‹ as Paolo Virno might put it, or ›exodus‹ in the terms offered by Hardt and Negri, fugitivity is being separate from settling. It is a being in motion that has learned that ›organizations are obstacles to organizing ourselves‹ (The Invisible Committee in *The Coming Insurrection*) and that there are spaces and modalities that exist separate from the logical, logistical, the housed and the positioned« (Halberstam 2013:11).

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a hopeful new beginning. And the realization of this concerns all the movements that were founded or still are in a similar state. (In: Keloglou 2007:12)

To conclude with Antonio Negri and Raúl Sánchez Cedillo:

What matters is (re)creating a flow of political movement, an open system of governance from below that holds together – through continuous constituent debate and the constant extension of this debate to the citizens – movement and government. It is possible to build this bridge, this coming-together – if all give in to the necessity that is called ›being majority‹. This is the empowerment that is decisive. (Negri/ Cedillo 2015: n.p.).

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Assemblies in Theatres, Biennials, Museums

The Failing Necessities of ›Being With‹

GIGI ARGYROPOULOU

Bruno Latour, in his essay »A Philosophical Platform for a Left (European) Party«, written in 1998 and referring to the era after the fall of the Berlin Wall in Europe, argues that »we are slowly shifting from an obsession about time« to »an obsession about space« (Latour 1999: 99). The challenge for the Left party no longer is to make the revolution, but »to explore co-existence between totally heterogeneous forms of people, times, cultures, epochs and entities« (ibid). This is precisely what the Right cannot do, as for Latour they are unable to absorb the »new obligations of co-existence« (ibid). Nearly ten years later, in 2007, The Invisible Committee, an unidentified collective, published a text under the title *The Coming Insurrection* (2009) as a call to arms against the destructive forces of capitalism. The introduction concluded with a question, a question that seemed a precondition for political action and change. This question was: »*Where do we find each other?«* (Invisible Committee 2009: 21) David Harvey in his book *Rebel Cities*, published in 2012, argues that if a viable anti-capitalist movement is to emerge then past and current strategies of spatial resistance need to be re-evaluated. He proposes as key the question of »how does one organise a city« (2012: 135) if the anti-capitalist struggle is to revitalize in the coming years. He also stresses that a central tension lies in a simple structural dilemma: How can the »Left fuse the need to actively engage with, but also create an alternative to, the capitalist laws of value determination on the world market?« (2012: 138). How might obligations of coexistence contest the desire to find each other?

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How might these collective becomings redefine ways to organize the city or notions of togetherness offer alternatives to »the capitalist laws of value determination« and models of an »experience economy« (Pine/Gilmore 2001: 77)?

From the fall of the Berlin Wall and the resulting lack of alternatives to a series of post-Millennium political events such as occupations, demonstrations, uprisings and insurrections across different locations, such questions have been posed, challenged and rehearsed, as citizens activated the public spheres, ephemerally and through discontinuous trails of praxis. This article seeks to focus on intersections of art and politics and the failing desire to produce alternatives to the capitalist laws of value determination in order to examine questions of togetherness, co-existence and the emergent and failing necessities of ›being-with‹ others in diverse space-time configurations.

In the arts and urban practice, the ›social turn‹ explored structures of togetherness and relationality and demonstrated a wider engagement with »obligations of co-existence« in cultural production in the urban milieu during the last couple of decades. Those works across the fields of visual art, performance theatre and architecture varied from community-based art to one-on-one intimate encounters, to happenings and gatherings, to site-specific performances and interventions that sought to occupy a ›specific environment‹ or which arose in close relation to particular socio-political situations. ›Real‹ people and/or communities were often invited to be part of such work either as participants or even as collaborators. Often, there is an attempt to create a localized temporary community, an ›in situ‹ assemblage of people. In *Living as Form*, Nato Thompson argues that the ›social turn‹ has shaken up the foundations of art discourse and notes that »these cultural practices indicate a new social order – ways of life that emphasize participation, challenge power and span disciplines ranging from urban planning and community work to theatre and visual arts« (2012: 19). Nicolas Bourriaud's theories fundamentally informed these discourses of relationality, sociality and co-existence. In his book *Relational Aesthetics* (2002), Bourriaud takes the realm of human interactions and their social context as a theoritical horizon. He draws on examples of artistic practice in the 1990s to propose that art no longer seeks to represent utopias but rather to construct concrete spaces. Bourriaud describes art as a »social interstice«, borrowing the term from Marx, who used it to describe exchange spaces which can escape from the dominant capitalist economy. Bourriaud continues to argue that »it seems

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more pressing to invent possible relations with our neighbors in the present than to bet on happier tomorrows« (2002: 45). As Bourriaud argues:

> This is a society where human relations are no longer ›directly experienced‹, but start to become blurred in their ›spectacular‹ representation. Herein lies the most burning issue to do with art today: is it still possible to generate relationships with the world, in a practical field art-history traditionally earmarked for their ›representation‹? (ibid: 9)

While the work of Bourriaud has been criticized by many with regard to the artistic quality of his examples, to notions of inclusion/exclusion and also concerning the question »what does democracy really mean in this context?« (Bishop 2004), since the 1990s a series of works sought to explore whether it is possible to create »relationships with the world, in a practical field art-history traditionally earmarked for their representation«. At the same time, notions of performativity, theatricality, experience and encounter frequently utilized in the arts also offer a fruitful perspective on the emerging neoliberal concepts of ›participation‹, which are recuperated by the marketing industries, by neoliberal institutions and power structures. In their 2001 text entitled »All The World's a Stage!«, Joseph Pine and James Gilmore write: »consumption is an experience, every business a stage, and work is theater. In the age of the experience economy, customers themselves become the product. They demand ›experiences‹ that can transform their behavior, even their lives« (2001: 77). In a recent lecture, Slavoj Žižek also discusses this contemporary obsession with experiences that are carefree and contends that »we want coffee without caffeine, beer without alcohol and love without the falling« (2013). Žižek further argues that this desire for experiences without their »dangerous counterpoint« is a paradox of our times and for him is an attempt to domesticate, erase and contain such experiences. Might practices within the social turn that emerged as a response to the social conditions of late capitalism then appear to slowly assist the conditions which they were seeking to oppose – especially as they were favored by art institutions worldwide that seek to demonstrate audience impact and participation, inclusion of communities, and action in the social realm, often offering smooth ›social experiences‹ of controlled participation?

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However, during these years a series of political events across diverse locations invited unexpected modes of ›participation‹ that challenged the limits of the ›social turn‹ and the role of art within this changing landscape. In 1993 in Vienna, the artist collective WochenKlausur created a mobile medical clinic for homeless people as a socially engaged artwork. In 2011 in Athens, over 480 self-organized medical centers appeared, exclusively organized by citizens in order to serve the needs of the many unemployed, uninsured, impoverished patients in times of crisis. During these twenty years the sociopolitical conditions have significantly shifted, that which formally appeared as a socially engaged artwork, an artists' intervention in the social realm, in times of crisis materialized as a bottom-up collective need. A series of political events across different locations practically tested the possibilities and »obligations of co-existence« and The Invisible Committee's earlier question was given ephemeral answers in the mobilized public spheres in squares, streets and occupied buildings. Assemblies often served as a mode of organization that supported a horizontal coming together and a collective decision-making. However, Harvey's earlier question of »how does one organize a city« and how the Left might »create alternatives to the capitalist laws of value determination of the world market« often remained unanswered as these emerging modes of coming together faced multiple challenges from within and in the face of repressive mechanisms.

In September 2014 in Hamburg, a camp was set up inside Kampnagel Internationale Kulturfabrik to host 400 artists, activists, researchers and participants for an assembly of the assemblies. A designed environment sought to facilitate the meeting in order to share »experiences from real-democracy-movements and artistic experimentation, we want to explore new ways of coming together« (The Art of Being Many 2014: n.p.). In recent years, and especially post-2011, a series of artistic events sought to engage with the political landscape to support awareness, or social change. For Boris Groys, this phenomenon of art activism is new and centered on »the ability of art to function as an arena and medium for political protest and social activism« (2014: n.p.). As he argues art activists want to change the political and social conditions »by means of art« (ibid). The assembly of the assemblies took place over four days in Hamburg in a designed environment inside a theatre and with the promise of a final presentation to an audience on the last two days. Seeking to resist individual presentations of diverse experiences and create hybrid explorations across different groupings and themes, the format

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functioned in some cases as artistic projects and in others as discussion forums and debates. The opening document stated: »Together they will prepare an assembly for about 400 people which is going to last for two days from noon to midnight. […] It is meant to focus on what can be done together« (The Art of Being Many 2014: n.p.). However, during these days many questions emerged and remained unaddressed: What is this ›together‹? How is it constituted? When might togetherness be possible, desirable and needed? What might be the needs of these diverse participants? What formats might accommodate practices of sharing and ›being-with‹? What is the role of time in an encounter? How can an assembly based on past experiences of other assemblies function here and now, in Hamburg? Unclear intentions regarding time and duration, aestheticization and spectacularization in the structure and the process led to a confused and unclear mode of getting together. Bishop's question in regard to relational work and Bourriaud's theories seemed somehow relevant: »What does democracy really mean in this context?« The potential of coming together is always related to the reasons and urgencies that bring us together as well as the quality of this time together that, as Bojana Kunst writes, »renders life possible (or impossible)« (2010: n.p.). In recent years, the format of the assembly is increasingly utilized in art events. Somehow, the assembly in the theatre or in the museum appears to politicize the whole event and offer a space for horizontality and collective decision-making. However, such instances bear the danger to actually contribute to the contemporary obsession with ›experiences‹ and support neoliberal modes of controlled participation rather than produce a politicized event. In order to explore ephemeral alternatives to the capitalist laws of value determination and market rules, it might perhaps be worth considering forms of resistance to the capitalist modes and uses of time, energy, production and consumption.

As more and more cultural workers today – both inside and outside institutional frameworks – seek to make artworks about and engaged with the political closures of our times, we might be witnessing a political rather than a social turn. Cultural workers implicated in contemporary political debates are producing diverse forms of practices that could be characterized as political theatre and art in a wider sense: works that in some cases take the form of critique and critical reflection, in others direct involvement in social movements, building autonomous and alternative ecologies of living. This ›political turn‹ is also apparent in the increased number of biennales, festivals,

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theatre programs and conferences that seek to address political and social realities, calling for works about revolt, crisis, conflict, occupation etc. Rancière argues that art and politics each define a dissensual reconfiguration of the common experience of the sensible and claims that despite a century of critique directed at the mimetic tradition, the assumption still appears to be that

> art compels us to revolt when it shows us revolting things, that it mobilizes when it itself is taken outside of the workshop or museum and that it incites us to oppose the system of domination by denouncing its own participation in that system. (2010: 135).

Might the artistic experimentations of the so-called social and/or political turn then be viewed as useful exercises of political and civic intervention? Or might we argue that such practices have been incorporated into the system as an extended new set of values, attitudes and structures, reaffirming what Boltanski and Chiapello (2007) have argued often happens to artistic practice and critique? How might such attempts redefine the role and the potential of performance practice in the political field?

In a documentary by Stefanos Mondelos under the title *FACK MSUV/ Performing the Museum as a Common/ and the Common as a Museum* (2015), we witness the creative process of an international activist/artist gathering in an art museum in Novi Sad in Serbia. The museum was occupied with the permission of its director and run as a commons for a week. In Mondelos' documentary we follow the process from the initial declarations to the final outcome.

Despite the initially good intentions, in the documentary it seems that the final outcome fails to radicalize the museum. On the contrary, it appears the museum somehow institutionalizes the participants. As the documentary reaches its closing point we see the outcome, the public sharing: a social gathering, performance works, mini interventions in the city streets and the museum. Somewhere in the documentary a man reads a text and quotes Walter Benjamin who in 1934 argued that »political commitment however revolutionary it may seem functions in a counter-revolutionary way so long as the writer (or the artist) experiences his solidarity with the proletarian only in his mind and not as a producer«.

As the museum is turned into a place of the commons and the theatre into an assembly, and the political turn is again incorporated by biennials and

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institutions, we might want to rethink what art and activism can do when they are reperformed or resituated inside neoliberal structures. In places of struggle in recent years we have witnessed new ways of thinking art and politics as new emergent hybrid forms rehearsed new configurations. In order to continue such explorations rather than erase or domesticate these experiences, it might be worth rethinking how acts, interventions and practices might retain their subversive potential inside other structures across arts and politics, processes and events. How might limits, borders and practices be displaced, pushed, destroyed and reconstructed out of specific needs, desires and interventions?

Natasa Ilic gave a talk in an occupied space in Athens, Green Park. A space that emerged out of a series of failing collective struggles, interventions, occupations and destituent acts in the years of crisis. Ilic discussed a series of projects by WHW in a variety of contexts and proposed to reconsider the ›usefulness‹ of art – »art might be useful because it is useless« (2015 n.p.), Ilic suggested. At a time when artistic and activist practices seem to be able to offer too much and at the same time have minimum effect on the contemporary situation, this impotential position might offer a starting point for thinking, acting and practicing at this moment it time. Reclaim the space and time of art as a mode of questioning the political instead of vice versa. Then perhaps the »obligations of co-existence« and the possibility of finding each other outside the capitalist laws of value determination might begin to rehearse impotential, emergent configurations through new uses of time, space and productivity.

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A Clock for Assemblies

Experimentation in Collective Time Measuring

SIBYLLE PETERS / THEATRE OF RESEARCH

The Art of Being Many was a temporal experiment in itself: an assembly of assemblies, lasting for four days, two of them in public, with hundreds of people all together in the same room; how can this be organized in terms of time? Timing is crucial for assemblies, and somehow it always goes wrong. And even the best of facilitators do not seem to be able to remedy this. Apparently, norm time and assemblies just do not go together.

Against this background, the Society for the Invention of Measuring Devices[1], a project based at the Theatre of Research in Hamburg, invented a special clock, the so-called interactive laser clock, which enables assemblies to take not only time keeping, but time measuring itself in their own hands. This interactive laser clock was first tested at *The Art of Being Many*.

In the following you find: 1) the speech that was given by the *Society for the Invention of Measuring Devices* to initiate the use of the clock as an experiment in collective time measuring and 2) a report on the use of the clock during the assembly.

1 The Society for the Invention of Measuring Devices is an ongoing project at the Theatre of Research in Hamburg. It was founded with the aim of developing new devices and methods that can be used by groups and collectives for a self-determined approach to measuring, evaluating and improving their well being. Many activities of the society have been documented on the blog www.gzevm.tumblr.com (cf. Peters 2016).

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SPEECH BY THE SOCIETY FOR THE INVENTION OF MEASURING DEVICES

»Dear Many,
The Art of Being Many is a durational piece. And certainly we do not have time for something like that. We have more important things to do. We have always already run out of time. All assemblies take too long and are still too short to get the really important things done. We need a break from the assembly. And actually: Everything important happens in the break anyway. And then we need another break, a break from the break, in other words: a break from time itself. And maybe then we could return and have a real assembly.

At the beginning of modernity, Isaac Newton wrote the following words: »Absolute, true and mathematical time, of itself, and from its own nature flows equably without regard to anything external« (Newton 1934 [1689]: 6).

He was wrong. He was proven wrong. Time itself is a movement, it is a movement of movements of movements, time is an assembly of movements, something that happens always and only in between. The way we depict and represent time, by measuring it, is such an assembly of movements. For now, this assembly of movements is very much resembling Newton's concept. This is no epistemological default, but it is due to the fact that time measurement is meant to govern. In fact, measured time is a, if not *the,* tool of global governance. Time measurement, based on the regular frequencies of electrons in movement, is governing the stock markets, the GPS systems in our phones and drones and all of us. And, of course, the best tool for governance is always the one that appears to be natural, unchangeable, absolute and true and so ubiquitous that we do not even notice it, most of the time.

Nevertheless, the way we depict and represent time is a collective decision. A collective decision that was taken in the early times of colonialism and industrialization. It was taken by all those who got to decide important things in those days. It was a decision meant to make the war machines of globalization work as precisely as possible. And they did.

After the end of Fordism, when in postindustrial societies time became something we were all made responsible for, things could have changed. But somehow we just never found the time to reinvent our measuring of time. We might not think about it very much, but in some way or another we know

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that time is nothing absolute and external but something that we have designed in a certain way to govern our actions. Only, time is always too short to bother. Time suddenly became too short for everything all of the time. We were caught up in the capitalization of time.

Let's stop this now. Let's have a break from time itself. Let's begin to reinvent time measurement and relocate the collective governance of our action in processes different from the regular frequencies of electrons in movement.

To do that, I would like to ask the assembly to declare that from now on this assembly is an autonomous temporal zone. It is in touch with other times, of course, but nevertheless it is temporally sovereign. In other words, I would like to ask the assembly to declare that this assembly is going to produce and govern itself through its own time.

The Society for the Invention of Measuring Devices, based at the Theatre of Research in Hamburg, has invented a special clock, an interactive laser clock, which allows us to do that in a simple way. How does this interactive laser clock work?[2]

On that wall you can see the green spot of a laser slowly moving up the wall. For now, the movement of the laser along the scale is equivalent to norm time. If we don't do anything the clock will just reproduce norm time as it is measured by any other clock. But: The movement of the laser up the wall can be manipulated, it can be slowed down or accelerated in such a way that the interactive laser clock is able to differ from norm time at a maximum of two norm time hours minus or plus.

If we all agree to use this clock as our master clock and coordinate the assembly and its different panels by using this clock instead of all the other norm time clocks, the time of the assembly will possibly be slower or faster than norm time.

To manipulate the clock, we will distribute small plastic bags with five time bullets each: five time bullets for each participant in the assembly. Throughout the whole assembly you then can feed the clock with your time bullets, slowing down or speeding up the time of the assembly according to the slot you choose to put the bullets in.

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2 Comissioned by the Society for the Invention of Measuring Devices, the interactive laser clock has been constructed and operated by Boris Frentzel-Beyme/Illuminium.

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Members of the society will now start to distribute the time bullets. Please make your decision by accepting or rejecting one of the small plastic bags. If more than 200 time-bullet-bags are distributed, the assembly will turn into an autonomous temporal zone. Thank you for your attention.«

REPORT ON THE USE OF THE INTERACTIVE LASER CLOCK IN THE ASSEMBLY

Remarkably, the interactive laser clock was the piece of equipment that was ready last. The time measurement mechanism almost did not get finished in time. Particularly problematic was the little mechanical finger that was meant to push the time bullets into the weighing mechanism following the metric of an algorithm. It turned out that this mechanical finger would have to be cast to work precisely, but there was no time left for that. The whole experiment was at risk. Then the Fab Lab Truck from the Netherlands arrived on the scene, the team examined the setup of the assembly and accidentally ran into the clockmaker, who was just about to despair. In this incident the art of being many worked perfectly; the team of the Fab Lab Truck rescued the clockmaker. With their 3D-printer a mechanical finger that precisely fitted the mechanism was crafted within minutes. The clock was ready to work.

After the Society for the Invention of Measuring Devices gave their speech, about 300 time-bullet-bags were successfully distributed; the autonomous temporal zone was established. Though there wasn't much reference to the clock throughout the day, many people participated in the process of bending time. During the first day the time of the assembly was slower than norm time, a difference of about 40 norm time minutes in total. Interestingly, this allowed the assembly to be ›on time‹ all day. The delay that big conferences usually generate and that produces so much stress for the people who run a program was perfectly incorporated in time itself. The interactive laser clock proved quite relaxing.

Before the assembly there had been a few concerns that by making the choice of speeding up or slowing down time visible, the clock would become a mechanism for the evaluation of a given situation. But this did not happen. The mechanism depicted the bending of time always in relation to the total time of the assembly, and never abruptly. Therefore, it was much too subtle

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to undoubtedly link a certain dynamics in the time measured by the laser clock to a specific situation.

Another concern was about potential conflicts between the time of the assembly and norm time, such as, for example, whether technicians who worked for the venue would accept the time of the assembly governing their working hours. But conflicts like these just did not occur.

During the second day participants speeded time up a little, so that at the end of the assembly the initial slowing down of time was almost neutralized, and the reconnection with norm time was surprisingly smooth.

Many things were controversial at *The Art of Being Many*. The clock was not. Throughout the whole conference people kept participating in the experiment. However, the clock was never the center of everyone's attention. Maybe that is the best you can say about an instrument of time keeping in action. Of course, people also kept navigating time with their mobile phones. Nevertheless, the clock continued to be a collective embodiment of temporal autonomy. And indeed, the experiment proved that to declare an assembly as an autonomous temporal zone made sense to most participants regardless of their differences in other matters. The experiment seemed to show that to loosen the ties to norm time and put an assembly in charge of its own time measuring not only has the potential to make time keeping in the assembly easier, but, more importantly, raises awareness of the constituent power of the assembly and thereby quite simply empowers the assembly to become one.

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Tear Gas Democracy

ORGY PUNK

BACKGROUND

The use of tear gas in combat is nothing new; in fact, Spartans took advantage of sulfur gas as a military resource in the 5th century AD. Contemporary history indicates that this irritant was used during World War I, when the French army included 26 mm grenades with tear gas in its arsenal. These grenades and spray versions became a common resource to dissolve public demonstrations in Latin America in the 1960s, and are still the quintessential tool against revolts in the streets, even though tens of years of scientific research have shown that tear gas is a poison that affects the health of human beings. In the 1990s, for instance, more than 70 people have reportedly died in police custody in the United States related to the use of pepper spray (cf. Smith/Stopford 1999). Pepper spray has the same ingredients as tabasco sauce, but at much higher concentrations. Tear gas, or CS gas, is mainly made from chili for its high content in capsaicin, which irritates the mucous membranes and the respiratory tract and is used by state forces to disperse public demonstrations, protests and riots. Being exposed to this gas for a long time can cause lung, heart and liver damage.

WHAT ARE PEPPERS (CHILI)?

The term ›chili‹ (from the Nahuatl word »chilli«), also called ›aji‹ in South America, refers to the immature, mature or dried fruits of a few species. The

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fruits of most varieties of hot peppers contain high percentages of capsaicin and related compounds, collectively called capsicoides.

The capsicoides bind to pain receptors in the mouth and throat that are responsible for the sensation of heat. These receptors send a message to the brain that something hot is being consumed.

Chili also has cultural purposes other than being used as food – as a medicine used by healers and shamans to treat coughs, tooth infections, and cultural diseases such as ›evil eye‹. It is believed that the smell of burning chili scares the impure beings: when a living being is exposed to this smoke, it gets purified.

JUSTIFICATION

To develop the performance *Tear Gas Democracy*, I combined my experiences as an activist - fighting in public confrontations – with my college education in gastronomy that introduced me to the work with chili in traditional Mexican cuisine.

My college education was in the field of gastronomy, acquiring knowledge in food chemistry, nutrition and sensory evaluation, obtaining scientific and technological knowledge of food. My work as a performance artist has developed in civil protests, formulating tactics of social articulation, generating various aesthetic strategies. As an activist, I participated in the fight for the legal recognition of homosexual couples in Mexico, and have been part of the organization of the 2012 and 2013 Gay Pride in Mexico. I have also been an activist in the *#YoSoy132* movement and the camp at the Monument to the Revolution, where I was in charge of the kitchen.

My college preparation and my work as an activist led me to develop this performance. On the gastronomy side, I have been in contact with the dried chilies used in Mexican food recipes and preparation; many involve fire-roasted chilies that create a suffocating smoke. On the other side, as a political activist, while fighting in public confrontations, I did compare the effects of tear gas with burnt chili smoke.

Many people, invaded by fear of tear gas, go in shock and hurt themselves by not acting in an appropriate manner: crying and running scared; something normal: humans fear what they do not know.

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I proposed a performance in which activists would come into contact with the smoke of burnt chilies so they could experience a similar dynamic to a police brutality confrontation, asking participants to face their fears. I was also seeking for a positive impact on the minds of the participants, using the magical and healing side of chilies. I intended do the same and tried to achieve a magical spiritual healing for the participants.

WARNINGS TO TAKE INTO CONSIDERATION

Tear gas and burnt chilies irritate the mucosa of the eyes, causing tears. If this happens, apply milk of magnesia mixed with water; this formula removes the burning from skin and eyes. If eyes are burning or if the vision is not clear, they should be washed with clear water for 10 to 15 minutes. If contact lenses are used, they have to be removed with freshly washed hands.

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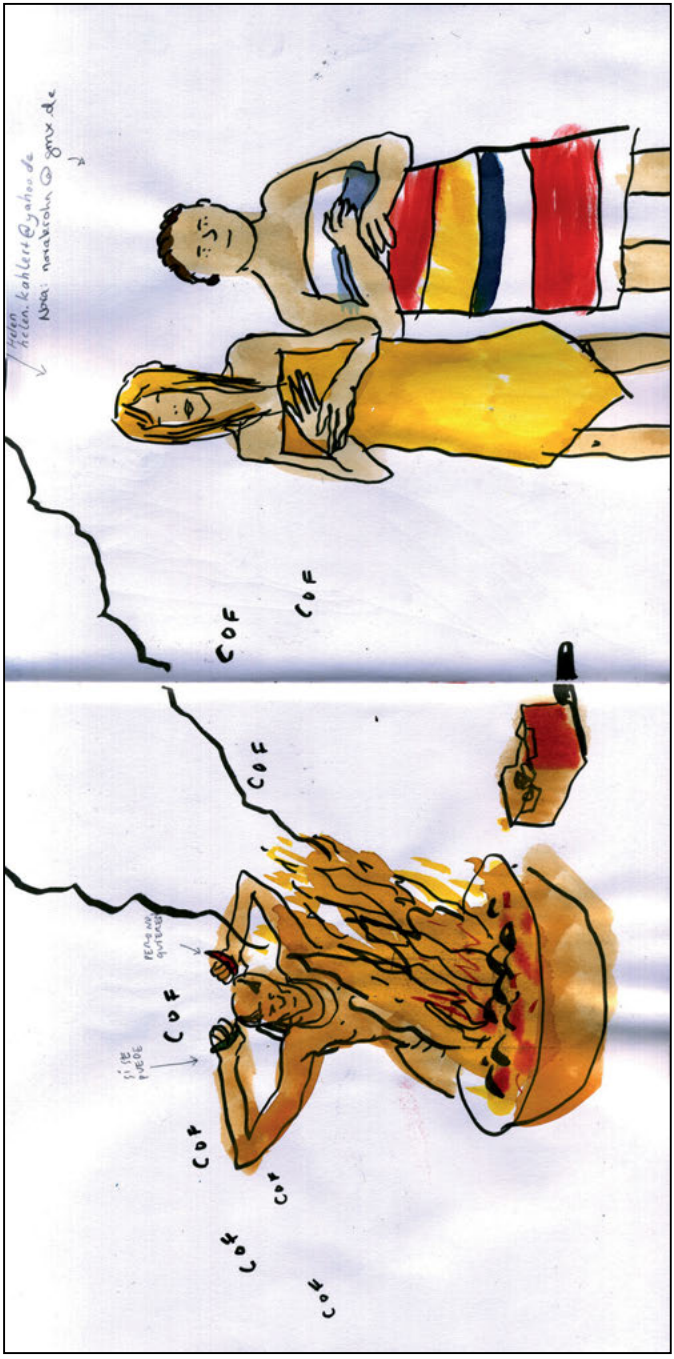

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Amplification and Assembly

SYLVI KRETZSCHMAR, KATHRIN WILDNER

In September 2014, we were part of the gathering *The Art of Being Many* at Kampnagel Theatre in Hamburg. The assembly took place in the theatre – as a piece of theatre – aiming to share experiences, ideas and practices of assembling, and to reflect upon and develop *the art of being many* in the wake of the *real democracy* movements. These political movements, which have occupied public spaces, gathered neighborhoods together and established blockade camps across the world since 2007, have been fueled by a critique of the politics of representation. This critique has led to new formats of assembling, and, consequently, new questions of form (»*how do we gather?«)* have become a central focus of political activism. How are decisions made collectively? How do we avoid appointing leaders? How can we suspend political agendas that have been generated outside of the assembly and thus the influence of political parties, unions and other organizations? How is co-existence organized in the camps, how can a comfortable atmosphere for speaking and listening be produced, and how do we transparently document an assembly? These questions become crucial when the aim is to map and test out direct democracy in the here-and-now of the assembly, instead of demanding it from political figures. The idea of *The Art of Being Many* was to bring together the expertise of (performing) artists, activist strategies, artistic/theatrical notions of assembly, and the experiences of international political movements, under the assumption that these elements already overlap and are interconnected. What we experienced was a chaotic, inspirational and hybrid encounter of performance, transnational congress, party, camp, tribunal and festival. Was it an assembly – or a representation of an assembly? Even now, we cannot say for sure.

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Together with the group *Ligna*, Hannah Hurtzig (*Blackmarket, Mobile Academy*), Tanja Krone (from the band/performance group *Maiden Monsters*), the sound artist Ernesto Estrella Cozar and others, we developed the panel *Sound/System/Voices* - addressing voices, music, and the sound of the assembly, its acoustic and technical parameters. In our contributions to this panel we also took into consideration the relationship between assembly and amplification (of the voice). Since then, our respective artistic and research work has been accompanied by questions such as how voice amplification technology and techniques assemble people and things in political and religious contexts or how co-existence is acoustically *voiced*. Today, almost one year after *The Art of Being Many*, we take this as an opportunity to meet and to talk about our respective projects and the meaning of *amplification**.

1. SPEAKING IN CHORUS AS AMPLIFICATION

SK: In our respective work, speaking in chorus plays a role as a practice of connecting individuals to a community: Assemblies are brought about, initiated and performed through choral speech.

In your research for the project *Global Prayers*[1], you describe choirs in religious contexts who generate acoustic communities in very different ways. ›Speaking in tongues‹, or *glossolalia*, for example, is a completely individual form of speech, which doesn't even come close to shared language, and yet it allows a collective acoustic space to emerge. In collective prayer, a religious community also arises where all involved are familiar with a particular text, the rhythm of its speech, and the melody of it.

In my own artistic work, I question how regimented such choirs must be in order to function. I am therefore interested in whether you know of choral

1 The interdisciplinary research and art project *The Global Prayers Congress: Faith in the City* (2010-2014) researched manifestations of religion in urban space, changes in the city through new religious movements and also the influence of daily urban life on religious practices. International case studies and artistic projects produced by researchers and artists (in, among other places, Rio de Janeiro, Lagos, Istanbul, Beirut, Mumbai and Berlin) were realized through various forms such as exhibitions, symposiums and publications (cf. www.globalprayers.info, accessed March 12, 2015).

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systems of interaction that do not have such a unitary structure, or that may emerge spontaneously, without a leader?

KW: Even if glossolalia appears to be a very individual thing, it is still a highly regimented form of speech. I first listened to a *speaking in tongues* session in 2010 in Lagos at the *Holy Ghost Congress* of the Redeemed Christian Church of God. Over a period of many days – and, above all, nights – there were ritual ceremonies, sermons and choral singing. There is a clear trigger at a particular point during a service: The preacher will say »Now, speak in tongues«. Speaking in tongues means that the voice of the holy spirit speaks through the person, often using fragments of words in mostly unintelligible ›foreign‹ languages. Each person speaks alone, often accompanied by a form of movement, a different corporeality – almost like a choreography, or perhaps an improvisation of spiritual confrontation. These individual voices with their various rhythms and intensities come together in the space to form a single sound. One can imagine no greater individuality, and yet it creates a communal experience, a shared space, which is occupied by individuals. But is that a choir?

SK: In my opinion, speaking in chorus requires collectivity from the outset – a type of synchronizing. For example, it is the starting point for a shared motivation to take to the streets in political demonstrations. You know the slogans, the chants, and you are already ›in the swing of things‹ through the shared rhythm of walking. Speaking in chorus *amplifies* this collectivity, often also through its tactical orchestration. In demonstrations, there can be something like a standing in for one another through the voice, for example in the »*Haut ab!*« (»Get lost!«) chants of protestors confronting police.

KW: It seems to me that in a religious context, this collectivity of speaking in tongues is set up above all through the space and the occasion of the church service or religious ceremony. But also through a shared ritual structure: Everybody knows what she should do when the prompt to speak in tongues is announced, even as each person carries out this task in a completely individual manner. In communal speech, for example, when praying the rosary, each participant knows the text exactly. The text is internalized, and there is – similar to demonstration slogans – a ritualized rhythm of speech. When speaking in tongues, it is individuals distributed randomly in the room that

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become a community through a sort of acoustic arena, while in communal prayer, words spoken aloud mutually amplify one another.

SK: I could imagine that speaking in tongues also leads to a mutual strengthening in the sense that others in the space open themselves to the same state of being, the same intensity. That could lend itself to a choral amplification even when it isn't in unison, or through a shared slogan.

KW: In relation to individual voices and shared speech, there is another level we haven't touched on yet that emerges in your project *Megafonchor*.[2] The ›megaphone choir‹, which was also performing at *The Art of Being Many*, draws on interviews with people who have lived in Hamburg's Esso Houses – their personal statements and perceptions of life in the houses and in St. Pauli, in a rapidly changing area of the city. These individual voices are then spoken in unison by a megaphone choir. How did you go about bringing the individual voices together into a choir?

SK: It was important to me that the voices arose from private speech, a form of speech that is intended neither for public announcement nor political statement. Even when those interviewed were politically active in Hamburg's *Right to the City (Recht auf Stadt*) movement, or in the *Esso Houses Initiative* (*Initiative Esso Häuser*), in the interviews they spoke only for themselves. We often looked for phrases in which it is clear that the speaker is struggling

2 The *Megafonchor* sings with the ghostly voices of a vanished place. Twelve women take interview statements of former residents, tenants and contractors of the so-called Esso Houses complex of Hamburg's Reeperbahn in St. Pauli and set them to music, amplifying them with megaphones. In 2009, the buildings were bought by the major corporation Bayrische Hausbau, which speculated from the outset on their demolition. The Esso Houses, with their affordable apartments, shops, legendary nightclubs, bars and last but not least a gas station, functioned as a village square that had become an important part of St. Pauli's everyday life. Due to the impending danger of collapse, the Esso Houses were evicted in December, 2013. The megaphone choir played a role in the demonstrations against the rapid gentrification of the St. Pauli district. It contributes to the political debates around the Esso Houses, which still continue in the wake of the buildings' demolition. (cf. Baumgardt 2014)

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to find the right words. Not the eloquent, rousing speech that is familiar to us from political agitation, but phrases that are built primarily in dialogue. Similarly, the *Human Mic* of New York's *Occupy Wall Street* movement allowed private narratives, for example of a personal struggle with debt or an eviction, to become political speech through speaking in chorus. In *Megafonchor*, private statements are amplified and multiplied through speaking in chorus over the megaphone. Through their contextualization with other statements, and strategically transforming the space of performance into a public address system, individual speech becomes a political statement.

KW: Which creates a further form of amplification, in that the individual voice becomes a public and political declaration. How did those who recognized their own words in the megaphone choir's amplification system respond?

SK: The megaphone choir loops together, locally, the speech of individuals who have not necessarily met one another. It is only through amplification in chorus that an acoustic assembly of these speakers can come into being. Some of those interviewed attended the megaphone choir performances later. The choir was in fact perceived by many of the inhabitants and shopkeepers of the Esso Houses as an amplification or a reinforcement of their strength. Although the megaphone is usually a device used to control and command, for us this was about amplifying what was already present in the political movement. When it came to protesting against the demolition of the buildings, we performed with the megaphone choir at many of the demonstrations. But also after the demolition – even before the *Planbude*[3] came into being – in that first moment of failure of resistance, when we all were asking ourselves how we would collectively deal with the situation. Even in that moment, the megaphone choir played an important role as an opportunity to mourn for this failure, onsite, not alone but together, and – without any resignation – to ask one another how we should persist. The megaphone choir

3 Since October 2014, PlanBude collects ideas, analyses and opinions for a central new building complex in the ESSO-Häuser-Area at Spielbudenplatz. In two containers, placed right at the construction site, PlanBude offers a wide range of planning-tools to allow all neighbors to get involved with the planning process. (cf. http://planbude.de, accessed August 27, 2015)

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performed an obituary for Esso Houses on the demolition site, which had the function of a farewell ritual for the municipality. It was a housing-funeral.

KW: This is then an even further amplification of the voice: The private becomes political – through vocalization in space, a publicness of the voice can arise, resulting in its amplification to a collective through shared listening.

SK: Yes – even though the megaphone choir doesn't exactly invite participation. The artist Christoph Schäfer made a drawing of the megaphone choir with the slogan »Bewaffnet eure Wünsche!« (»Arm your wishes!«)[4], because aesthetically, the megaphone choir has a militant element. There is a certain unpredictability in the way we move about a space. This, however, means that people become very attentive, and listen very carefully.

KW: You say unpredictability, but here you are speaking from the perspective of the listener or the audience. The performance of the choir itself is very controlled – every step, every movement is choreographed. This rigor of the apparatus, these precisely controlled sentences, the metallic sound of the amplification devices, the movements – even the black clothing – produces a counterpart with which you confront yourselves. This stages an assembly of watching. There is no shared form of speech as initiated by the human mic, where all become a part of the shared action of repeating speech in chorus.

SK: Yes, the megaphone choir is not a spontaneous action. Rehearsals are quite long and the performance depends on a rehearsed precision that you would not normally achieve in public space. The human hic, in contrast, functions more instantaneously. In New York's Zuccotti Park, the use of loudspeakers was forbidden, making a different form of amplification for speeches necessary. They also didn't want a spokesperson. So the human mic was the appropriate form of amplification. Those present in the crowd scarcely perceive the speaker – she remains anonymous – and all repeat what has been said, and in this way disseminate a form of speech across a crowd.

4 The drawing and a documentation about the megaphone choir were presented in the exhibition *Utopian Pulse: Salon Public Happiness* (Wiener Secession, 2014 and Württembergischer Kunstverein Stuttgart, 2015). (Cf. http://christophschaefer.net/tag/salon-public-happiness, accessed January 21, 2016)

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Mostly, this speech takes the form of very simple sentences. The act of speaking, repeating and recapitulating acquires something preachy – as with *call and response* – which also has a religious origin. As does the choir itself, which derives from the Greek word *chorus* for a place of ritual assembly. The human mic played on the religious form – that was both desired and intended. It's not clear where the human mic had originally come from and when it was invented. David Graeber mentions it as something already familiar to many Californian activists who had already used it as a tool during WTO actions in Seattle in November 1999 (2013: 50-51). But during Occupy Wall Street it became an effective and specific mode of assembly. Attempts to translate it to our context, to apply a human mic in Hamburg, more or less produced frustration, functioning only in the form of an acknowledgement or as a kind of joke. Still, the concept of the megaphone choir is based on an artistic research about the human mic as amplification.

2. AMPLIFICATION AS A FUNCTION FOR LOCALIZING, SPATIALIZING AND POSITIONING VOICES

KW: Sound, therefore, has a particular place: the church, the street, the demonstration or the Spielbudenplatz, the square next to the former Esso houses. How are these respective sites changed through the amplification of the voice?

SK: The Spielbudenplatz was once a public square, but it has become increasingly privatized or at least far more commercialized. This is demonstrated by its redesignation as a ›Business Improvement District‹, a means to define and optimize the square as a zone of consumerism. It becomes clear who should spend time there, and above all who, in the future, should *not* spend time there – who are the undesirables – the homeless, for example. Similarly, one street further across in the Brauereiquartier – a city quarter that went up overnight to make quick money – it becomes very clear what exactly is changing in St. Pauli in terms of acoustics. If you do something loud, it immediately causes a clamor. Due to the high density of the buildings, the architecture becomes a space that resonates sound, that amplifies. The space is not designed for stopping or lingering, but for walking through,

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shopping perhaps, but not for talking to one another. This would be acoustically uncomfortable.

KW: Materiality and architecture allow, make possible, forbid or prevent particular actions. The megaphone choir is a good tool to make this evident. When I made a soundwalk with a group around the Spielbudenplatz on the invitation of the *Planbude*, it became clear how much various spaces subtly regulate acoustic behavior. The soundwalk was about acoustically probing and perceiving the space without adding anything. Along the Reeperbahn, close to the facade of the buildings, there is a zone between inside and outside, a zone for the enticement or invitation to consume. This is above all evoked by sound. It is possible to hear the music and the people inside. Because of the awnings over the street, there is a sound barrier. Here, people are also camping in the entrances of buildings. When taking time to get to know the acoustics of spaces, or the aural architecture, it becomes possible to find out what rules of behavior, ideas and strategies are inscribed through the acoustics of a space, or how the different characteristics of the spaces are in a way amplified through sound as on the Spielbudenplatz or in the Brauereiquartier.

SK: To set up a situation on the Reeperbahn in which people are able to properly listen, stand still, or pause for thought is a really difficult thing to achieve. This is a zone where tourists throng. It is a zone for spectacle, for getting drunk, for falling from one bar into the other. In the initial moment, the megaphone choir, as a performing group of women, fulfils the promise of the event character which the street now embodies: »Hey, check it out! I bet they're all gonna get undressed at the same time! Check it out, something's going on over there!« But strangely enough, catcalls and commentary come to an end very quickly. The megaphone choir works first with a high pitch and then with absolute silence – with silence and stillness; moments in which you absolutely cannot know what will come next. Of course, the cars going by cannot be silenced. Still, there were moments where it felt like you could hear a pin drop. Even I got goose bumps. I was surprised that such a thing was even possible. On the weekend – on the Reeperbahn!

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KW: The Reeperbahn runs parallel to the Brauereiquartier and represents its acoustic opposite: a space that is permanently filled with sound and practically demands that you shout, and shout *along*. To set up something like the megaphone choir in a place like that, so that you are silent and listen, challenges the space. However, you have also performed in completely different places with the choir, for example in the theatre. What happens then? How would you describe amplification with respect to space there? Do you bring the Spielbudenplatz into the theatre?

SK: The megaphone choir, at its core, is about the *transportation of voices* from one place to another. I think that because of this, it also works in the theatre – because from the beginning it is about translation, or transmission. The conflict around the Esso Houses is well known in many regions as an example of the effects of gentrification. Its symbolic character is there already anyway, and this aspect becomes amplified when we speak our texts on stage. The stage opens the texts up for other associations and poetic shifts. And it offers a space for comparisons with other past and present conflicts about public space, its commercialization, exploitation, and about rising rents – particularly when we perform in other cities or in places that exhibit a similar set of problems.

KW: Another question could be what sorts of conflicts might arise through the amplification of voices and sounds in urban space? The megaphone choir points to certain conflicts and prevents them from being forgotten. But there are also examples where conflicts arise *because* of the reverberation of sound through space. And by that, I don't only mean neighbors complaining about a noisy local bar. There are several examples from the research around the *Global Prayers* project which point to conflicts such as: Which religious voices are present in space? For example, in multi-religious cities, the call of the muezzin causes confrontations – even though it is invisible and ephemeral. In Singapore, the muezzin's call to prayer has for this reason been relocated to the radio, and therefore into the home – from public to private space (cf. Lee 1999). The Istanbul municipality of Galata, which is a traditional quarter with many mosques and a particularly high frequency of muezzin calls, has for the first time seen an institutional struggle about sound: How loud can it get before it has to be turned down? And who has the right to determine that? This is particularly interesting because over the last six to

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seven years, Galata has been subject to a kind of turbo-gentrification. On the one hand, new inhabitants complain that the call to prayer is too loud, affecting their quality of life through what they perceive as being regular and insistent interruptions. On the other hand, long-time residents are disturbed by men and women who have begun to hang about on the streets drinking, by the short skirts of the women, and also by the intensified level of volume, the new and different voices and sounds on the street.[5]

S.K. In both examples the issue is clearly not first and foremost the question of sound levels. The notion of amplification can be helpful in order to understand what such conflicts are actually about, notions that our discussion has already touched on: the amplification of voices as a means to bring about a community – as a point of initiation, a staging and a tactical reinforcement of this community – but also as a definition of acoustic spaces as territories.

KW: Places are not only acoustically demarcated – they also expand themselves acoustically. The borders of the territory shift themselves as an amplification of the influence of a particular grouping. Unlike the visual, sound projects itself beyond that which can be seen. Political demonstrations, too, occupy space acoustically. You are speaking of a particular *positioning* of arguments.

SK: Even though acoustic characteristics of spaces and their effects are rarely consciously perceived, and even though sound appears to be ephemeral, the repercussions of voice amplification are nonetheless unexpectedly powerful as a form of localization and also as a form of acoustic occupation and consecration of space. The determination of protest routes and the conscious selection of particular sites for political demonstrations also have a lot to do with the targeted positioning of arguments through reverberation, through the movement of loudspeakers, megaphones or choruses. In my research on the media-historical development of the microphone and the loudspeaker (cf. Kretzschmar 2014), it became clear to me that a linear history guided by the

5 (Cf. comments on gentrification processes in Istanbul, e.g. https://gentrificationblog.wordpress.com/2010/09/29/istanbul-islamisten-und-die-kultur-der-gentrification, accessed September 2, 2015)

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unitary aim to amplify sounds or the voice does not exist. Rather, the discoveries of the telegraph, the telephone, media for recording, replaying, saving and composing sound and voice have all played a central role in the development of the technologies used for voice amplification in the political space today.

KW: And also in order to transport sound from one place to another as a deliberate transmission, translation and expansion of voices. The telegraph, the telephone and radio are completely different technologies that send sound from one place to another: modes of dissemination, connections between spaces as well as the production of forms of assembly, modes that are not restricted to any single location. Rather than sharing one containing space, they operate across a multiplicity of spaces and assemblies.

3. AMPLIFICATION, PRESENCE AND ABSENCE

SK: In radio, it is clear that the loudspeaker transports something or somebody absent into a different space of reverberation. However, the acoustic manifestation of an absence is no less relevant when amplification systems are put to use onsite, for example in religious or political assemblies. Amplification is the acoustic configuration of that which is displaced through the separation of voice and body. By implication this always already calls into being something which is *not* present: an absence through which the speaker then also begins to embody and to localize the assembly of listeners. Assemblies are more than just a collection of bodies, things and materials present in space. It is also crucial for all present to exhibit a distrust of political representation, and a fundamental skepticism about how those who are absent are addressed, how they are spoken about in the instance of the assembly.

KW: Each assembly yields new themes that are specific to that assembly and define its character – the manifestation and representation of those who are absent become something that binds the assembly together. This occurs frequently through sound. In street protests, themes are brought up, spoken out, chanted, called and provoked, and through all this they acquire presence. How did you perceive the role played by sound and the amplification of voices at *The Art of Being Many*?

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SK: The transmission of all contributions through headphones turned it from assembly into meta-assembly. In fact, the sound produced by the headphones tends to isolate the individual. Listening is shielded by headphones, which soften external noise, making you more aware of your own breathing and your own body. This creates an individualized acoustic space from which you begin to observe the assembly. Because there are various audio channels, it is not possible to be sure whether your neighbor is listening to the same contribution as you are, or whether she is part of a completely different sub-assembly. This dispersal and isolation led me to a state of constant reflection on the assembly in which I found myself. It amplified a permanent interrogation of the situation of assembly itself.

KW: The simultaneity of various acoustic arenas separated out those who wanted to follow any one particular lecture, discussion, sound happening or music. The fragmented assembly presented a permanent and enormous challenge to those present. Granted, the entire A*rt of Being Many* assembly took place in one space. But it became very clear just how crucial shared listening and shared speaking is. This acoustically fragmented situation demanded a sustained level of concentration in order to appreciate the existence of a communal experience, or indeed of an assembly at all. As a result, you find yourself constantly asking: What kind of assembly is this, anyway? Where am I here, and with whom am I assembled? This was a probing of the limits of the assembly, including its possible failure. As an assembly that reflected on the act of assembling – and its necessary conditions – *The Art of Being Many* called upon the communal, but at the same time it made apparent these perforations in the collective imagination; what this assembly is and what it means.

SK: The form of voice amplification intensified the theatricality of the situation, so that you often felt *as if* you were a part of an assembly. This distracted the attention from a specific content that should have been discussed. The artificiality of the event was above all irritating for those who came from the field of activism and direct political work, for whom the self-reflexive nature of the assembly was largely irrelevant. For many discussions, the sound concept and the artificiality of the situation were counter-productive obstacles to be overcome. This gave reason for justified criticism. On the

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other hand, the idealization of presence that is shared by many movements organized through assemblies was radically called into question.

* *amplification*: multiplication, potentiation, reinforcement, recruitment, backup, boost, gain, enhancement, strengthener.

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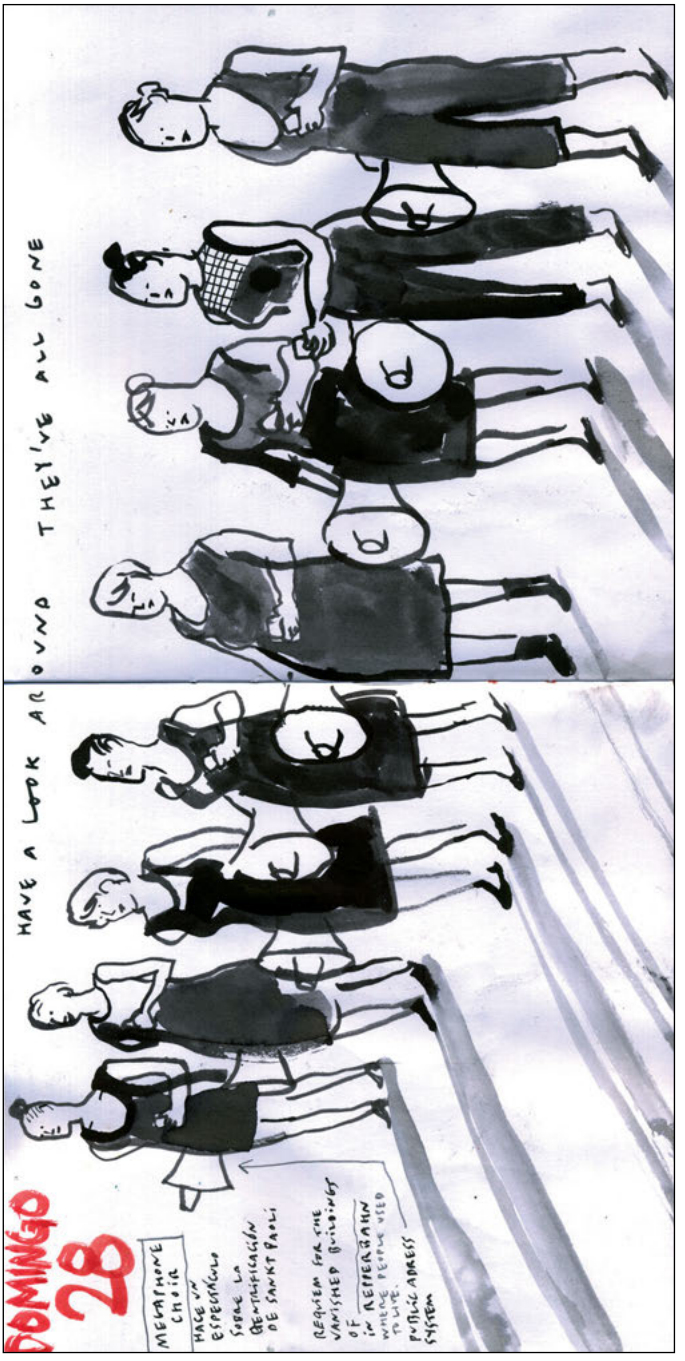

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Intervening in the Narrative Voice

Reflections Around ›The Art of Being Many‹ and the ›Meditation Exercise‹ Genre.

ERNESTO ESTRELLA

Voice is predominant in our daily errands, and it is one of the few sonic sources that can compete with the general visual network that surrounds us and shapes our day. This competence is still very limited, though, and often fails to succeed. In this sense, voice is actually one of the sources of sounds we hear more and listen to less. This induced deafness results in voice becoming a mere channel of information or directions. The other elements that configure a voice, or set of voices, remain unheard or scarcely noticed. Maybe only a musical context, and especially a contemporary-classical music concert (even more than a theater play), can achieve a degree of attention capable of putting us in touch with the voice's modulations, tonality, breath breaks, etc. Roland Barthes referred to these coordinates as *the grain of the voice* (Barthes 1977: 179-190). My interest in intervening in different formats and genres related to voice runs parallel to my desire to enhance and provide tools for active listening with respect to acoustic phenomena. I have recently encountered a group of artists and researchers who share a similar inclination towards voice phenomena. The group revolves around the *Errant Bodies* project space in Berlin, which served as a platform for launching *The Voice Observatory* at the start of 2015. It is within this systematic exploration of the voice that I understand the ›meditation exercise‹ that I brought to Kampnagel in Hamburg in the fall of 2014 for *The Art of Being Many*.

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Some brief background information might be useful in order to understand the specific context of my meditation exercise. First, there is the political assembly as a collective sound experience. I was living in New York when the Occupy Wall Street movement emerged. I had participated in assemblies before, but the magnitude of what was going on in the financial area of downtown Manhattan allowed me to become a close observer of the sound and movement choreography developed by the many. Beyond innovations like the people's microphone and the actual discussions in the assembly I was mesmerized – as listener and participant – by the way in which more casual conversations were being held. Sometimes, at the margins of the main events, a radical transformation of listening and talking habits took place. Once the discussions, presentations, songs, were done, groups would get together to solve some basic issues regarding food, hygiene, transportation etc. To solve these issues people often left the camp in groups. So, the dynamics and new nature of communication would, for example, have a group of eight to ten people entering a busy subway with the common question of locating lodgings for everybody. It was this ›occupation‹ of the daily space and routines of the city that I felt was surprising, unexpected, and, of course, highly fragile. Entries and exits from the conversation were gradual and sensitive, a wide array of silences and pauses emerged, the volume and even the tone of individual voices would change slightly from one sentence to another, and, most of all, a highly sophisticated school of listening emerged in the middle of the fast and noisy transactions of New York's MTA system. No romanticism here, it just happened, and other people – who had just entered the subway somewhere else – were included to join the small group of protesters. Probably others who have been part of Occupy movements around the world could expand on this experience. I discovered it at the margins and in the grey zones of the Occupy dynamics. The experience itself made me think of reenacting or somehow recreating that situation in its listening potential as a document for an oral history and an on-site sound-installation of the Occupy events in their original locations.

The second source of inspiration that brought me to create a meditation exercise for *The Art of Being Many* is more banal. I am a professional insomniac. And I have tried almost everything. Little romanticism here either. It is just a condition of my body, mind, and who knows what else, that I have little control over. One of the last things I tried were some of the ›meditation to fall asleep‹ podcasts that you can find on the web. This was after the repeated

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failure we ran into when a good friend of mine (a sharp classicist, by the way) tried to put me to sleep by creating soothing, quiet, imaginary landscapes with her mellow voice. That did not work, and neither did the podcasts. So I decided to enact the sleeping narrative myself, like a shamanic chant, and see if I could fall asleep to my own voice seducing my body, mind, and so on, into sleep. It almost, almost happened. But I am too hooked to work. So before I knew it I had already started to follow unexpected meanders and explore the meditating voice in directions that are not customary. This happened while still keeping the deep, calm, directing timbre and tone that characterizes the genre. I did not fall asleep. But I did find a way to wake up to a different body (while still lying down). After several trials and recordings (normally done around 3am), I decided to explore the ›meditation genre‹ more systematically through a series of podcasts around the theme of transformation through different itineraries. The initial title of the series was to be *Transform: Awakening Meditations*. Still, I never thought I would do this kind of exercise live. That all changed when I was invited to join the *Sound, Systems and Voices* group at *The Art of Being Many*.

The title I gave to the piece was *Meditation to Join the Body of the Many*, and it takes about 8 to 10 minutes to complete. Most of it was prepared prior to the event but the actual experience of spending some nights in the camp set up at Kampnagel in Hamburg gave me the fine-tuning and on-site twists that the piece has now. The ›assembly of assemblies‹ initially gathered about 150 individuals, who had been part of different Occupy and protest movements around the world. That is, individuals who have worked very closely and intensely to transform a given reality, with different degrees of success and failure. My interest was to cross and offer a virtual itinerary, a guided tour that could incorporate different stages. And to do it quietly (something which rarely happens), to also provide a reminder of the inner logic and landscape that inhabits the act and desire of transformation. An ontological question also cropped up: the possibility of letting go of our individual subjectivity in order to join a generic ›body of the many‹. Basically, what my voice does is to help initiate a trip out of yourself to then display a virtual (voiced) location that incorporates elements and details from different Occupy and assembly places and plazas. From there, I would then induce a descent back into each persons' individual body.

Now, the setting was not easy: some 200 people moving around, sitting, lying down, eating in the big hall-turned-assembly-space. All of them had

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been wearing headphones since the first day of the event, something which became unusually normal after the first couple of hours there[1]. The idea was that people could plug in or out in order to listen to different channels related to activities that were sometimes happening simultaneously. For the presentations of the Sound, Systems and Voices group, we had three channels, and my meditation ran on one of them. I was also carrying headphones and asked everyone to find a comfortable position, close their eyes and relax for the next 8 to 10 minutes before the actual meditation started. I also had my eyes closed during most of the meditation, to avoid distraction from the surrounding movement. On one of the occasions when I did open my eyes and looked around – I had just suggested that we raise our arms and reach out to a distant sound of voices in a faraway square – I was surprised to see that some 30 to 40 people in the room where actually doing exactly that. Up to that moment, I had no guarantee that anybody was actually listening to my meditation instead of the other two channels or just the ambient sound. That gave me an intense sense of responsibility and a daring to push the meditation a little further, and into a more intimate register. The meditation was repeated twice with a pause of some 10 minutes. The second time was slightly more playful and started with me sitting among the audience and staying there (for the first one I had a mic stand in the middle of the room). I did not look around to check who was listening this time, but I did feel that the idea was an extremely subtle and fragile proposal that could have easily failed. Which, obviously, was part of the experiment.

I rarely ask the reactions of the audience after a show or a reading. At this occasion, though, I was highly interested in what had happened there in the hall, for it was not really an artist/audience situation that I had to deal with here. To my surprise, people were very pleased and thankful for the meditation, which was most of all appreciated as a quiet, calm moment of breath in the frame of the otherwise rather frenetic, noisy and talkative setting of The Art of Being Many. So it did bring people into a different emotional

1 Professor Maria Engberg, from Malmö University, wrote an interesting reflection on the problematic nature of such a decision, which was also a point of sensitive discussion among the organizers of the event, as I later gathered. She also raises in this piece some points related to my meditation (which I would subscribe) and how it addressed some of the delicate issues present at *The Art of Being Many* (Engberg 2014).

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zone, regardless of the specificity of my itinerary. This, of course, raises the question – a twisted one – of the power that a single voice can have in terms of guidance and manipulation, even if that voice (mine) has been emptied of most of its personal traits. New listening habits can be induced in this way. Also, zones of our body or mind that are normally not accessible – or even physically or emotionally painful – can be reached and relieved through these kinds of meditation exercises. In the difficult and tense context of a social or political gathering, such a meditation can also act as a training, or training zone, where we can become aware of the multiple realities of an assembly and find ways to hold this multiplicity together. For me, the key element is still the potential the genre has for displaying an experience of transformation that only needs us to close our eyes and listen.

By way of conclusion, and before offering the transcription of what I did, I want to extend my gratitude to all those ›individuals of the many‹ that made the experience possible by just listening. I am also thankful to my colleagues in the Sound, Systems and Voices group and to the organizing team of The Art of Being Many and Kampnagel. The opportunity to throw in such an experiment among a live crowd has provoked two direct consequences for me. First of all, the commitment to record and publicize these experimental meditation exercises; a series of podcasts is now being developed and soon will be recorded.[2] The second consequence is my decision to incorporate the Meditation to Join the Body of the Many into the second episode of my series The Insider; this episode will dive into political issues and explore the collective listening discoveries I encountered during Occupy Wall Street.

The following transcription merges the two meditations I did at *The Art of Being Many* and adds a few new elements that will be incorporated in the studio recording. Small titles appear at the start of each section only for the purpose of this specific transcription. This detail, and the transcription itself are exceptional. Only the sound clip and brief introductory texts will be accessible in the future. The score that accompanies this text was done before the event as a way of displaying graphically the process I am covering with voice and language.

2 Scheduled for February 2016 at Berlin's LowSwing Studio with the assistance of sound engineer Florian von Keyserlingk.

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The Text

To be read in a low, calm, voice. Slow pace and often allowing the appearance of pauses between sentences and even words, but without losing the rhythm. Breath should not be heard.

Hello. I would like to welcome you to a ›meditation exercise‹ that will take approximately 8 to 10 minutes. We will use the form of a guided relaxation exercise. I have called this a ›meditation to join the body of the many‹ and we will try to gradually abandon our body and join the body of the many. You can of course take a break or leave this meditation anytime you want. Still, it would be nice if you stayed tuned in as we move through its different stages.

I don't know where you are. But if you can find somewhere where you can sit, or lie down, then do it. If you are sitting down, just feel comfortable, and maybe try to lean on something or lie down if you can. Whenever you want, and when you are already comfortable, I would like you to slowly close your eyes. Take some time if you need it.

›sounds of the sleep in the many‹

While lying down, or sitting, you can hear the sounds of the room around you. There are noises around you. And I do not want you to fight those noises. I want you to take them. And let them be themselves. The movement or quietness around you. These are the sounds of the assembly. Now. But also yesterday. And the day before. They also happen during the night, as we lie down to rest. And still there, some movement, close and far away. But not so much anymore. And some are already asleep. There is a cough somewhere in the room. And silence. The buzzing of electricity. The sliding sound of a sleeping bag. In the distance, you can hear a murmur. Also, somewhere in the room, the brushing, rhythmic sound of sheets, as if somebody was masturbating. And steps. Carefully. You cannot locate where sounds are coming from. Some more steps, but they are leaving. And you can take these sounds personally. Or let them go. For they are not yours.

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Almost imperceptible, you can now hear a distant train. Passing, full of people going somewhere else. Taking a weight from you. And you have to let them go. The sound of the train fades out, somewhere in the distance.

›abandoning your body‹

But you still want to reach out to that sound. It is still there, almost gone, somewhere in some corner of the room. You want to get close to it.

I want you to feel how one of your hands is slowly opening. Like when a flower opens in the morning, or in the night, your fingers gradually open. It could be your right hand, or your left hand. And I want you to let your fingers bring your hand, your arm, slowly up, in the direction of that sound you heard before. It is still there, almost gone. Your fingers stretch and your arm moves. And gets away. As you are caressing that distant sound. It might come back. And you go a little further, with your fingers in the air. Your hand floats and moves. Until that moment when your hand is not yours anymore. You are touching something in the air. But your hand, your arm, is already far away.

You breathe. You breathe in. And out. And as you breathe out, every time, the air moves outside, far away from you, growing away from your body. Each time. Floating. As your breath leaves and starts undulating, in the air. And it is now somewhere in the space, where you are. Up there. Moving. Among fragments. And silence. Sound is scarce. You are now a thin layer of breath, a slow and fading constellation, almost transparent with the air. Moving up there. And you can slowly look down. Now what do you see? Maybe you are too far away to see. But that's OK.

›the square of the body of the many‹

Again, somewhere, in a different corner of the room, a murmur of voices has started to gather. It is not clear. But it is there. And you want to join in. So you move closer to it. As you approach it, you do not see much, but you can feel those voices.

Because in a way, you are part of them. In a way, it's already not yourself. And we are moving into this place. It is a square, vaguely shaped. And you

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can hear a dance, too. As we cross the space slowly, we start to move, briefly taken by the dance. Somewhere, on the left side, you can hear people chanting. Sentences. Repeated. You have been here before. We are already here. We are the 99%. And you hear those voices. And somehow you want to join in. Go along. With your lips. Dive into repetition. We are here to stay. You can hear them near you. Peter is not here. Jane is not here. Brandon is not here. Hannah is almost not here. And we repeat in silence now. For this is where we are.

›stairway to the games and speeds of the heart‹

You are distracted by a new sound. Cheerful. Not that far away from you, there is a set of stairs. On the top, some kids are playing. Five, six, or more. And you are one of them, playing there, too. With stones. And with leaves. You take one stone and you throw it downstairs. Somebody else also throws a stone. And then a leaf, not too dry, not too humid. You are throwing these leaves. And you can see. The different speeds of the heart. As it opens. And wrought its dance in the air.

›mixed waters of decision‹

It is warm. You are somehow floating. The feeling of warm water has started to surround you. But there is another unknown current, touching parts of your body. Your body is not yours anymore. But it is there. Spread out. And calm. In space. This new current is cold. Fresh. Now getting slightly faster, carrying one of your legs away. As if pulling it. Even if it is not yours. You can still feel it. This cold water, moving parts of you away. Closer to another body, which you do not know. And cannot see. You breathe. And you want to reach out. Keep everything close. But finally you let go. You can still feel the cold somewhere. Not pain yet. A very slow dance has suddenly started, as you move again. And advance.

›encounter with a loved one‹

Somebody is looking at you. You can feel their presence. Behind you. Still. Somebody is passing nearby, looking. Behind your back. You turn around. It is somebody from your past. Somebody you have lost, or not seen, in a

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long time. They look at you. And say: I don't know who you are. But I know I have loved you very much. The waters grow warm again. And the murmur grows. You are alone again. You can hear the movement in the square. The kids, the stones, the leaves as they fall. New sounds. And you can move through this space. Feel, hear other moves and other voices, unknown. You had not realized they were there. A sense of distance. As you look, slowly, and move, as you look.

›return to the individual body transformed‹

And now, wherever you are, you are going to come back slowly. To some part of you. You decide which part of your body will make you come back. It could be a small bone in your finger. Or the skin on your ear. From there, you will let it flow in. With all that you have gathered around. Gradually, and quietly. Until you feel your body again. There, where you had left it. Take some time to explore the temperature, the relation with the ground. Your hands, your back. And breathe. Whenever you feel like you can open your eyes. You don't need to look around. Now we are here. And I want to thank you for listening.

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Ceremonials of Gathering

Syncretizing Vogue and Voodoo

MARTIN JÖRG SCHÄFER

A lot of the pressing questions at stake in a theory of gathering and coming together also come up when pondering the buzzwords ›Vogue‹ and ›Voodoo‹, which refer to very different, perhaps even opposite cultural practices. However, they overlap in that they both refer to sub-cultural, semi-secret, and ephemeral communities of the disenfranchised. The people coming together in a Vogue-ball or a Voodoo-ritual do not necessarily share the same language and the same codes outside of Vogue or Voodoo: these practices basically bring them together as many rather than as individuals. The following line of thought will hint at some of the implicit aspects and their significance for a theory of gathering – or at least for a respective research program (cf. Peters 2013): at the ritualistic, celebratory and ›intoxicated‹ dimensions of gathering as well as at the common codes or ›languages‹ developed when coming together as many.[1] 21st century performance art has made use of Vogue (cf. Harrell 2009ff.) as well as Voodoo (cf. Kôkô 2003) and their respective histories. But these references cannot be disentangled from the evocations of the concepts of Vogue and Voodoo in the ›Western‹ pop-cultural imagination. Therefore, the latter serve as examples and starting points for the following considerations.

1 Together with Elise von Bernstorff, Ann-Sophie Demenz, Nadine Jessen, and Sibylle Peters, among others, I was part of the group preparing the *Vogue and Voodoo* panel at *The Art of Being Many*. The following thoughts are therefore not ›my own‹ but those of many: To a certain extent they retrace our discussions.

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The very real cultural practices and techniques called voguing and Voodoo enjoy a good deal of pop-cultural notoriety but relative obscurity as far as the actual specifics are concerned: One could add a Vogue complex to what can be called its Voodoo complex (cf. Stengers 2011). Both, Vogue and Voodoo, are a staple of the images circulating through movies, TV shows, pulp novels, Facebook feeds, and brains. Vogue: a highly stylized queer ballroom dancing style from 1980s Harlem with rigid movements, striking one pose after another. It was popularized by the 1990 Madonna hit single and MTV video *Vogue*, by Jennie Livingston's award winning 1990 *Paris Is Burning* documentary and by Judith Butler's subsequent reading of it (cf. Butler 1993: 121-140; cf. Baker 2011). Voodoo: the name of East African religions (a lot of them older than Christianity) that come in many shapes and sizes, with various practices, gods, rituals. Since Voodoo is not one practice but many it has been easy to conceive it as a powerful, enchanting as well as threatening figure of Otherness as such – especially in its syncretized versions that emerged from American slave cultures: Haitian Voodoo, Louisiana Voodoo to name but a few (cf. Lademann-Priemer 2011). The power of the priestess or priest to let the participants of the ritual fall into trance has long fascinated the pop-cultural imagination (cf. McGee 2012). It is this image of collective trance that is important for an art of being many whereas the imagery of the Voodoo puppet or the zombie seems contrary to such an art: The puppet functions as the representative of a real person and can be tortured and manipulated at will. The zombie is apparently dead but either still follows commands or comes in the shape of a dangerous mindless mob.

What is of interest in Voodoo are the ambiguous images of trance and the states of intoxication that go along with it: How not to lose the ›many‹ in trance but to enable them? What is at stake in the notion of a communal ritual by which such a trance is achieved? What are the musical and rhythmical dimensions of trance and ritual? How do the substances that are consumed communally bring about this state? A point of departure for this line of inquiry is Susan Buck-Morss' powerful account of the 18th century origin of Haitian Voodoo in her 2009 book *Hegel, Haiti and Universal History*: Buck-Morss does not describe this syncretized version of Voodoo as a religious tradition performed by the powerful in order to govern the weak. She rather conceives voodoo as the common point of reference of originally dispersed heterogeneous people traumatized by their enslavement and finding themselves together in a strange country. They may have been enemies before

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being enslaved and shipped over the sea on a quite often fatal journey. And quite certainly a lot of them did not speak each other's language (cf. Buck-Morss 2009: 125-132). Buck-Morss argues that, rather than repeating old power structures, Haitian Voodoo, for a short period of time at least, was an emancipatory tool: It provided common symbols and a common point of reference for those formerly lacking one. Moreover, it provided the ground for acting together in the late 18th century Haitian Revolution (cf. Buck-Morss 2009: 129-148). In this context, ritual, rhythm and intoxication proved to be invaluable powers to the disenfranchised many.

As far as ritual, rhythm, and intoxication are concerned, the media of Voodoo overlap with the imagery of Vogue evoked by *Paris Is Burning*. Vogue contests are also communal gatherings and largely ceremonial: They follow a script. There is music, there is rhythm, substances are consumed on the side. Vogue contests are celebrations and there is a festive mood they bring about. But above all the 1980s ballroom scene was famous for creating a space, a community, and an identity for a group of people who had been marginalized in multiple fashions. The people who gathered were predominantly non-straight, non-white, and not well off at all. They were excluded from mainstream culture via sexism, racism, and classism. And at the same time, they came together to celebrate themselves by appropriating, mimicking and mocking mainstream identities. On the catwalk, they contested prizes in various categories such as »Realness«, »Runway«, »Butch Queen Vogue Femme Figure Performance«, and many more. People divided themselves into so called ›houses‹. These houses did not only run against each other but their members also took care of each other on the outside: in everyday life (cf. Baker 2011). The shared participation in a musical, rhythmical and intoxicated celebration provided a common point of reference.

In this intersection between Vogue and Voodoo, there are several important implications for the phenomenon of gathering as many. First of all, with regard to the ceremonial dimension of gathering: Every assembly contains elements of ritual such as dress codes, seating arrangements and customary gestures that constitute and transgress thresholds. Who is to sit where with whom and why? What are these implicit rituals? Who has the authority to apply or change them? Who is speaking in whose name and why? How to challenge that authority? To what extent are the modes and rhythms of coming together determined by these rituals? How many are there and how are they established? Who is included, who is excluded, and why and how? Both

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Vogue and Voodoo (the latter at least in its Susan Buck-Morss' version) exhibit what can be called (playing on a famous phrase by Frits Staal) an ›inventedness‹ of ritual (cf. Staal 1979): The ritual does not necessarily have to mean anything in itself but it is employed to produce meaning, to establish codes, to examine practices.

Secondly, Vogue and Voodoo both stand for a festive mood that goes along with it. It does not seem quite possible to pinpoint whether this mood is brought about by states of intoxication (»Rausch« in German) or whether such states of intoxication produce a celebratory atmosphere. The buzzwords Vogue and Voodoo conjure up the trance-like states that are sometimes experienced when coming together as many. How do these states come about? What do they do to you and me and to friends and strangers? By what rituals are they produced and/or abused? How and by whom can and should these states be manipulated? How can they be remanipulated and reappropriated by those who take part? How do they allow themselves to be sabotaged by staying sober?

Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, and as already stated above, both practices, Vogue as well as Buck-Morss' version of Voodoo, historically aim at constituting sub-cultural, semi-secret, and ephemeral communities of the disenfranchised who do not necessarily share the same language and codes outside of these practices. The new Haitian rituals and the Harlem ballroom competitions both re-appropriated materials that did not come with an inherent emancipatory power: an old multifaceted religion, the pages of late capitalist Vogue magazines. But out of these materials, they tinkered and manufactured something that provided a common point of reference for a group of disenfranchised human beings. No longer were they the atomized few that had fallen or were torn out of the categories that gave them access to what was considered ›human‹ in a respective context. But the rituals and scripts of Vogue and Voodoo created something else: a common context. The power to stand up to the slaveholders in the case of Haitian Voodoo, the power to stand together as well as to stand up for oneself in the case of Harlem Vogue.

Buck-Morss calls this a common »language« (Buck-Morss 2009: 132), but that expression does not quite grasp what this common point of reference is all about: There are signs and there are symbols, and there are definitely certain codes and scripts governing the respective ritualistic dimension of Vogue and Voodoo. But there is also music, there is also rhythm, and there

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are intoxicating substances involved as well. All of these create a certain atmosphere; all of these contribute to the general mood of any assembly, not just those relying on music, rhythm, and intoxicants: something that affects the respective singular body in a singular fashion and possibly transforms it into a trance-like state. Part of this trance is the implicit knowledge that all the others are affected as well, albeit in their singular fashions. Intoxication and trance turn the ones out of themselves. They bind ›us‹ together with entranced others who are beyond and beside themselves as well. In states of trance and intoxication ›we‹ are not united by a common point of reference, but rather by a common dislocation (cf. Nancy 1991, 1-42). ›We‹ are ›many‹ in that we already experience being many in one single self. And by that shared experience of dislocation we are bound together. Especially when our dislocations join forces in a mutual exchange and flow.

Moods and atmospheres like these do not just happen in particular practices, which are, in the cases of Vogue and Voodoo, much fantasized about. At times, the assembly can even transform into a leisurely festive gathering. And this festive mode is to some extent, at least, related to states of shared intoxication. Such states can certainly be brought about by drugs but also by a lot of other means: by oxygen, by ambiance, by hormones, coffee, cigarettes, sugar, drinks and by all kinds of stimulants. Or, for that matter, by their very lack: e.g. by gathering in an enclosed room with far too little fresh air for a long time. But intoxication cuts both ways: It can be ›fun‹, it can lead ›us‹ to a higher plane, but its dislocating forces can also run dry and lead ›us‹ nowhere. They can also ruin ›us‹ through addiction. Intoxication can empower and perhaps even ›unite‹ the many. Intoxication might also drain their energy and isolate them from each other. But this festive mode is also always in danger of tilting over into a pervasive foul or even dangerous mood. When do the members of the festive, intoxicated crowd start turning against each other? When do they start turning against the ones they perceive and create as ›others‹? Intoxication can let the crowds rise against an oppressive power (as in the case of Haitian Voodoo). However, intoxication can also bring the many together as the new bully in town. And intoxication can always be employed by the authorities to police and subdue the many: to provide bread and circus for some and to criminalize the others. In some confrontations, the representatives of the authorities have themselves seemed as if on drugs (cf. the contributions of Orgy Punk, Vassilis Tsianos and Margarita Tsomou in this volume).

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All this does not mean that the states of intoxication and trance induced by Vogue and Voodoo do not make any use of language, of signs and of symbols. On the contrary, both do employ cultural techniques of sampling and appropriation. The signs and symbols of traditional power structures are evoked but redeployed: The Haitian Voodoo Buck-Morss dreams up aims at a democratic structure while sampling its rituals out of the elements of religions that have been as oppressive as other religions. The early voguers imitate (and transform) the models of wealth and beauty found on the pages of Vogue Magazine. States of trance and intoxication that coincide with, on the one hand, religion and, on the other hand, consumerism are turned into other modes of trance and intoxication. The signs may largely remain unchanged. But now they are used differently and by different people.

Vogue and Voodoo present very different options as far as the respective states of trance go. One might conceive them as each other's flip sides. On the one hand, Vogue can lead to a state of enhanced self-presentation: ›You‹ have to present yourself on the catwalk. The idea commonly associated with Voodoo, on the other hand, is to lose oneself or to transcend the very idea of the self: e.g. to become invincible in a bulletproof body and to thus fight the oppressors. Losing oneself boosts another: an intoxicated self. Therefore, the self-loss associated with Voodoo is never too far away from the self-enhancement associated with Vogue. When voguing, ›you‹ have to present yourself on the catwalk: to the crowd and to the judges, in front of your own house and in front of the opposing houses battling for the same trophy. ›You‹ have to stand up for yourself on the runway used by the other voguers who run in the very same category. However, it is the dynamics of the gathering and of all the people ›you‹ have to present yourself in front of that gives you this sort of power. ›You‹ stand up for yourself because they want you to stand up for yourself. ›You‹ stand up for yourself because they need you to. The assembly is giving ›you‹ the very self to stand up for. Which leads to the question where this self was to begin with: This self seems a product of gathering in a state of trance and intoxication in the first place.

Instead of letting the self grow bigger, other practices aim at letting the self vanish: The pop-cultural imagery of Voodoo is associated, at best, with falling unconscious, with speaking in tongues, and with entering another realm – all as part of an allegedly exotic ritual. Your trance is not your own, ›you‹ are someone else. ›You‹ are remote controlled: by the substances, by the rhythm, by the music. This other self has been transferred onto ›you‹ by

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a ritual: by a ritual that produced a connection with others where there formerly was none; by a ritual that brings you together with others who (like you) are strangers to themselves now. But they are together with you: ready to bond, ready to achieve a common goal. The Western cinematic imagination has more often than not pictured this as the logic of the angry mob empowered by the dark forces of Mother Nature and unleashed against the pillars of rational civilization. But there is nothing in the structure of this self-loss that necessarily implies this image. The logic at stake seems rather one of inclusion than of exclusion. Just as in Vogue, the new self is a self received through sharing one's own self-loss with others. One loses one's alleged individuality but losing oneself individually would make very little sense. In the Susan Buck-Morss version of Voodoo it is an image of a togetherness that (despite all of Buck-Morss's aspirations to a ›universal history‹) emerges from the rhythm of self-loss. But (just as in Vogue) this self-loss begs the question what kind of self there actually had been to lose in the beginning.

From this point of view, neither Vogue nor Voodoo allow for a neat division between individual and collective experience. Both are rhythmical, musical and intoxicated practices interweaving the self and the others because the others already are part of the self. Drugged or sober, frenetically dancing or transfixed: This interweaving marks the basic dynamics of togetherness. One cannot escape it even when alone. It is enhanced when coming together in an assembly. And it is taken to a peak when this assembly starts celebrating: celebrating itself and all the others who want to join in. While presenting ›us‹ to, keeping ›ourselves‹ from, or losing ›ourselves‹ in a celebratory gathering ›we‹ might invent alternative ceremonies for an ›art of being many‹ as well as other states of trance to go along with it.

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Foreplay in Many Axioms

A Theoretical Voguing on Performance, Labor, Pleasure and Multiplicity

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What I call ›foreplay‹ is a mode of performance production existing outside of pre-asserted structures of recognition, in terms of professionalism, artistic achievement and a logic of eventfulness. Such production is constituted of forms of artistic labor that question, in their enactment, a pre-asserted order of value. I call foreplay circumstances of performance that, just like queer voguing in the ballrooms of 1980s Harlem, are sustained by a labor of pleasure on the part of performers and spectators, and exceed the frame of a singular event; performances that exist outside of a market rationale, or at least are not yet recognized as valuable in any profitable system of performing arts; performances that are not organized according to a climax, but develop in an extended interval of leisurely enjoyment, and within a complex economy of attention and distraction.

Welcoming the invitation to think in a horizon of multiplicity, proposed by *The Art of Being Many*, I shall present here the theoretical hypothesis I call foreplay, which I have developed in my work over the last years, in a series of multiple propositions, which you can take – if you wish – as a form of ›theoretical voguing‹, with each axiom asserting itself on the catwalk of your reading, and competing for your attention. Alternatively, you can think about these propositions as the many points of a pamphlet, claiming the rights of a disavowed, multiple, and nameless pleasure of performing against the orgasmic sovereignty of the ›event‹. Finally, you can take these many points

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as many possible beginnings of this essay: as an open-ended series of preludes to my piece on foreplay.

- Foreplay – a concept I borrow from sexual terminology – is a way of thinking about playful activities that are both implicated in, but yet somehow also avoid, the teleology of productive labor. By ›foreplay‹, I mean an a-teleological mode of activity which, in a sense, anticipates and postpones a productive outcome, and in so doing stands as an endless prelude, preceding and multiplying an event that never takes place as singular, enacting a production which is nevertheless not recognized as ›proper‹.

- In *The Oxford English Dictionary*, the word foreplay features as an entry under the suffix ›fore‹, and it is defined as: »stimulation or love-play preceding sexual intercourse« (1989). According to *The Merriam-Webster Dictionary,* foreplay is also any »action or behavior that precedes an event« (2003). The nature of the event whose advent foreplay announces and prepares is not clearly specified: Shall we understand it as the coitus? Or rather, as orgasm? How to measure what is preliminary, propaedeutic, serving as a teaser and appetizer, and what is in fact ›the real thing‹?

- According to its definition, foreplay appears as a slippery territory of *crescendo* that cannot claim the status of an arrival. Foreplay, that is, is a praxis not allowed to be its own stable signifier, relegated to the status of a parasitical entity: its function is ascribed retrospectively, as if only a future occurrence were entrusted to open the time proper to the activity itself.

- Foreplay, therefore, is a labor of pleasure inhabiting an ›improper‹ time: a time projected towards the possibility of consummation, without the guarantee of arrival. It occupies surreptitiously an interval which is not legitimate, if not submitted to and disciplined by a future development.

- The concept of foreplay, however, inhabits a structural paradox: The event that might possibly secure its ontological status, which might transform it into a ›legitimate‹ praxis of production, is what puts an end to foreplay as such. In other words, if the accomplishment of foreplay – in

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coitus, or in its supposed climax, the orgasm – is what justifies its temporality of deferral (along with the pleasure accumulated in its duration) the ›event‹ would be, after all, both the temporal and purposive end of foreplay.

- The teleology intrinsic in the common understanding of foreplay is clear, for instance, if we consider the linguistic equivalent of this word in other European languages, such as Italian or French. The sexual activities preceding intercourse are here referred to as *preliminari*, or *préliminaires*, and therefore point directly to the teleological aspect of sexual intercourse: an outcome, understood as actualized pleasure. ›*Preliminari*‹ conjures the achievement of a goal: Each gesture of desire would be ›preliminary to‹, entailing the expectation of a linguistic object supposed to complete the finality of the sentence, the finality of *pleasure as an event*.

- Foreplay is also a useful figure to discuss the way pleasure is mobilized and exploited in contemporary capitalism: a context in which labor time is too often blurred with the worker's own free time, serving as an endless deposit of labor power, available for exploitation and self-exploitation especially when conditions of employment and remuneration are slippery. In this context, artistic work is rarely recognized as such in the moment of its enactment, but mostly happens in a projection toward the horizon of its potential realization as value. For example, too often artistic labor is not paid up front, and its articulation is sustained by virtue of ›love labor‹. This predicament takes several different forms, among them that of the application, deferring the moment of a project's enactment to a potential future; that of voluntary participation in artistic projects for the sake of passion, good will, eagerness or ›professional training‹: supposedly key ingredients in the demand to undertake work for the sake of love rather than of wages.

- Like foreplay, such effort of love, such experience of pleasure in working regardless of economic recognition, inhabits a time seemingly dependent on a future outcome, which could retrospectively turn love labor into what could be considered, and remunerated as, proper ›work‹. Like foreplay, such labor of pleasure is haunted by its condition of being preliminary, by its own parasitical relation to a possible, forthcoming futurity.

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- In the same logic in which pleasure is mobilized as a key ingredient to keep alive the promise of future recognition for labor, such forms of exploitation – framed either as training, as preparation for work, as gratuitous work services or the like – are gladly welcomed as ante-chambers of productivity, although in most cases they constitute the structural base of production proper.

- What happens, however, in the space between the promise – projected toward a future outcome – and its potential accomplishment? How can we think about the time of foreplay outside of its future and retrospective evaluation as ›preliminary‹? Can we? What remains of foreplay if we tear off *telos* from its horizon? What remains of such labor of pleasure if we imagine it outside of a progressive course of evaluation?

- My proposal abstracts foreplay from the common language and opens it up to its own etymological potentiality. I regard foreplay as a concept and praxis hiding in its own linguistic predicament pointers toward an understanding of itself as something other than a preliminary praxis. While pointing towards a future play, in fact, the term foreplay also conjures a longing for the play that was *before*, the previous times in which pleasure took place, even without reaching a climax. However much expectation towards an event the ›fore‹ might create, the word *play* itself puts finality under question, reshuffling it backwards in a semantic and temporal imprecision. If we consider it carefully, we shall notice that in foreplay the ›event‹ is extended beyond its own singularity, either in time, position, order, or rank.

- By liberating this other sense, I appropriate foreplay's intrinsic functioning as a counter-technology of pleasure and labor. I appropriate it as well as a counter-technology of value for labor as praxis.

- Learning from foreplay, in a sense, means learning a different form of inhabiting what is presented as a parasitical and disenfranchised position for us love laborers, disobeying at the same time a logic of futurity which exhausts both the pleasure and the continuity of work.

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- Claiming such a different sense of foreplay means affirming a powerful disobedience to the ›diktat‹ of achievement presiding to sex, as much as to work, and haunting the enactment of both labor and pleasure.

- The idea of foreplay I reclaim undermines the supposed progressive temporality of sex, according to which there is a duration considered preliminary insofar as it prepares for a ›real‹ event. Such temporality configures pleasure as something growing to a point of extinction, standing as the ultimate actualization of pleasure, and its value.

- Obviously, such a progressive structure of sexual pleasure is historically constructed, conceptualized and supported according to a distinctively androcentric model. Female orgasm, in fact, has long been regarded (and treated) as a problem, precisely because of its structural ›failure‹ to meet the androcentric logic of pleasure, according to which orgasm marks a point of no return in the sexual act. The potentiality for reaching multiple orgasms during sex, which is intrinsic to female sexuality, is itself a powerful threat to the idea of ejaculation as the ultimate goal of coitus.

- Foreplay, as female pleasure has known for long time, is not preliminary, neither preparatory, nor surrogate to orgasm. On the contrary, it enables a multiplicity of orgasms, neither of which is sovereign on pleasure nor on the temporality of love-making. Outside of any progressive logic, foreplay puts in question the sovereignty of the event of orgasm, and in so doing it multiplies the potentiality of the event, as well as the possibility of persistence beyond the event itself.

- Foreplay counters the notion of ›event‹ as that which exists in a rhetoric of actualization and subsequent disappearance, a logic which is forgetful of both the longue *durée* of labor, and of value. That is, the contemporary emphasis on the event – as ephemeral, singular climax – overshadows the slippery path which artistic labor undertakes in its becoming value, its toil and its pleasure, its possibility of existence outside of an achievement considered as ›outcome‹.

- Foreplay is a way of thinking about the endurance of pleasure as a tactical occupation and organization of time and labor. It is an idea countering

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the trajectory of finality haunting the temporality of potential value realization, which is central in the most common demands placed upon the potential worker in the artistic field.

- The notion of foreplay addresses the mode of production of artistic labor outside of a logic in which ›preparation‹ (in the form of workshops, training, stages, etc.) is either something already marketed as a consumable commodity, or is an antechamber of supposed productivity, haunted by an always forthcoming future career.

- Foreplay names a mode of engagement with performance-making that, from within the production system in which, necessarily, it is embedded, possibly disavows its implication in a teleological ›end‹, sustaining the pleasure of its doing as work – hence struggling with the temporality constructed by the necessity of its future valorization.

- Such a mode of engagement assumes pleasure as an engine of continuation and renewal of work. It reconfigures artistic work as a doing, as a praxis, rather than as a horizon. It mobilizes pleasure as a measure of production and as tool for cooperation (with co-workers and spectators alike), rather than as profitable function of a delayed future accomplishment.

- The temporality I call foreplay, moving back to where we started, can be recognized as inherent to certain artistic practices, disavowing their eventfulness and their potential valorization, playing with the pleasure of multiplying their own units of accomplishment, outside of a progressive logic of completion.

- The ›vogue‹, in this respect, is a brilliant example: Instead of an event to be witnessed in a state of concentration, voguing entails a series of numbers, poses, performances, all of which constitute a climax of sorts, and all of which, however, participate in the continuing enjoyment of the evening as well. It is a performance praxis born out of a common pleasure of ›doing‹, in a collective scene of recognition. It is a performance practice that longs, in fact, for the pleasure which was before: the previous times in which a performance took place in a particular circumstance (for

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example, in a particular ›house‹), for the previous time in which dancing and striking poses was enacted, witnessed, celebrated in the social scene of a common invention.

- The mode of performance labor I call foreplay calls upon a sense of deferral, rather than an accomplishment of pleasure. It brings about an idea of loitering, of over-staying in a condition of work understood first and foremost as pleasure. In the vogue, the structure of the competition plays with the supposed final horizon of achievement: performing as well as possible the glamorous image that one has chosen to present, and enjoying performing for and with others, is the horizon of achievement, rather than a vehicle to a final validation. In a sense, the structure which the vogue assumed, at least in its early incarnation, mimicked and subverted the very grammar of success and public recognition presiding in show-business: By voguing, the performers claimed and affirmed an autonomy of the act of exposure, as radical as the affective community sustaining such performances as praxis.

- Foreplay also names a mode of performance-making characterized by a lack of mastery and professionalism, at least in the traditional sense in which these categories are understood and marketed in capitalism. The vogue, at least in its heydays, challenged the idea of professional performance, along with the training supposedly necessary for performing. Voguing, in fact, is not embedded in a developmental process where procedures, knowledge, and skills are put under scrutiny and trained or organized towards the professional stage of an artistic craft.

- At the same time, the vogue is a praxis producing its own technology of performance, one elaborated collectively as creative self-invention. Voguing can be regarded as a performance work indifferent towards being not, or not yet, recognized and remunerated as professional performance.

- Foreplay names, as well, a specific mode of attending performance, one in which the event is received distractedly as part of a spectrum of leisure activities, rather than becoming the focus for a more studied or ›labored‹ attention, such as it is expected in the ›legitimate‹ theatre venues. Hence,

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it entails a mode of spectatorship assuming on itself a mimetic relation with the performance labor which produces it, and which, on its part, is produced by such leisurely attention.

- Foreplay names a state in which performance does not happens for spectators ›paying attention‹, but rather in a condition of unfocussed eroticism.

- Countering the orgasmic logic that views sex as a labor that reaches a point of exhaustion and then vanishes, the idea of foreplay names a longing for performance exceeding the logic of an itch that might be scratched and extinguished in the time and space of an event. It points to a desire which over-stays, queering the singularity of performance as event, multiplying its focuses in a multiplicity of forms and temporal articulations.

- Hence, with the idea of foreplay I also want to trouble the very unfortunate, value-oriented expression by means of which, in the common language, the pleasure of sex and that of theatre have somehow fallen into association: the definition of ›sexual performance‹, where pleasure emerges as something to be achieved, and the very process of achieving is rated in terms of performance. Such expression, explicitly flirting with the domain of business, attests to the achievement of a given result, and the process through which the result is attained. Such result is not a feature of production, but an evaluation on the behavior *in time* on the part of the ›performer‹: it is the feat she realizes during her service.

- The logic of foreplay regards performance as something other than a service, other than a feat. It points to the autonomous temporality which artistic labor might elaborate as its own measure, undermining the constructed, progressive temporality of work in contemporary capitalism. In this different measure, I call for a liberation of the temporality of work from the horizon of value realization, and a liberation of pleasure from its position of supplementarity to the always forthcoming domain of capital.

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- Multiplying the points of climax, rather than making the event the climax, multiplying the pleasure in its duration is a call for the liberation of love labor from the absolute domain of value, *at least for the time being*: setting it in a multiple present, rather than an always forthcoming futurity. Foreplay is the name of all the many, nameless moments of pleasure in love-making, striking poses in their duration, in their excess.

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Unfinishing Legislation

Constituent Performativity in the *Charter for Europe*

ELISE VON BERNSTORFF
Translated by Sage Anderson

The *Charter for Europe* is the attempt to initiate a potential constituent process in Europe. Its aim is to operate as a critique of and a counterproposal to the disposition of the politico-economic union of Europe. In order to do so, the Charter develops positions regarding our current political situation. Work on the *Charter for Europe* began at the conference *The New Abduction of Europe: Debt, War, Democratic Revolutions,* which took place in Madrid from February 27 to March 1, 2014.[1] In five different working groups, conference participants – mostly artists and activists – worked out the conception of the charter and a preamble. A first version of the charter was released following the conference, and then disseminated, discussed, and further developed over Skype, Mumbles, and a wiki. During *The Art of Being Many* in September 2014, the charter was presented and discussed in the panel *Real Fictions*. This publication includes the charter in its current state as of November 15, 2015. The charter consists of a preamble and five sections in which the following themes are discussed: democracy, income/debt, commons, governance, and citizenship/borders.

In what follows, I would like to read the charter as a contribution to a constituent process in Europe. Taking the concept of *real fiction* as a starting point, I will deal less with the concrete contents of the charter and more with

1 http://www.museoreinasofia.es/en/activities/new-abduction-europe, accessed October 10, 2015.

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the performative aspects of the text itself. The expression *real fiction* relates reality and fiction to one another but also reveals a tension between them. It refers to the role of the imaginary in every experience, and to the real effects of every fiction: A *real fiction* is only invented and yet completely real. According to Jacques Rancière, the real must be fictionalized so that it can be thought. He explains that »the ›logic of stories‹ and the ability to act as historical agents go together. Politics and art, like forms of knowledge, construct ›fiction‹, that is to say *material* rearrangements of signs and images, relationships between what is seen and what is said, between what is done and what can be done« (Rancière 2004: 39). The reality-changing potential of fiction is significant here as well. The *Charter for Europe* gives itself the form of a charter, and thus evokes associations with state and international legal dimensions. At the same time, however, it lacks legal obligation and legitimation, as well as any power of enforcement or validity. Below, I consider this strategic pretense and its *real fiction,* the presentation of the *Charter for Europe* in relation to the sphere of politics and the political. The aim is to reflect on the role of aesthetics in the political of constituent and constituted acts. With Walter Benjamin, I will differentiate lawmaking and law-preserving acts, a distinction Jacques Derrida both resumes and undermines. The blurriness of both acts leads to the necessity of a legal practice that can be described with Antonio Negri as a continuous constituent process, which allows for the possibility of a continuous renegotiation and thus has the potential to politicize.

In what follows, the role of fiction and the potentials of art as a practice of fiction will be of particular interest. I will begin with a brief introduction into the genealogy of the form of the charter itself and then address the issue of the preamble, which is placed before the law and, for reasons of the general validity of the law, tells the story the law itself may not contain.

THE FORMAT OF THE CHARTER

The term ›charter‹ designates fundamental documents of state and international law; in a broader sense, it also refers to the bylaws or commitments of non-governmental organizations. The early medieval form of the *charta* can be distinguished from the *notitia*: The charter is a dispositive certificate, it applies new legislation through the *traditio cartae,* in the moment of the

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transfer of handwriting, while the *notitia* is a record that confirms the enforcement of a legislative act (Brunner, 1880: 20-21).[2] In the *notitia,* or record, the time of action precedes that of documentation, while in the dispositive charter, the time of action cannot be differentiated from that of recording, to the extent that such dispositive documents are called »acts« (cf. Taylor 1988: 459). Thus, as a rule, the charter is formulated in the first person, present tense, while the *notitia* is formulated in the third person, past tense. The performative textual strategy that underlies the charter's textual form creates the impression of presence and eventful implementation, not only documenting the event but simultaneously inventing it through an action. As a result, the charter in its traditional form is better described as a lawmaking document, rather than a document that preserves legislation.

In keeping with the charter's customary form, the *Charter for Europe* is written in the first person (in the plural in this case, not in the singular), and the present tense dominates. Yet the »we« that speaks is explicitly defined as unfinished and process-related. Descriptive sentences present a way of reading the current crisis in Europe that often contradicts the hegemonic presentation of this situation. Performative statements are used in an illocutionary manner, thus carrying out an action: »We rise up against all this« (*Charter for Europe,* 2. section). Self-contradictions can also be found in the wording of the charter, e.g. holding fast to a concept that is on the one hand to be newly invented, and on the other hand meant to be transformed (»Hold on to this concept. Hold on to its reinvention. Hold on to its transformation«, *Charter for Europe,* 4. section) – adhering to change. The *Charter for Europe* does not institute, it does not determine, instead it remains unfinished in its form, imagining a permanent constituent process that will not be coopted by a constitutional fixing. Here, the *Charter for Europe* breaks away from its legislative character. In the next section, with Walter Benjamin and Jacques Derrida, I will differentiate more precisely between lawmaking and law-preserving acts.

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2 »Because the originator of a carta makes an ordinance with it, and finalizes a legal action, he introduces himself into the document as speaking and acting in the present, with an ego vendu, etc. The notitia, which is merely recorded for the purposes of evidence, has the tone of historical narration, of a report.« (Brunner 1931: 463. Translated by Sage Anderson) On the history of the charter cf. Kramer 2011: 112 and Breslau 1912-1915.

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LAWMAKING AND LAW-PRESERVING VIOLENCE

Conceptual tensions in Benjamin's work between the violence (*Gewalt*) of making and preserving laws are significant in this context as they relate to questions of legitimacy and sanctioning that also play a role in the charter. These concepts – and their tensions – can also be carried over to the relationship between performativity and institutions.

In his 1921 essay »Critique of Violence«, Walter Benjamin (1986) considers how violence, law, and justice stand in relation to each other. Benjamin defines violence as intervention into people's ethical and moral affairs. The concepts of law (*Recht*) and justice (*Gerechtigkeit*) define the sphere of ethical and moral affairs. They are indissolubly intertwined. Benjamin distinguishes lawmaking violence from law-preserving violence. Repeatedly and institutionally, courts and police exercise law-preserving violence in order to maintain the binding force of the law vis-à-vis the people whom they govern. Lawmaking violence introduces a legal order. This act of legislative creation is not legitimized by another, existing law; the conditions for legitimizing procedures are self-produced. Retroactively, so to speak, it posits that something »will have been law«. Law-preserving violence and lawmaking violence are thus closely tied up with each other, propelled by one and the same mechanism, because legislation is only upheld in that it is asserted again and again as binding: The legislative act must be repeated along with every law-preserving act, because the violence of the law must always anew fend off other forms of violence. Benjamin calls this legal violence mythical: »The mythical manifestation of immediate violence shows itself fundamentally identical with all legal violence«. (Benjamin 1986: 296) With Benjamin's essay in mind, it is possible to pursue the inquiry into the constituent process. In a specific societal system, how does an alternative, democratic power emerge that facilitates a break in, or antagonism to, the existing political order without perpetuating the arbitrariness and violence of implementation and the history of sovereignty?

The distinction between lawmaking violence and law-preserving violence is further deconstructed by Derrida. In his reading of Benjamin and the »mystical foundations of authority«, Derrida characterizes the inherent violence of every foundation:

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> Since the origin of authority, the foundation or ground, the position of the law can't by definition rest on anything but themselves, they are a violence without ground. […] They exceed the opposition between founded and unfounded. (Derrida 1992: 14)

The establishment of law is itself a violent act that cannot be self-substantiated. It is only accessible retroactively, in the mode of mythical narration as carried out from within the present order. This argument is particularly strong in Derrida's reflections on the Declaration of Independence of the United States of America (Derrida 2002). The act of the declaration of independence (and every constitutional lawmaking act) is not solely descriptive or declarative; it rather accomplishes what it announces. »The declaration that founds a constitution or a state already includes the binding pledge of the signatory« (ibid: 122)[3]. An institution must make itself independent from the empirical individuals who have brought it forth, while at the same time preserving the act of foundation – act as archive and act as performance. The people in whose name the signature is made does not exist before the declaration; through the signature, this people brings itself into the world as free and independent subject. »The signature invents the signatory« (ibid: 124). It is only the signature that authorizes one to sign: The representative will be legitimized only after the fact. A coup that founds legislation, that brings a law into the world (ibid: 125). To approach the performative character of this, we can revert to the aesthetic practice of theatre: Then, this act can also be described as a staging technique. The subjects (the people to come) speak themselves into being, and for this, they require certain conditions of success. The subjects of the performance are first of all produced by its frame. A fiction thus resides at the core of every legislation; it is always illegitimate and fictional. Yet through this assertion, the fictional may potentially establish itself as fact.

Both a declaration of independence and a charter may obtain legal force (for example the *Charter of Fundamental Rights* of the EU), but a charter frequently takes the form of a statement of intent. The indistinguishability between a performative and a constative structure, which according to Derrida is essential to the effect of the declaration of independence, is also laid out in the form of the charter, in which the act of creating legislation cannot be distinguished from the documentation (Derrida 2002: 124).

3 This quote and the following ones translated by Sage Anderson.

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The *Charter for Europe* has editors who are writing it, but no one who signs; additionally, the number of editors is potentially endless. The ›we‹ means something other than the signatories, yet it remains open and performative – no declaration ›in the name of the people‹, no representative structure. The ›we‹ exists only *with* the declaration, and, describing itself as unfinished, it self-effectively produces itself as a new, unprecedented ›we‹: one that is on the way, that tries to think itself from its own borders, from its own exclusion (»Challenging citizenship in Europe is perceiving it ›from the border‹ itself«, *Charter for Europe,* 19. section). Such a ›we‹ relates to the question of the few and the many: The charter presupposes ratification by the many; the many are the auto-fiction of the few, who in the future will have proven themselves as the many (or not).

THE CHARTER AS CONTRIBUTION TO A CONSTITUENT PROCESS

The categories of lawmaking violence and law-preserving violence as differentiated by Benjamin become indistinguishable in Derrida's writing. Antonio Negri, who grapples intensively with constituent power in several works, makes it clear that this indistinguishability can lead to a new conception of *pouvoir constituant*.[4]

Antonio Negri developed the concept of »constituent power« in his 1992 book, *Insurgencies: Constituent Power and the Modern State.* According to Negri, constituent power is the force that propelled the modern Euro-American revolutions (for example the US-American, French, Russian revolutions), an aspect they have in common despite their ideological disparity. This force is to be differentiated from constituted power, the power that is already factually established. In his investigation, Negri shifts his view from the constitution and the passing of the constitution to an unlimited process. Constituent power brings about a new order of legitimation, which in earlier times would have been established with reference to divine power or power based

4 The distinction between *pouvoir constituant* and *pouvoir constitué* goes back to Abbé Sieyès. Cf. his text from the beginning of the French Revolution, »Qu'est-ce que le tiers état« (Sieyès: 2002).

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on ancestry. While constituent power is frequently seen solely as a temporally limited process and as legitimation for newly constituted power, Negri sees possibilities for constituent regulation of societal constitutions that could keep a continuous constituent process running, even after the supposed end of revolutionary events. The idea of a continuous constituent process can also be described in Derrida's vocabulary as a practical consequence of the indistinguishability of lawmaking violence and law-preserving violence (which is already laid out less explicitly in Benjamin). If legislation is to persist beyond the instance of constitution, it must posit over and over again the law that is to be upheld; lawmaking violence must become law-preserving violence. With his conception of constituent power, Negri distances himself from the juridical conception (Negri 1999: 1): His definition of constituent power is opposed to the becoming of the constitution. Negri refers to the French philosopher and politician of the Enlightenment and Revolution, Jean Antoine Condorcet. Condorcet's statement, »One generation does not have the right to bind a future generation by its laws, and any form of hereditary office is both absurd and tyrannical« (Condorcet 1994: 61), found its way into the revolutionary constitution of 1793. Negri takes this challenge literally and thus goes far beyond the former meaning of *pouvoir constituant.* (Negri 1999: 209). On the one hand, constituent power has the capacity to emerge not only from constituted power, while on the other hand it also does not forcibly institute constituted power (cf. Raunig 2007).

Every constituent power always remains limited and produces exceptions. And every constitution solidifies specific relations of power and sovereignty. A constituent process must make these exceptions and limitations visible again and again, without relinquishing the goal of concrete changes and the search for possibilities of modifying existing power structures. To this end, factually established power provides only few, limited options and instruments; yet the constituent process must aim to reach beyond the established system of governance rather than choosing between these available means (cf. Lorey 2008). In its preamble, the *Charter for Europe* responds to this problem of a constituent power.

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PREAMBLE

To conclude the interpretation of the performative in the *Charter for Europe*, I will look at the preamble that determines the conditions of the reading of the charter. Preambles are introductions that are placed before legal texts. They have no immediate legal force; rather, they assist in the interpretation of a constitution, law, or contract. Premises are delineated, motives described, and historical context recalled; thus they contain something that the law itself is not permitted to contain, because the law only gains its authority when it is »without history, without genesis, without possible derivation« (Derrida 2006: 49). In this way, preambles are barriers that keep historicity and narration outside of the law and mediate access to the law (Vismann 2000: 39).

The preamble is the constitutive ›before‹, the stage direction ahead of the performative that sets the conditions under which the speech act can be felicitous. In the *Charter for Europe* it sets up a specific way of reading the following text, a reading that makes it possible to think of a political reality that is composed differently. The ›we‹ that shows itself here as constituent power is not nationally rooted, it has no sanctioned agency, but instead it is developed by those who fight for codetermination. This ›we‹ defines itself in a performative process, in moments of encounter.

CONSTITUENT PROCESSES BETWEEN FACTUAL INSTITUTION AND ART

What is it that we make decisions about in the democratic process, the instrument of our collective self-determination? What is up for negotiation, and what is already fixed in place? Which decisions are even located in the sphere of the political, and what is withdrawn from politics? In short: How is our constituent capability composed? With a view to actual political practice, the concept of constituent power seems to be far removed from the current disposition and *Realpolitik*. In representative and direct democracy, free elections or votes play an important role, and still there is growing resentment about the deficit of representation (cf. Blühdorn 2013: 14), symptoms of crisis are increasing (sinking voter turnout, less control over markets and enterprises [cf. Crouch 2008 and Agamben et al. 2012]). The administrative unit

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of Europe confronts us with political conditions that are no longer consistent with the schemata of lawmaking and law-preserving, or constituent and constituted. Important components of polity are further excluded from the constituent process (for example in relation to the institutional democratic deficit of the EU[5], or through contracts of international law like TTIP, which introduce investment arbitration that can be bypassed by the courts in unverifiable ways). The EU is constituted without constituent process (»We have faced a radical transformation of the EU which now has become clearly the expression and articulation of capitalist and financial command.« *Charter for Europe, Preamble 2.*).

How are constituent processes possible at all in this respect? It seems that in the first place we must produce the conditions that we need in order to come together and communally assess how we want to live, and how we can communally implement these decisions: the conditions for politics. Christoph Menke defines politics as an action in which collective self-government is accomplished. With the emergence of capitalist economy in particular, political power is taken away from wide areas of society; communal self-governing is not possible. Politicization is action meant to produce the possibility of the political in the first place. Menke does not look for this process in the coup of a revolution or in the declaration of independence, but on a smaller scale. He relates it to art as the production and the positing of a fictional world that is seemingly self-sufficient and removed from *Realpolitik.*[6] If art,

5 Mandates are transferred from member states to European Communities; yet these Community-level mandates are applied by institutions other than the European Parliament, even though before the transfer the national parliaments had the mandate to pass laws in the affected areas. The Council of Ministers of the European Union consists of members of the respective national governments. On the Council, the division of power between (supranational) legislative and (national) executive is not guaranteed. With the formation of a sufficient majority coalition, national governments can be put into position to introduce EU laws without national parliamentary control (cf. Toussaint-Report 1988 [PE DOC A 2276/87]).

6 With Menke, one could ask whether the form of constituting that he sees in art can coexist with already constituted legal systems. Further, one could ask whether it is possible to read Negri in such a way that the constituent within the constituted is an aesthetic practice, which, coming from what is particular in the field of art, could be effective again in the field of *Realpolitik*.

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according to Menke, is not a medium in which we can communally govern or lead ourselves, it can still be an instrument of politicization and the production of the possibility of political action. Politicization cannot only aim to be successful; it is not only a means to an end or mere tactics, just as little as politics can be solely ethics, a distant ideal. Here, the fictionality of lawmaking takes a positive turn as an act of political emancipation. Every act of politicization must therefore »contain within itself a pretension, an uncovered claim: the pretension to already be politics; the uncovered claim to already actualize the freedom of political self-governing, here and now.« (Menke 2006: n.p.)[7] The *Charter for Europe* can be read as such a pretension.

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Charter for Europe

PREAMBLE

1. We live in different parts of Europe with different historical, cultural and political backgrounds. We all continuously arrive in Europe. We share experiences of social movements and struggles, as well as experiences of creative political work among our collectivities, on municipal, national and transnational levels. We have witnessed and participated to the rise of multitudes across the world since 2011.

In fact, the European ›we‹ we are talking about here is unfinished, it is in the making, it is a performative process of coming together.

2. In the wake of the financial crisis we have experienced the violence of austerity, the attack on established social and labor rights, the spread of poverty and unemployment in many parts of Europe. We have faced a radical transformation of the EU which now has become clearly the expression and articulation of capitalist and financial command. At the same time, we have lived through a profound displacement of national constitutional frameworks, we have learned that they do not provide any effective defense against the violence of the crisis, and on the contrary are responsible for the dreadful governance of the crisis. In the ruins of representative democracy, xenophobic chauvinisms, ethnic fundamentalisms, racisms, antifeminist and homophobic processes, new and old forms of fascism proliferate.

We rise up against all this.

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DEMOCRACY

3. Representative democracy is in crisis. A crisis produced from above, by international financial markets, rating agencies, private think tanks and corporate media. But the credibility of democracy is also questioned from below. To talk about democracy is to (re)appropriate and to (re)invent a common sense of democracy. The guarantee of rights to the commons, of the transformation of citizenship, of equality, freedom, peace, autonomy and collectivity.

4. The 2011 uprisings across the world have rescued the living meanings of democracy. When we claim democracy in Europe we do not aim to restore the lusters of the old national constitutional democracies, but rather to invent the institutions that can catch up with the cry of »They don't represent us« spread by those uprisings. We want to claim back our belief in the self-government of the ›demos‹. Hold on to this concept. Hold on to its reinvention. Hold on to its transformation.

5. We are experiencing a post-democratic turn in Europe. National constitutions are being used for the private interest when the Troika imposes budgetary decisions as well as social policies without democratic legitimation. Security, in a similar way, has become a central process in the emptying of significance and performance of democratic institutions. Austerity and security are prefiguring a general transformation of the role of institutions on the global level that is rendering democracy impossible.

6. The constitution of the people is what is at stake for us in what we term democracy. How can we rethink a democratic self-governance in pluralist and participatory experimental ways? How can we learn from the democratic practices on the squares around the globe and think of them as reinvention of participatory processes in the assembly of the many, in order to give ourselves our own rules, laws and rights? How can this process be pluralist, federalist, based on networks and assemblages, movements and relations instead of identities, functions and roles? We envision here something beyond the juridical form of democracy bound to a national sovereign. We are opening up this concept, to spread democratic practices into the social, the everyday, into production and reproduction of life. The state needs to be under scrutiny,

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challenged by the diffusion of radical inclusion and the invention of democratic tools from below.

7. Democracy in Europe means for us a two-sided process in which both ›democracy‹ and ›Europe‹ are intertwined, (re)appropriated and reinvented on the basis of the transnational social and political struggles of the many. Democracy as a practice. Democracy for Europe.

INCOME/DEBT

8. Nowadays, debt has become the main mechanism of both economic governance and capital accumulation in Europe. It works as a multilevel system throughout the whole society. We are witnessing how debt is affecting everyone. Workers, students, the unemployed: no one is allowed to escape from the new debtfare.

9. Debt and income are the two sides of the same coin, when the very reproduction of life is increasingly tied up with the access to credit, and hence with the rise of private indebtment. This is the most distinctive contraposition of the crisis – a contraposition between private and anonymous debtors and the many indebted. Rating agencies, bankers and financial institutions do not represent us.

10. The struggle for democracy is about fighting against the blackmailing of public and private indebtment, hence against the policies of austerity dreadful to the many. The challenge is to transform this generalized private indebtment towards the financial few into a common indebtment of the many towards the many. Money and finance need to get back in the hands of the democratic many. Basic income is the tool we can use for our common indebtment of the many towards the many. It is the answer to the recognition that wealth is something we produce in common.

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COMMONS/STATE

11. Democracy as a process goes along with the constant collective production and use of the commons. This collective production of the commons is the only way to prevent poverty and war and to create social and cultural wealth. It is a matter not only of defending the public policies that sustain education, health, culture and social well-being, but also of moving forward towards new institutionalities of the commons as the means we produce to live together. To do that, the people of Europe have the right to organize themselves in the horizontal way of the many, thereby creating and performing a new form of democracy.

12. New institutions of the commons are continuously invented and created all over Europe to oppose the monopoly of decision of the State. Many of them are emerging in the struggles against the crisis, the austerity policies and their impact on the everyday life of the people of Europe. They are the first steps to reinvent a political and social space beyond the dichotomy of the public and the private sector that sustained the political and social space of modernity, in which the state on the one hand and the market on the other guaranteed the reproduction of power and profit. State and Market failed to create the well-being of the people of Europe. Institutions of Commons break with the logic of social reproduction that have to be borne by other commoners and the commons of the world. They create collective forms of the reproduction of life that are beyond the logic of capitalization.

13. The institutions of the commons are based on collective decision-making and they have to grow stronger in order to have an impact on the everyday life of society for replacing, step by step, the dysfunctional structures of the nation states. We have to democratize governance and national institutions of education, city development, art, research, social and physical well-being in order to provide the means for these new institutions of the commons to become real, to spread and to be sustainable. This can happen only at a transnational level, fighting the global logic of profit and understanding Europe as the space of a democratization from below in the affirmation of the commons.

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GOVERNING/GOVERNANCE

14. The problem is not what form of state is the more appropriate for democracy, the question is how we want to be governed: Modern representative democracy is based on the idea that the many should be governed by being reduced to the few in terms of the traditional party system. Distributed democracy instead relies on the possibility of the self-governing of the people regarding the main issues of our lives in common.

15. The prerogatives of absolute command of a separate body of professional politicians and technicians cannot be the guarantee of a political process in the general interest. We have to get rid of the idea itself of the State as One: The power of the One as a master and manipulator of complexity is incompatible with the practice of democracy for the many by the many. Representative democracy has degenerated into a technocratic authoritarian system, a ›government of the unchangeable reality‹, that is relying on the administration of fear and submission.

16. Beyond a technocratic top-down federalism, we think a democracy of the commons has to rely both on the local dimension and the trans-European one. Natural and artificial commons cannot be ›nationalized‹, neither can they be managed by an oligarchic techno-structure. A democracy of the many can only be a distributed democracy; it can only be achieved by expanding open and bottom-up networks for the common interest. There can be no one-and-only power over the commons, but just a system of distributed democratic counter-powers deciding on the basis their continuous interactions, conflicts and negotiations.

CITIZENSHIP/BORDERS

17. A redefinition of citizenship in Europe must start from migrants' practices of crossing the borders and reclaiming citizenship beyond its nationalistic and exclusionary origins. The various manifestations of borders that we are challenging and fighting against from day to day reflect different situations: they are geographical and state borders, detention camps for migrants, electronic control systems, walls and barbed wires. But they are also internal

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controls and visa regimes. The borders of Europe now reach far beyond the geographical limits of the EU member states, establishing an externalization of migration controls.

18. Physical borders are continuously contested and reshaped by the movement of those who cross and are being crossed by them. Various practices and routes bring people to enter, leave and reenter the space of Europe. However, it is also the multiple movements of the internal migrants, which express and respond to the deepening disparities and inequalities in Europe. These practices are central in contesting what Europe is today and in foreseeing what Europe may be tomorrow.

19. Challenging citizenship in Europe is perceiving it ›from the border‹ itself – we imagine and practice an open, ongoing and inclusive citizenship, disconnected from the place of birth and the place of departure, independent from permanent or temporary residency in one place, not subdued to labor condition and instead grounded on a shared, open and democratic social space.

20. We need to constantly question any position of privilege that downplays demands for ›inclusion‹, however this term may be contested, of anyone who experiences material constraints and differential treatment to access social rights and freedoms. Europe needs to be a project of peace, not for the security of its own borders but for the *safety* of economic, social and political rights.

THE CHARTER FOR EUROPE IS AN OPEN PROCESS

21. We want to initiate a different kind of constituent process on the basis of social and political struggles across the European space, a process towards a radical political and economic change of Europe focusing on the safeguarding of life, dignity and democracy. It is a contribution to the production and creation of the commons, a process of democratic regeneration in which people are protagonists of their own lives. In the squares and the networks, we have learned something simple that has changed forever our way of inhabiting the world. We have learned what ›we‹ can achieve together.

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We invite people across and beyond Europe to join us, to contribute to this charter, to make it live in struggles, imagination, and constituent practices.

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Urban Panics and Black Holes

Ambiguities of Deceleration in the Time of Financialization

MARIOS EMMANOUILIDIS
Translated by Eva Athyridou

The movement of the squares[1] is now accepted as commonplace: a project of political rediscovery, a recurrence of the political body in public space. The event of the squares is an experimental production machine of politics, an experiment on our selves and on our relations with others. It is the labor of the contingent production of another subjectivity. It became a project »of production of abilities disconnected from the reinforcement of the organized power network« (Foucault 1988: 27). But it is not only the participating bodies that were involved in the squares. The whole social body was energized by it. Moreover, the event of the squares motivated a political chattering, a creative or a boring one, which followed the economic verbalism and the dominant narrative about the sovereign debt as a collective guilt of the first year of the crisis in Greece. All these aspects establish the strategic importance of the movement of the squares and its place as a decisive moment. Even if the event did not last long, even if it suddenly ceased, or simply reappeared to disappear again. Even if this experimental machine had its limits.

1 I thank Eva Athyridou, Dimitris Koros, Meriç Özgünes and Anna Tsouflidou for their contribution to the authorship of this paper.

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If we consider the movement of the squares as a decisive moment in the discontinuous lines of resistance or lines of flight, it is useful to examine it in the context of financialization as the new form of capitalism[2].

FINANCIALIZATION AND THE CRISIS OF NEOLIBERAL GOVERNMENTALITY

a. The Perpetual Character of the Crisis and the Dangerous *Parasites*

The event of the squares is undoubtedly linked with the crisis, or, more specifically, with the management of the crisis. And here we are talking about a financial crisis which rapidly turned into a sovereign debt crisis. We would probably not understand much if we considered this crisis a circumstantial disorder, which would result in us returning to normality and to our old dilemmas (neoliberalism vs Keynesianism[3]). The unending crisis is not an accident. Neither is it a deviation from a normality into which we will return when states and supranational organizations will impose the necessary arrangements on financial capital and introduce a new equilibrium between real and financial capital. It would be more accurate to talk neither about the crisis itself, nor about a crisis-regime, but, more specifically, about a perpetual crisis. And I mean a status of perpetual crisis which is linked to the political economy of danger, with financialization as a modern form of capitalism. I think that it is useful to examine the squares-experience, its temporality, its critical attitude, in the frame of a constant crisis as the product of financialization[4].

The financial crisis of 2008 rapidly turned into a sovereign debt crisis. However, the crisis was not the revelation of the functional inability of the Greek state (and actually not only of the Greek state), even though it was considered proof of a corrupt and impotent state. On the contrary, it has made

2 Some of the most important books on financialization are: Bryan/Rafferty 2006; Sotiropoulos/Milios/Lapatsioras 2013; LiPuma/Lee 2004.

3 »For Foucault's crisis of governmentality, Keynesianism was the problem; for us, it appears to be part of the solution«. (Dean 2010: 265)

4 For the perpetual crisis of finance cf. Bryan 2012: 171-6.

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evident a systemic crisis and the state's fundamental exhaustion with regard to knowing and governing the economy. If good governance is linked with the governance of the economy (according to Quesnay[5]), the economy had become invisible to the state even before the crisis occurred. And this issue no longer is a tug of war between minimum and maximum governance, nor one between welfare and neoliberal state. Perhaps it is related to something else, something that the term ›neoliberalism‹ is not broad enough to describe. It is probably a condition where the state is incapable of understanding and controlling capital flows, as capital ignores the state, it slides over it, it crosses it, it penetrates it. Capital (or a crucial modality of it) is now moving in a way that disregards state security (as it escapes it)[6]. Neither consensus nor legitimacy are prerequisites for capital to move, to be produced and to accumulate. If so, to the extent that capital is moving in such a way, economy is not a space where the state can guarantee the well-being of the population. The sovereign debt crisis revealed the constituent crisis of the confidence in the state in the time of financialization: The states function as enterprises with a specific risk profile and their policies are under the constant evaluation of the markets.

Consequently, the administration itself is getting dismantled as the guarantor, the secure field of the population's life. However, »the measure of political efficiency becomes a naked political possibility and effectiveness, of injecting economy within the population's life, through bypassing the injection of the economy to politics« (Foucault 2007: 95)[7]. That is the paradox of the violent and convulsive process of privatizing society with the use of techniques that refer to a sovereign modality of power, rather than to a neoliberal governmentality. We could say, though, that in this era of an infinite

5 »Quesnay speaks of good government as ›economic government‹« (Foucault 2007: 95).

6 It is not »the winding paths of capital« (Arrighi 1994: 12), but the fractals of its nomadic movements.

7 »The essential issue of government will be the introduction of economy into political practice« (Foucault 2007: 95), although, according to Foucault, for liberalism, »economic science never claimed that it had to be the line of conduct, the complete programming of what could be called governmental rationality« (Foucault 2008: 286).

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acceleration of capital, the capacity of the market as a mechanism of understanding things is entering a crisis, at the same time that it remains the only regime for the production of truth. In this context of limited visibility, and of a constant crisis of trust and comprehension, the only space to which state and capital are anchored is the life, the labor, and the property of the population.[8] And that because it is in those elements of life and of labor that capital's risk gets apportioned and shared. »The political government of the population in this era of financialization relies on the liquidation of its life and of its labor. It relies on the conversion of the social body into a wasteland of open, decoded flows into a permanent reconstruction of the living standards of the population. And, subsequently, on its exclusion from the strategic constitutive processes of democracy« (Emmanouilidis 2013: 138).

Yet this refuge of capital and state in the population is a shelter in the most dangerous and precarious position. The danger presented by the poor, the parasites of the financial apparatus, was revealed by the crisis of subprime loans.[9] The poor, these insolvent debtors, were the parasites who shook the global financial system. An understanding of this doubtful position, the position of the poor as the most puissant and the weakest spot, is essential to understanding the course of scattered lines of resistance[10.]

b. The Crisis of Neoliberal Governmentality

I refer to the result of the tension between financialization and neoliberal governmentality as a crisis of neoliberal governmentality: The fast and pre-

8 »Finance creates the social world in the image of capital, and the social world becomes the *anchor* of finance« (Bryan 2012: 176) [my emphasis].

9 »The parasite invents something new. Since he does not eat like everyone else, he builds a new logic. He crosses the exchange, makes it into a diagonal. […] He wants to give his voice for matter, (hot) air for solid, superstructure for infrastructure. People laugh, the parasite is expelled, he is made fun of, he is beaten, he cheats us; but he invents anew. This novelty must be analyzed. […] He makes the order of things as well as the states of things – solid and gas – into diagonals« (Serres 1982: 35-39).

10 For an analysis of politics of exodus and lines of resitance cf. Papadopoulos/Stephenson/Tsianos 2008.

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carious time of financial markets also became the time of the state, an anxious-debtor state subsumed (and regulated) to the constant evaluation of the markets. The result was the constant feeling of a definite crisis – the end of the state – which was expressed as an inability or indifference of the state to positively regulate the population's life.

More specifically, the crisis of neoliberal govermentality was expressed as a crisis of security and freedom – pillars of neoliberalism.

(a) In Greece, the revolt of December 2008 brought about a crisis of security before the economic crisis unfolded. It was the moment when the precariat, the poor, the poorest of the poor, immigrants, school students, wildly invaded the central political scene. In this entrance of the precariat, of the immigrants and not only them, in the central political scene, or, in other words, the diaspora of their visibility throughout the social space, state power has reacted by employing practices of exclusion and discipline. It dissected the urban space, manufacturing a wide siege zone bordered around three university institutions, and with the ›avaton of Exarcheia‹[11] at the epicenter, it organized its policing for the purification of the space. Neoliberals then were asking for martial law to be imposed. The intensification of the political protection in terms of state sovereignty came along with an escalation of the far-right fascist and racist violence: The period after December 2008 was the first threshold of Golden Dawn's appearance.[12] In that regard, December 2008 was a crack, a destituent force, from which a crisis in the constitutive procedures of neoliberal subjectivity unfolded. As if it were the management of a crisis even before the crisis itself.
(b) The financial crisis put another basic element of neoliberal governmentally into crisis: the subjects' freedom of action and movement[13], a freedom of the neoliberal subject that constituted the coordinated feeling of the infinite possibility for the risk-taking of differential credit actions with a feeling of an infinite possibility for the unfolding of the self. The crisis, as a crisis of

11 »Avaton« is the Greek word for the autonomous monastic state of Mount Athos, the entrance to which is prohibited to women. Exarcheia is a region in the center of Athens characterized by vivid political activities in which the presence of the state is limited and questioned by leftist and anarchist groups.

12 Golden Dawn is the Greek neo-Nazi party.

13 Free to choose-obliged to be free to choose, cf. Rose 1999:87.

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the subjects' pervasive feeling of finitude and shrinkage, or the impossibility of undertaking such actions, was also a crisis of the field of the subjects' practices of freedom.[14]

METROPOLITAN BLOCKADE: THE TACTICS OF DECELERATION AND THE TEASE OF NON-GOVERMENTALITY

And then, when the consensus produced by this era of financialization (until 2008) came to an end, the dangerousness of the population was revealed when they suddenly sat in the squares. Because this population refused impoverishment, the liquidation of its life, its political exclusion by a state in a crisis of material and moral solvency. The crisis of neoliberal governmentality has revealed and produced a political exhaustion of representative and accountable government.

The population has refused the degradation of its life and got together in the squares. It attempted to reinvent direct democratic procedures, the so-called ›real democracy‹, it released its body from the fear of violence, it spoke words of resistance and disobedience, words of betrayed and de-subjugated subjects. »Metropolitan assemblies de-block and re-claim the subjectivity of the panic-stricken, precarious, exhausted inhabitants of the city.« (Tsianos forthcoming)

They gathered, they settled, they did not move linearly, unlike in December 2008, as an exceptional, dangerous ›inside‹ of an ›outside‹: The people participating in the processes of the square movement attempted to establish the inside space of democracy and to replace the Parliament, the representative processes of a decaying, immoral ›outside‹. »*Blockade* and *panic* are what makes these acting assemblies look so threatening. […] Metropolitan blockade means multiplying space rather than segmenting and cutting it off,

14 Michel Serres defines crisis as the point of appearance of the finitude of nature; as the appearance of a barrage to the world, the knowledge that »we are infinite as far as the logic, the research, the desire and the will is concerned, and of that nature beyond us is finite« (Serres 2011: 47).

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connecting the various parts of the city, creating layers of quietness and action. The city becomes a zone outside representative political power and oligarchic democracy« (ibid).

The event of the squares was in some way the activation of moral and political art. And it was about the art of those who had the preoccupation and the will »not to be governed *like that*, by that, in the name of those principles, with such and such an objective in mind and by means of such procedures, not like that, not for that, not by them« (Foucault 2007b: 44).

What is important about the movement of the squares is the appearance of the body in public space, in this space of political gathering. The emergence of the body in public territory. Political split is primarily taking place on the ground, says Jean-Luc Nancy (2013: 7). And it is a land without labor and pleasure, even if the squares movement was a feast. The squares were a place for citizens to get together, ensured that they were on the right side, a side with multiple features. The event of the squares was the new territorial politics enacted through physical presence. And that new politics was at the same moment a project of deceleration, as if it were a counterweight against the infinite speed of financial flows. If we assume that the encounter in the squares was initiated by networks rather than the expectable groups and collectives, its destination was the encounter of bodies in one territory, an encounter in which, paradoxically, the utmost speed of networks became almost stationary. An encounter of bodies beyond the pervasive trading field, beyond the fenced field of trade unions and political parties.[15] Deceleration, though, is not immobility, it is not the absence of speed. »Moving strongly but not too quickly«, is the title of the second part of Mahler's 1st Symphony[16]. It means that I slow down to see, to hear, to get together. If the demonstration moves dynamically to ideally produce an explosive event in a dense time, the time in the squares is slow and continuous: an extended occupation of a central space.

The multitude settled in the center of Athens, on the Syntagma square across from the Parliament, disorganizing the city center's regulatory power. And the space of the city center got smoothed out and became a place where

15 »In the forefront of the mobilizations, new social strata entered, different, or rather beyond the ›people of the Left‹, the syndicates and the movements« (Milios forthcoming; translation by Eva Athyridou).

16 I thank Eva Athyridou for mentioning this to me.

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time stopped being abstract time and became the concrete time of bodies. And then, the bodies became a major minority sitting in a ›smooth‹ central space: a place empty of monetary erosion where money no longer is the strategic power relation[17]. Thousands of discourses sprang from this smooth place; but it is not the discourses we are interested in. It was there that non-representative politics was activated for a moment as a strategic relation.

And all these, a certainly bold sparking, were made possible through the slow banality of bodies in squares. »The general intellect was spreading harmlessly in instant communication, at the service of financial desire, entrenched in formalistic research, a schizophrenic body in a potential assemblage with neoliberal governmentality. This general intellect then suddenly washed up in a barbarian, multiple, though complete, body« (Emmanouilidis 2013: 145)[18].

All of a sudden (and in an unexpected way), the possibility of producing a new life appeared as an outcome of this crisis of liberty and the security apparatuses of neoliberalism. »People disidentified themselves from the atomized panicking individual to become an urban monster that devours space« (Papadopoulos/Tsianos/Tsomou 2012: n.p.). Squares have reactivated the force of the art of being many. And it was not only a practice of truth, a parrhesia. It was a practice, an apprenticeship of physical courage. While the demonstration on May 5, 2010 (Marfin Bank, Athens) collapsed

17 »The power which every individual exercises over the activity of others […] exists in him *as the owner of exchange values, of money*. The individual carries his social power, as well as his bond with society, in his pocket«, (Marx 1989: 109; translation by Eva Athyridou). Money for Marx is a strategic power relation and »money becomes the *real community*«. For Foucault, »we must distinguish the relationships of power as strategic games between liberties – in which some try to control the conduct of others, who in turn try to avoid allowing their conduct to be controlled or try to control the conduct of the others – and the states of domination, which are what we ordinarily call power. […] The word ›game‹ can lead you astray: when I say ›game‹ I mean a set of rules by which truth is produced. It is not a game in the sense of an amusement; it is a set of procedures that lead to a certain result, which, on the basis of its principles and its rules of procedures, may be considered valid or invalid, winning or losing« (Foucault 1997: 297).

18 Translation by Eva Athyridou.

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in face of its dazzling blast of violence, on the other side, the Aganaktismenoi, the Indignados, decided to avoid this violence in the first place. As best as they could, they attempted to better manage state violence. In the gathering of June 28-29, 2011, they were seeking ways of escaping a possible clash. It was a tactic of clashing, leaving and returning to the square.

This tactic of avoidance and of reoccupation at the same moment established the bodies of the squares as visible and permanent, as it was not disappearing in the frontal collision with the State[19]. Principally, state violence became visible and delegitimized through this process. Though, after the ›summer vacations‹ of the squares movement and the following attack on the President of the Republic, the movement ended with a big demonstration. It was the revolt of February 12, 2012. This demonstration was a movement of »absolute refusal« (Hatzopoulos/Marmaras/Parsanoglou 2012: n.p.). And on that day, the desire to become radically ungovernable has appeared at once so clear, on that day that was the last day of the revolt in Athens, the ›termination‹ of ›the indignation movement‹, its ›end‹. The revolt of February 12, 2012 in Athens, approached the tease of the absolute refusal of governmentality, and then it withdrew from it (the massive demonstration of the same day in Thessaloniki felt as if it was a lament). And if we can afford to be a bit blasphemous towards the passion of the revolt, of the courage of the body on this day, the tease of this revolt, the limit that it touched, was itself the tease of Foucault's non-governmentality[20]. Conversions of the squares movement have started from then on; the strategic management of the movement's potential, or its will.

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19 »Armies were like plants, immobile, firm-rooted, nourished through long stems to the head. We might be a vapour, blowing where we listed. Our kingdoms lay in each man's mind, and as we wanted nothing material to live on, so perhaps we offered nothing material to the killing. It seemed that a regular soldier might be helpless without a target. He would own the ground he sat on, and what he could poke his rifle at« (Lawrence 1989: 8).

20 »I do not think that the will not to be governed at all is something that one could consider an originary aspiration. I think that, in fact, the will not to be governed is always the will not to be governed thusly, like that, by these people, at this price. […] I was not referring to something that would be a fundamental anarchism, that would be like an originary freedom, absolutely and wholeheartedly resistant to any governmentalization. I did not say it, but this does not mean that

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3. GOLDEN DAWN AS AN APPARATUS OF CAPTURE[21]

The labor of deceleration (as the temporality of the squares) is ambiguous, though. It has differential lineages and it follows different paths. A deceleration-fixation and a deceleration-escape from neoliberal governmentality. This deceleration sets a limit to the chaos of financialization[22]. But this limit cannot be the impossible and undesirable return to disciplines of national sovereignty or to the welfare state. This limit is the possibility of discovering our abilities beyond power systems and within the slow time of non-representative democracy.

Right after the event of the squares, another struggle develops and takes form. Maybe it is useful to transpose our subject and to examine this dangerous, paranoid, fascist opinion which claims to be protecting us from the chaotic nomadic movement of capital and the inability of state management[23]. An opinion which claims to be able to set a symbolic threshold in deterritorialized capitalism and to cover the gap of governance's lost ability[24]. Even if this fascist hand cannot produce the future, it claims to be able to manage the present, directly and efficiently in a way that an articulated policy would

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I absolutely exclude it [my emphasis]. I think that my presentation stops at this point, because it was already too long« (Foucault 2007: 74-75). As for Foucault's mention of »originary freedom«, Judith Butler remarks, »he offers and withdraws it at once. ›I did not say it,‹ he remarks, after coming quite close to saying it, after showing us how he almost said it, after exercising that very proximity in the open for us in what can be understood as something of a tease.« (Butler 2001: n.p.)

21 For the relation between the post-crisis regime of a perpetual crisis, post-neoliberalism and the Greek Nazi party Golden Dawn cf. Emmanouilidis 2013.

22 »To slow down is to set a limit in chaos to which all speeds are subject« (Deleuze/Guattari 1994: 118).

23 »It is as if the struggle against chaos does not take place without an affinity with the enemy, because another struggle develops and takes on more importance – the struggle against opinion, which claims to protect us from chaos itself« (ibid: 203).

24 »Our Western political system results from the coupling of two heterogenous elements, a politico-juridical rationality and an economic-govermental rationality, a ›form of constitution‹ and a ›form of government‹. Inconsumerable they may be, but they legitimate and confer mutual constistency on each other« (Agamben 2011: 4).

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not. It claims that it is able to cure the crisis of neoliberal governmentality and the state's inability to constitute a field of production, of trust, of providence for its population in the era of financialization. The fascist overcodification is the return of the demand for solid materials, the resorting to the solid (the naked strength of the bodies, the timeless Hellenism, etc.) as a response to the liquidation of life that the process of financialization demands, and not the crisis itself as a deviation from a normality. But this desire, the barrage to solid materials is the deleterious, desperate, suicidal choice of the crisis' victims.

The period after the event of the squares and primarily after the revolt of February 12, 2012 was not just a threshold of creative upheaval in the shape of a multitude invading to SYRIZA (Gavriilidis 2015). It was also a threshold of normalization, which was crossed with the appearance of Golden Dawn's punitive practices and sovereign commands. The strategic function of Golden Dawn became possible due to its political presence: The neo-nazi party was using the squares movement's critique while at the same moment capturing it, transposing it and making a part of that critique disappear. In the meantime, rebellion was invading (or was reterritorialized) in the systemic procedures of Parliament.

In that context, the event of the squares became heterogeneous: Any relation between the movement of the squares and the rising of Golden Dawn since spring 2012 is a strategic relation, i.e. »a possible connection between disparate terms, which remain disparate« (Foucault 2008: 42).[25] It is not about an inner connection of two, though, as a part of the squares movement's discourse was drained in Golden Dawn, got lost and reappeared as a discourse of an apparatus different to the one of the ›squares‹.

The connection between the event of the squares and Golden Dawn is neither a relation of continuity nor of completion. We are not talking about the ›upper‹ part of the Square that became Golden Dawn. Instead, what happened here is a redirection of discourse through circulation, its shift and adaptation, its appropriation and misappropriation. Golden Dawn captured the squares' energy and made it disappear in a »black hole« of racism and

25 »The function of strategic logic is to establish the possible connections between disparate terms which remain disparate. The logic of strategy is the logic of connections between the heterogeneous and not the logic of the homogenization of the contradictory« (Foucault 2008: 42).

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fascism.[26] »If I were to assign a content to fascism«, Deleuze says, »it would typically be a line of flight that turns deadly« (Deleuze 2011: 219).

If »to govern means to structure the possible field of action of others« (Foucault 1982: 790), i.e. the ability to determine the strategic territory and the disputed objects of action, then it must have been Golden Dawn that since the summer of 2012, and for the subsequent year, was ruling Greek society. Golden Dawn caused the shift of this strategic battlefield. From Syntagma, the space of the square, from a space of potential democratic practices, Golden Dawn shifted the place to impoverished neighborhoods[27]. Golden Dawn occupied the city. The population's denial of impoverishment and the moral critique of the management of the crisis turned into a contempt towards democracy and a desire (or acceptance) to exterminate poor immigrants[28]. This shift was the defeat of the revolt in Athens and at the same time the administration of this defeat: a threshold of normalization.

And these shifts, the capture and the annihilation of acts of resistance and lines of flight, snuck into the anti-state sentiment of society, has enabled Golden Dawn's racist war to unleash. And it was the racist war unleashed by Golden Dawn that ensured the required amount of state sovereignty. It was this racist war that managed to impose the normality of the crisis and to establish the new normativity for a population facing a permanent crisis. This

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26 A black hole is an outcome of a failed line of flight and functions as an apparatus of capture: »[The machine] may produce an effect of closure, as if the aggregate had fallen into and continues to spin in a kind of black hole. This is what happens under conditions of precocious or extremely sudden deterritorialization, and when specific, interspecific and cosmic paths are blocked. […] It is important to bring up this ›black hole‹ function again because it can increase our understanding of phenomena of inhibition […]. Every fascism is defined by a micro-black hole that stands on its own and communicates with others, before resonated in a great generalized central black hole. There is fascism when a war machine is installed in each hole. […] What makes fascism dangerous is its molecular or micropolitical power for it is a mass movement: a cancerous body rather than a totalitarian organism« (Deleuze/Guattari 2004: 368).

27 And again, after the Golden Dawn pogrom of May 2011, against immigrants.

28 ›…to exterminate the impoverishment through the extermination of the poor immigrants‹.

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war was not arranged by a sovereign state but it made the state become sovereign[29]. Because »war is transformative, not instrumental« (Dillon 2014: n.p.).

I do not think that the recourse to the ›deep state‹ and the erosion of the state apparatuses from the far-right are adequate explanations of the dynamics of fascism and its strategic function. There is something more than the stigma of historical fascism that has intruded in, or has infiltrated the state apparatus, which is more surficial than the dark metaphor of the threatening depth that intensifies the so-called existing state problem of Greece today. The dynamics of fascism do not rely on the secret transactions – against a supposed transparency or democratic character of the visible state – or the ideological erosion of the state apparatuses. They consist of the uncharted, infinite financial transactions in the surface of the social body that anemically fund democracy, block the activation of politics as a strategic relation, and produce the possibility of fascization of our times.

What is important in our times is the following definitive and unalterable fact: Something has changed, and that which has changed is also connected, at the same time, with the presence of fascism in our time, the possibility of its dynamics – the process of financialization (and not just financial capital itself), already before the crisis, went along with a rearrangement of the modality of power, an intensification of the sovereignty of an impotent political authority, a fascization of the systems of power, but also with the possibility of the fascization of the multitude as a desperate reaction to the inability of escape.

29 »The harsh measures towards irregular immigration and immigrants and the discourse on sub-humans and intruders, the threats to the existence of our society, could for some people be explained as signs of an authoritarian, barbaric, exceptional state, but the fact is that an exceptional and barbaric state is a strong, proud and confident state that stands on its feet and imposes the government of the social body through terror. However, the state now is a frightened formation which cannot govern with security, it cannot even deceit, as it cannot plan, therefore its oppressive statements are violent signs of distress« (Koros 2014: n.p.).

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INCONSISTENCY

The event of the squares in Greece has appeared suddenly, just a year after the end of the powerful strikes and protests organized by trade unions. It lasted for one or two months and the constituent process which started from the squares remained incomplete. No matter how it ended, the squares succeed in creating a »smooth place« in the center of the city and to motivate a critical political project (a ›just-in-time‹ project)[30].

So on the one hand we have the strategic battle of the depreciation of labor power, and the liquidation of all elements of life, and on the other hand the slow, underground or sudden, movements of the many trying to escape annihilation or searching for a unifying point from which to resist.

And there is a last issue concerning the transmutations of the critical practices. There is a fine, subtle line, between the square event and the growing interest for the commons and practices of collaboration. But the collaborative practices might fund another movement as well: the funding of the capital valorization through the activation of a small, local, moral entrepreneurship. This process leads to the reassembly of neoliberal subjectivity.

This temporal discontinuity of resistance, its unexpected acts, the vulnerability of its potential, and recently, its reterritorialization in parliamentary procedures, puts the critical project in a permanent starting position, or makes it appear as if it is in a permanent starting position. As a result of this, the practice of critique remains constant while at the same moment it is constantly in a position of emergence. A position, which we can conceive in contiguity to financial capital (as a ›body without organs‹), and which is related to the production of a post-crisis, fluctuated subject, in a position of impotent prudence and prediction of its life events. It is as if we are still in the same blind place which made Deleuze wonder in 1977 (in his last, unanswered letter to Foucault): »how to maintain the rights of a microanalysis (diffusion, heterogeneity, piecemeal character) and yet find a sort of unifying

30 »Overall, the occupy protest movement is not linear, synchronic, nor evolutionary. Its failure to produce a new permanent structure for real democracy or for organising future mobilisations or a new »species« of revolutionary subjects is also its strength. The occupy protest movement is, strictly speaking, not a movement at all, but a block of strange and unfamiliar becomings emerging in different locales« (Kambouri/Hatzopoulos 2011: n.p.).

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principle which is not of the State, party, totalization, or representation type?« (Deleuze 1997: n.p.).

But we probably have to avoid this unanswered questioning of a unifying principle. Maybe it is now time to accept the ambiguous power of the obscure position where the body, as a victim of financial capital, is a body of strength where capital anchors itself. Because this obscure position is the power and the weakness of the poor. Maybe now it is time to accept that the critical attitude of our time demands or presupposes inconsistency, the rupture with reasons and outcomes of action.

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Open Source Finance Hacking

Potentials and Problems

BRETT SCOTT

The global financial system is a notoriously opaque and alienating complex. The system is implicated in social injustice and ecological destruction around the world, and the key financial institutions, such as banks and funds, wield unhealthy levels of political power. The financial sector – that cluster of institutions that sit in the center of the financial system – have at least five problematic dimensions.

Firstly, the financial sector routinely steers money into projects that are hardwired to breach planetary ecological boundaries. It is thus premised on ecological *unsustainability*. Secondly, it is an active agent of *inequality*. Not only do financial professionals reap outlandishly large salaries, but financial instruments like shares and bonds are conduits for powerful cartels of investors to direct money into the powerful corporate sector, often in ways that do not benefit ordinary people.

Thirdly, even if you do not believe that the sector creates inequality, it exhibits high levels of *complexity* and *opacity*, which, when combined with the fact that the system is highly interconnected, translates into high levels of *systemic risk*, the ability for financial crashes in one country to shake the entire global economy.

Fourthly, the sector hosts a particular *culture of finance*. This tends to be portrayed in the press by pictures of obnoxious traders swilling champagne, but the much deeper issue is the pervasive denial of agency and responsibility found in the sector: Financial institutions like to portray their profession as an apolitical agent of economic efficiency, rather than accepting the highly

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political nature of allocating credit and facilitating investment processes around the world.

Fifthly, there is the process called *financialization*. In basic terms it is the creeping sense that the culture and drives of the financial sector are taking over many aspects of life previously untouched by it, turning everything into investable and tradable commodities. Thus, land and atmospheric pollution rights become parceled into land investment funds and commodity investment baskets, while people's life insurance policies get parceled into structured investment products for hedge funds to speculate on.

These trends, when taken together, have a way of creating ever more alienating and obscure financial phenomena, which appear incomprehensible and uncontrollable to the average citizen. Take, for example, high-frequency algorithmic trading, portrayed by those involved as a force for rational efficiency, but creating hitherto unknown levels of systemic risk.

It is notoriously difficult to try imagine alternatives to our dominant financial, and broader economic, system, though. We can sometimes see promise in individual initiatives that we support – for example, an alternative currency, or a social lending platform, or a co-operative – but we struggle to see how they represent any broader program of change.

Indeed, many standalone alternatives to mainstream finance actually end up getting critiqued by radical thinkers because they do not offer such an overall program. Thus, Bitcoin has moved from being viewed as an interesting, subversive technology to being viewed as a conservative techno-libertarian get-rich-quick project. Microfinance gets slated for reproducing the politics of debt on a micro level. The promise of crowdfunding is critiqued for reproducing the illusion of ›everyone can be an entrepreneur‹.

For every interesting new innovation, there are dismissive and demotivating critiques waiting to be discovered. While the technology conferences host happy-clappy ›everything is awesome‹ innovation fetishists and elitist ›entrepreneurship will save the world‹ types, activist conferences are full of ›everything is shit‹ critical theorists, waiting to sledgehammer down whatever proposals come out of the tech conferences.

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THE HACKER NARRATIVE

It is a fine line trying to walk between these poles, to maintain a critical mind whilst not weighing yourself down with the implications of your own critique. In 2013 I attempted to articulate such a line in my Pluto Press book, *The Heretic's Guide to Global Finance: Hacking the Future of Money*, sketching out a critical but positive vision. In the book I drew on hacker philosophy to suggest approaches to exploring the financial sector, jamming some of its negative elements and building alternatives.

Of course, it goes without saying that the terms ›hacker‹ and ›hacking‹ come with a certain amount of political and cultural baggage. Hacking really refers to an *ethic* or an impulse, rather than any specific class of action. ›Hacker‹ is not really something you can put on a business card like ›plumber‹ or ›accountant‹. It has a similar dynamic to terms like ›mystic‹, or ›leader‹, or ›innovator‹: I may have mystical tendencies, or leadership skills, but as soon as I concretize those terms and explicitly call myself a mystic or a leader, I have missed the point in some way. They are not concrete roles. They are loose sets of characteristics that are hard to formalize.

In recent years though, the term has come to have a second problematic interpretation. This is the Silicon Valley version, which presents the geeky but successful male coder-entrepreneur as a ›hacker‹. As the computer industry has become exponentially more powerful, and as tech startup culture has risen to cult status, this definition of hacking has risen too.

Rather than carrying a subversive edge, this version of the term gets applied to all manner of generic computer-based innovation undertaken by preppy, Stanford-educated entrepreneurs. With their mainstream success comes a ›revenge of the nerds‹ triumphalism, and ›hacker‹ comes to refer to an exclusive club of soon-to-be-wealthy business-focused masters of tech.

This in turn has given the ›hacker‹ more legitimacy in innovation scenes in general. The gentrified version of the term is even seeping into public sector parlance and the NGO world, where ›hackathons‹ are held and computer language like ›beta testing‹ and ›2.0‹ are applied to all manner of activities. The true cores of hacking, though, do not correspond with either the criminal interpretation, or the Silicon Valley ›Mark Zuckerberg‹ interpretation. To seek the soul of hacking, we need to go deeper into the underlying impulses and dynamics.

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A major foundation of hacking is the *exploration impulse*, the desire to explore and understand those things that most people in society are not encouraged to explore or understand. It is thus a drive to *de-alienate* a world which might otherwise appear confusing and unwelcoming. For example, urban exploration, or ›urbex‹, crews explore abandoned buildings, infrastructure, underground train lines and logistics centers. Hardware hackers explore the moving parts of machines. Computer hackers explore lines of code.

In its positive interpretation, this adventuring is underpinned by a rebellious *curiosity*. Applying this mentality to the financial sector is useful, because many people are told that finance is something for experts, not something for ordinary people to either understand or be curious about. The perception that finance is ›too complicated to understand‹ subsequently serves to create a layer of protection for the financial sector, much like the perception that computers are too hard to understand forms a layer of protection for groups like Microsoft.

The desire to challenge those perceptions and explore, though, also happens to border on illegality a lot of the time, because roaming past set barriers can involve breaching boundaries encoded in law in society. There is a natural tendency towards *deviance* from social norms built into the hacker ethos. Given that powerful institutions tend to have a strong role in setting such social norms and laws, hacker exploration can occasionally veer into what is defined as ›criminal‹.

The figure of the hacker thus comes with a certain unpredictability, an unstable identity. A core element of the original hacker ethic is the love of tinkering and do-it-yourself maker culture, but what distinguishes it from normal hobbyists is that there is a distinct *mischievous* element to it, often with a dark twist. There is an element of the trickster, like the mythological woodland sprite Puck.

The creativity is not just about building new things, it is about playfully messing with things, bending rules, recombining elements, and especially, using elements of existing systems in ways they are not supposed to be used. Thus, for example, Richard Stallman's concept of ›copyleft‹ is considered a classic hack because it takes the rules of copyright and bends them to create a license that opposes copyright.

In the realm of finance, such hacks can include the subversive use of shares for shareholder activism, the creation of activist hedge funds – such as Robin Hood Minor Asset Management – and mischievous artistic projects

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like Paolo Cirio's *Loophole for All* tax haven hack. More generally though, the do-it-yourself spirit of hacking extends into the realm of alternative currencies, peer-to-peer platforms, sharing economy technologies and cooperatives.

One powerful social phenomenon to emerge from hacker culture is the *open source* movement. It started with people working on *collective* software projects, but as *individuals*, organized via open mailing lists rather than traditional leadership structures. Open source culture is an attempt to fuse elements of individualistic hacker ethics with overt public and community goals. It thus has potential to serve as a model for how to overcome the limitations of standalone hacker culture.

The goal of the original open source movement was to build alternatives to proprietary corporate software programs that are protected by copyright laws. The idea was to create programs with underlying code that was visible to all and available for use under open source ›copyleft‹ licenses. The movement has since expanded into fields beyond software, from Creative Commons music to open source architectural design models. The underlying theme is to disrupt centralized authorities – like large corporates – but to do so by building useful, usable and accessible alternatives for people.

There remain many limitations to the concept. For example, open source culture is definitely technology-centric. I use great open source software like GIMP, Scribus, and Inkscape, but making software widely available does not guarantee anything like broad empowerment. For example, you need support structures to train people.

Furthermore, despite being sometimes cast as a covert ›Marxist‹ movement from some conservative quarters, the open source community itself carries lingering elements of conservative libertarian culture, particularly the idea that self-empowered individuals can shape the world by voluntarily building stuff and then allowing others to opt in. This dynamic has been seen clearly in the Bitcoin community, which operates on open source principles, but which has nevertheless developed a highly unequal demographic of users with unequal levels of access. In other words, Bitcoin arguably *replicates* elements of existing power structures.

The underlying potential is there, though, and there is something authentically powerful about the open source framework. It may be the closest working model we have to an alternative hybrid economic system. It is defi-

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nitely not entirely separate from the mainstream – after all, open source programmers often have day jobs at large tech companies, and large companies often use open source software – but it is building precedents that nevertheless challenges core precepts of the mainstream economic system. For example, it challenges the idea that people only work for their own gain and not for the public good, and that people demand payment, patents and power.

APPLYING THE CONCEPT OF OPEN SOURCE TO FINANCE

Open source culture thus might be a useful way of framing the initial broad changes we might want to see in the financial system. After all, we are stuck within a massively powerful incumbent system, and need to find ways to build anew from that starting point.

Software code is used to build rule systems that steer energy into activating hardware towards particular ends. So, extending this as an analogy, what might financial ›code‹ look like? A financial system, in a basic sense, is supposed to distribute claims on human energy and resources (›money‹), via financial instruments (often created by financial intermediaries like banks), into new economic production activities (›investments‹), in exchange for a return over time.

Here, for example, is a rough financial circuit: A person manages to earn a surplus of money, which she deposits into a pension fund, which in turns invests in shares and bonds (which are conduits to the real world assets of a corporation), which in turn return dividends and interest over time back to the pension fund, and finally back to the person.

Shares and bonds are extractive financial conduits that plug into a corporate structure, but if you looked for how they are coded, you would discover they are built from legal documents that are informed by regulations, acts of parliament, and social norms. They are supported by IT systems, payments systems and auxiliary services.

But it takes more than clearly-worded documentation to be able to create financial instruments. The core means of financial production, by which we mean the things that allow people to produce financial services (or build financial instruments), include having access to networks of investors and companies, having access to specialist knowledge of financial techniques,

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and having access to information. It is these elements that banks and other financial intermediaries really compete over: They battle to monopolize relationships, monopolize information, and to monopolize specialist knowledge of financial techniques.

And indeed, that is why production of financial services mostly occurs within the towering concrete skyscrapers of the ›financial sector‹, spinners of webs of financial code that is mostly unknown to most people. We have very little direct access to the means of financial production ourselves, very little say in how financial institutions choose to direct money in society, and very little ability to monitor them.

We have, in essence, an intense concentration of power in financial intermediaries, who in turn reinforce and seek to preserve that power. And while I may be happy to accept a concentration of power in small specialist industries like Swiss watchmaking, a concentration of power in the system responsible for distributing claims on human society's collective resources is not a good thing. It is systematically breaking our planetary hardware, whilst helping to fuel a culture of bland individualistic materialism in increasingly atomized communities.

OPENING ACCESS, RECONNECTING EMOTION, LIBERATING CREATIVITY

At core, Open Source is supposed to be a philosophy of access: access to the underlying code of a system, access to the means of producing that code, access to usage rights of the resultant products that might be created with such code, and (in keeping with the viral quality of copyleft) access to using those products as the means to produce new things. Perhaps the ethos is best illustrated with the example of Wikipedia. Wikipedia has:

1. A production process that encourages participation and a sense of common ownership: We can contribute to Wikipedia, which is to say it explicitly gives us access to the means of production.
2. A distribution process that encourages widespread access to usage rights, rather than limited access: If you have an internet connection you can access the articles. We might call this a *commons*.

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3. An accountability model that offers the ability to monitor and contest changes: An open production process is also one that is more transparent. You can change articles, but people can monitor, discuss and contest your changes.
4. A community built around it that maintains the ethic of collaboration and continued commitment to open access. It is more than just isolated individuals, it is a culture with a (roughly) common sense of purpose.
5. Open access to the underlying software, which can be tailored and altered if the current incarnation of Wikipedia does not suit all your needs. Look, for example, at Appropedia or Conservapedia.

You can thus take on five conceptually separate, but mutualistic roles: producer, consumer, validator, community member, or (competitive or complementary) breakaway. These same five elements can be the pillars underpinning a future system of Open Source Finance. So let us look briefly at each pillar in turn, along with examples of the types of initiatives that exemplify them.

PILLAR 1: ACCESS TO THE MEANS OF FINANCIAL PRODUCTION

Right now, production of financial services is limited to a closed, elite group of professionals – bankers, fund managers, traders, and so on – who reap very large rewards. They might possess talent, but they are also known to not always act in the public interest, and to occasionally cause giant economic crashes. The goal of encouraging wider participation in financial production would be to bring more diversity into the system whilst empowering people.

Very few of us perceive ourselves as offering financial services when we deposit our money in banks. Mostly we perceive ourselves as passive recipients of services. Put another way, we frequently do not imagine we have the capability to produce financial services, even though the entire financial system is foundationally constructed from the actions of small-scale players depositing money into banks and funds, buying the products of companies that receive loans, and culturally validating the money system that the banks uphold.

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Interestingly, one of the original movements to bring wider participation in financial life was the rise of *day-trading* by stay-at-home semi-professional traders using discount brokerages to play the stock and currency markets. Despite being portrayed by the industry as a movement for empowerment, it is entirely based on the same toxic mentality of short-term speculation encouraged by financial elites. Furthermore, the industry is run by brokers who reap far larger rewards from the system than the actual participants. Lastly, the participants do not offer any real services to society, other than the banal claim made by all speculators that they help to ›increase liquidity‹ in markets.

A much more meaningful movement is the peer-to-peer (P2P) finance movement. We all intuitively understand what P2P finance is: If you decide to lend money to your friend, it is a direct P2P action, and you directly perceive yourself as offering them a service. P2P finance platforms, such as Zopa, extend that concept beyond your circle of close contacts, so that you can directly offer a financial service to more distant people who request those services. In so doing, such platforms offer you access to an active, direct role in producing financial services, rather than an indirect, passive one.

There are also many interesting examples of actual open source financial *software* aimed at helping to fulfil the overall mission of an open financial system. Examples include Mifos, Cyclos, and Community Forge's Hamlets, all of which are designed to help people set up their own financial institutions or currency systems.

Certainly, currency is one active area of experimentation. The concept of ›producing‹ a currency is probably strange to most people, given that many people are inaccurately taught that currency just emerges magically from the government. Designing alternative currencies, though, brings a much more acute awareness of how currency, and confidence in currency, has to be constructed. Bitcoin is fascinating to the public partly because of the incredulity at the idea that people can produce the currency themselves. In using such a currency, I feel aware of my role in upholding – or producing – the system. The scope to construct currency goes far beyond crypto-currencies, though: local currencies, time-banks, and mutual credit systems are emerging all over.

One final area to consider is the drive to add third party customization on top of existing financial services. The Open Bank Project, for example, is trying to open up banks to third party apps that would allow a depositor to have much greater customizability of their bank account. It is not aimed at

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bypassing banks in the way that P2P is, but it is seeking to create an environment where an ecosystem of alternative systems can plug into the underlying infrastructure provided by banks.

PILLAR 2: WIDESPREAD DISTRIBUTION

Financial intermediaries like banks and funds serve as powerful gatekeepers to access to financing. To some extent this is a valid role - much like a publisher or music label will attempt to only publish books or music that they believe are of high enough quality - but on the other hand, this leads to excessive power vested in the intermediaries, and systematic bias in what gets to survive. When combined with a lack of democratic accountability on the part of the intermediaries, you can have whole societies held hostage to the (arbitrary) whims, prejudices and interests of such intermediaries.

One such prejudice built into the current financial system is the way it tends to steer money to those who already have it. For example, huge amounts of money are being lent to hedge funds, while entrepreneurs with small businesses that are useful to society, but that are not sexy like Facebook, get ignored by big investors and banks. Expanding access to financial services is thus a big front in the battle for economic democratization.

Financial inclusion is a whole field in its own right, with a significant history of innovation, mistakes and political wrangling. This includes the credit union movement trying to extend finance into poorer communities that get overlooked by large banks. It also includes microfinance, and international development finance that offers concessionary loans or grants to poorer countries.

Financial inclusion also overlaps with the realm of ICT4D – information and communication technologies for development. One big area of right now, for example, is *mobile banking and payment systems*, which has important implications for international development. Well known innovations include M-Pesa in Kenya, a technology to use mobile phones as proto-bank accounts. These technologies do not necessarily guarantee inclusion, but they do have potential to expand access to lower cost financial services to people that most banks ignore.

On the cutting edge right now, though, is the rise of *crowdfunding*. In the dominant financial system, you have to don a suit and suck up to the small

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set of gatekeepers, hoping they will not exclude you. Crowdfunding, though, has expanded access to receiving financial services to a whole host of people who previously would not have had access, such as artists, small-scale filmmakers, activists, and entrepreneurs with little track record. It is no secret that crowdfunding can be most effectively used by those with existing social networks, but it has a lot of potential to serve as a micro redistribution system in society, offering people a direct way to transfer wealth to areas that traditional welfare systems might neglect.

PILLAR 3: THE ABILITY TO MONITOR

When we deposit money into large commercial banks, we are helping to provide them with a reserve buffer against which they extend new credit in the form of loans. Do you know where they lend to, though? Chances are that you do not, because most banks will not reveal their lending activity, under the guise of commercial secrecy and confidentiality. It is like they want to have their cake and eat it, claiming to be acting as intermediaries on your behalf, but without offering any accountability. And what about the money in your pension fund? Also very little accountability.

We have nascent examples of banks that buck the trend and that explicitly open themselves up to scrutiny. For example, small UK banks like Triodos Bank and Charity Bank publish exactly what projects they lend to. This gives you the ability to hold them to account in a way that no other bank will allow.

Trying to bring more general transparency to the system of financial intermediaries is very difficult, but different interest groups are pushing for it. Governments value transparency because it allows them to monitor taxation and facilitate regulation, especially in an era where huge numbers of hidden inter-bank derivative relationships can form intense webs of systemic risk. Activists want transparency so that they can be more effective watchdogs. Free-market crusaders value transparency in theory, since markets are supposed to only work when there is perfect information.

The transparency agenda goes beyond financial companies. Corporations in general are vehicles for extracting value out of assets and then distributing that value via financial instruments to shareholders and creditors. Corporate structures, though, have reached a level of complexity approaching pure obfuscation. There can be no democratic accountability when you cannot see

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who owns what, and how the money flows. The corporate open data movement, exemplified by groups like OpenCorporates and OpenOil, though, are offering new tools to shine a light on the shadowy world of tax havens, ownership structures and contracts.

There is something about the sheer scale of corporate-level finance that brings a culture of low accountability on the part of both large lenders and large borrowers. It is interesting to contrast this with peer-to-peer models: When people are treated as mere account numbers with credit scores by banks, the people in turn feel little accountability towards the banks. On the other hand, if an individual has directly placed trust in me, I feel much more compelled to respect that.

PILLAR 4: AN ETHOS OF NON-PRESCRIPTIVE COLLABORATION

The prevailing culture of finance is split into two toxic camps. On the one hand there are passive retail investors who put money into banks and pension funds but who do not expect much in the way of accountability. On the other hand, there is the high-flying world of glory-boy traders and corporate financiers who care little about financial inclusion.

People do not always want to have to take full responsibility for their financial life, but it would be great to encourage opportunities for more collaborative, creative participation. At the heart of open source movements is a deep DIY ethos. This is in part about the sheer creative joy of producing things, but it is also about asserting individual power over institutionalized arrangements and pre-established officialdom. It carries, as discussed earlier, the search to remove individual alienation: You are not a cog in a wheel, producing stuff you do not have a stake in, in order to consume stuff that you do not know the origins of.

This ethos of individual responsibility and creativity stands in contrast to the traditional passive frame of finance that is frequently found on both the Right and Left of the political spectrum. Indeed, the debates around ›socially useful finance‹ are seldom about reducing people's alienation from their financial lives. They are mostly about turning the existing financial sector into a slightly more benign dictatorship. The essence of open source, though, is

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to band together, not via the enforced hierarchy of the corporation or bureaucracy, but as part of a likeminded community of individuals creatively offering services to each other.

It is very easy to romanticize that notion, but examples of this ethos are becoming more common. For example, the indie beer company BrewDog raised money through its ›Equity for Punks‹ share offering. Such an offering is probably only going to attract beer-lovers, but that is the point: You get together as a group with mutual appreciation for a project, and you finance it, and then, when you are drinking the beer, you will know you helped make it happen in a small way. Similarly, community shares offer local groups the ability to connect to, and finance projects that are meaningful to them in a local area, whether it be a solar cooperative, a pub, or a ferry boat service.

This underlying ethos is also found in crowdfunding platforms. They offer would-be crowdfunders the chance to connect personally to projects that excite them. That does not guarantee that such people offer equal levels of financing to all types of projects, but it does mean that they feel more connected to those things they do finance.

PILLAR 5: THE RIGHT TO FORK

No financial system is ever going to be perfect, and any particular model inevitably comes with tradeoffs. For example, deposit insurance was initially put in place to protect small-scale depositors, but it has subsequently contributed to people's complacency towards banks. Our goal should not be to try design a stable utopia, but to build institutions that preserve peoples' ability to challenge whatever dominant system is in place at any one time.

The right to dissent is a crucial component of a democratic society. In the open source movement, this right to dissent is referred to as the ›Right to Fork‹, the ability to take pre-existing code, and to modify it or use it as the basis for your own. The right to fork is supposed to be both a check on power, but also a force for diversity and creativity.

In the mainstream financial system, there are extensive blocks on any such right, many of them actively enforced by financial regulators. They make it hard for new banks to start, and apply inappropriate regulation to small, new financial technologies. The battle for the right to fork, therefore, is one that has to also be fought at the regulatory level.

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It also needs to be instilled as a principle into the design of any alternatives to mainstream finance. I do not want to replace a world where I am forced to use national fiat currencies with one in which I am forced to use Bitcoin. The point is to create meaningful options for people.

BUILDING POSITIVE FREEDOM INTO OPEN SOURCE

Perhaps the biggest weakness of open source approaches, though, is this assumption that this right to fork alone is enough to ensure that dissent is built into the system. To use the language of political philosophy, we might say the concept is based on *negative liberty*, the situation where nobody is directly blocking your freedom. It is exemplified by the phrase ›nobody is stopping you‹.

Merely saying one has the right to dissent, but without providing people with the tools to act on their theoretical freedom, can have conservative overtones. For dissent to be effective, it has to be *actionable*. Indeed, the mainstream financial sector can probably claim that the right to fork already exists. People are indeed free to voice their displeasure, even if they find it very difficult to actually *act* on their displeasure. The banks can say, *sure, you're welcome to leave. Nobody is stopping you. Good luck out there*. It can have the feel of conservative free market ideology: *Nobody is forcing you to take this underpaid job. It's your own choice. Get another job if you don't like it.*

More recently, we have seen the politics of negative liberty played out on multiple levels in the Bitcoin community. The source code might be open, but there are few support structures for how to meaningfully deploy that into creating alternatives, and the existing Bitcoin community can be very unsupportive of attempts to create alternative crypto-currencies. Furthermore, there is increasingly a dog-eat-dog disregard for solidarity in the system, with triumphalist Bitcoin millionaires patting themselves on the back for being early adopters that outcompeted the slow, dim-witted individuals who were too ›risk-averse‹ to get involved early. And, much like the mainstream financial sector, the new Bitcoin elite is cloaking themselves in a layer of techy jargon that serves to preserve their power.

For dissent to be an actionable, empowering force, it has to be informed, constructive and effective, rather than reactive, regressive and theoretical. Building the basis for that involves many different elements, but there is not

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scope in this essay to do them justice, other than to say one crucial element is meaningful *education*. It is very hard to articulate ideas about what's wrong with a system when one cannot articulate how the current system operates. The ability to conceptualize alternatives relies on breaking down the wall of jargon that the financial sector cloaks itself in. It has to involve opening intellectual access to the deepest layers of financial code, from the cultural and political underpinnings of money itself, to the institutions, instruments and networks that move it around. Quite how we achieve that remains a work in progress.

AHOY! WE SET SAIL FOR THE OPEN SEAS

When viewed in isolation, many of the examples and initiatives mentioned above perhaps do look insignificant. When viewed collectively as pioneers of potential future trends, though, they point to something powerful. If indeed we can make inroads into making elements of the financial sector more authentically inclusive and authentically creative, we have a foothold from which to build and advocate more profound economic alternatives.

We may be in the early phase of a slow-moving revolution, which will only be perceptible in hindsight. As projects within these five pillars emerge, the infrastructure, norms and cultural acceptance for more open financial system may begin to emerge and coalesce into reality.

And so, a final word on hacking. The open source hacker ethic is powerful, but it needs to be extended and augmented. It is still too tied up in the ›revenge of the nerds‹ politics of the male geek, and relies too much on those who already have the resources to act as heroic Robin Hood figures. Rather than sticking with the stereotype of the outsider rogue male, hacker culture needs to be balanced (or perhaps *queered*) by a warmer and more feminine spirit, and also needs much more focus on social and ecological processes, rather than just technical disruption. Building a holistic financial hacker culture is an exciting prospect going forward.

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Invaders Are Here!

PANTXO RAMAS

The scenario of Southern Europe today allows us to imagine the future in a concrete way. In Barcelona, especially, after the local elections of May 24, 2015, the ecology of the city is changing. Against any prevision, *Barcelona en Comú*, a coalition of social movements and the civil society, won the elections and is now immersed in a new world. Hostile in some way, this space is also one where things are possible, where it is possible to ›make stuff‹.

Today, *Barcelona en Comú* has to face the backlash of the corrupt forms of life cultivated by the regime, which is trying to grab onto the state apparatus in order to protect its interests. This attempt shows how much those that Nirmal Puwar has called »space invaders« (2004), for they have broken the homogeneity of public space by invading it from a minority position, are invaders of the state today.

In this context, this generation of invaders has to face both a vertical and a horizontal problem: reacting to the attack of the regime and producing a livable ecology in which to act and etching the institutional space. The same duality of verticality and horizontality shapes the open space: in composing a direct dialogue with the city capable of explaining the complexity and the contradictions of institutional power and at the same time composing capillary dispositives that can allow society to climb the walls of the institutions and invade the administration. It is a matter of thinking this relationship through mechanisms of transversality and assemblage among different lives, groups, stories that are encountering and enriching each other. This is why I refer to it as an ecology.

Talking about »ecology« (cf. Star 1995; Puig 2010) means breaking with any fantasy of homogeneity that can be produced through imagined communities or processes of identification that work on the symbolic level. Ecology

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is not a metaphor to talk about something else, but an interpellation to the consistency and efficacy of political action in keeping a complex ecosystem alive. The outcome of the process of transformation at stake here does not depend on the success of one or another agent, but on the force of the ecology as a whole and on its ability not only of surviving but of growing and transforming social life.

THE INSTITUTIONAL RELATIONSHIP

The problem of invading and etching the institutional space is having to confront the effects of the last decades of neoliberal policies that transformed the public administration into a space for protecting private interests. At the same time, this administrative machine is full of minor counterweights, small counterpowers and many partially autonomous mechanisms that can work in accordance with the new institutional project. In the ›palace‹ the strategy has to account for the numbers of seats in the city hall – in Barcelona seven different political forces are represented and no traditional majorities can be formed. The side effects of this multiplicity can be positive since it imposes the construction of an empowering relationship with the administrative forces inside the institution in general.

Council workers – whose public vocation has been literally disrupted by the neoliberal governmentality – can become the connection to counterbalance such a numeric weakness and allow ordinary administration to be the place to concretely change the effects of public policies. The challenge is to identify the transformative forces that live in the administration: to recognize institutional agents, partial cultures and collective desires. These forces can be called upon to play a constituent function in the *change* at stake, to allow this invasion to be more than a symbolic invasion of the discursive field of politics but a concrete action in the life of the city – by changing protocols, values, principles and transforming the effect of public policies.

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A POLITICAL SOCIETY

Out of this tension between public policies and urban life, the second question emerges: the relationship between government and society and the effective realization of an administration that governs obeying to those who make and live the city. For without a strong relationship between government and society, this fragile ecology can lose its vital sap. This political space needs to assume a function and a responsibility both with regard to the institutions and to the political organization. In this leap forward, a set of tensions emerges because efforts, expectancies and problems weigh on the machine: the endeavor of a draining campaign, the enthusiasm that rises from an unprecedented possibility, the difficulties of landing and connecting in the complex space of the state. This leap produces contrapositions, problems in terms of cohesion that emerge from incomprehension, contradictions and inevitable accelerations.

To challenge this tension, it is necessary, on the side of reinforcing communication and internal reorganization, to nourish an outside that can interfere, in an invading way, in the institutional machine. It would be a mistake to think of the administrative dimension as being in opposition to the open social space today, and the inside and outside as separated spaces where the function of the outside is to push those that are inside to ›change things‹.

The problem is different: We cannot read the institutional space in molar terms, as separated from the action of society. The intervention into the state cannot just be vertical – along a civil line of representation that intervenes into the state through norms and from there into society itself. The challenge is to link the critical practice to a material operativity. To put the general intellect to work for producing prototypes that can unbalance the serious gesture of the institution. A diffused general intellect capable of building dispositives of articulation and concretely compose differences to allow this ecology to live is essential in order to prevent this institutional leap from being a flight into the abstract or a jump into the dark.

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A POLITICAL ECOLOGY

If we think about the space we are invading in ecological terms, as forms of life rather than in mechanical terms, another series of practices (of critique) can emerge as well as another set of problems. In Barcelona, the institutional ecology is rich, as a result of struggles, emancipation and processes that historically made this city a place of social and public experimentation. But this institutional ecology is also dry and exhausted.

Neoliberal policies have not ›destroyed‹ and substituted the institutional ecology. They made it into a space of pillaging, exploiting the living forces that emerge from the relation between society and public function to nourish their own worlds: ›make money‹ and move the relationship of mutual support internal to society from the state to the private sector. To do that, they introduced a series of material dispositives that objectivized institutional life: financialization as a material culture. Contracts that precarize, time-tables that break the possibility of a life in common, aesthetical codes that define segmentations of statutes both for workers and users of public services. These – legal, physical, imaginary - objects dry out the institutional space, and the life of those who live and work in the administration, bureaucratizing, nullifying and humiliating these relationships among the people, inside and outside institutions.

This challenge of resubjectivation needs to break a double objectivation, imposed not only on users, but on public servants themselves, to allow this society of multiplicities to build dispositives of autonomy, inside, outside and through the institutions. However, it would not be enough to think in terms of resubjectivation if we do not deal with the materialities of politics. In this sense, the municipal scale is crucial because it allows us to experiment with a molecularity of policies capable of intervening not only in the subjective but in the psychic dimension of the city, in the public and intimate sphere of the urban ecology.

A GENERATION OF MAKERS

It is not about producing new flows of subjectivity for the citizens to rule urban policies; this is about making the city a living form of emancipation – a space of joyful living: This invasive generation needs to be a generation of

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makers that puts the force of change in the materiality of things. The problem is that institutional transition and invention cannot just deal with principles, values or protocols. It needs to invade everyday life: the spatial usability or the living aesthetics and emotions that live through urban life. And it needs to use the force of things to intervene in public policies. And to make change irreversible.

Generation M makes stuff. Not through mass production but by tweaking and expanding the capabilities of existing things and processes. The maker's craft: tinkering, stretching, knitting, inventing, weaving, recombining. […] Generation M is all about collaborations that create the very material conditions we live in. But these are neither collaborations between individuals or minds, nor social cooperation. These are collaborations between diverse material forces of living matter and abiotic matter. […] From the sterile environments of network society, cognitive capitalism and the knowledge economy that characterised the previous generation to the wet, contagious involutions of interspecies and multi-material communities. […] Social movements in the M age make a step further. They will not only act politically and institutionally to defend the commons but immerse in immediate, real, material practices for commoning life and the environment. (Papadopoulos 2014: n.p.)

The imagination of Dimitris Papadopoulos in the manifesto Generation M permits us to break apart and reinvent the institutional imagination through the question of transition: How to produce an ecology that changes and invents the city, without dying in the attempt? The materiality of Generation M is the place where we can do politics by taking care of the city, by struggling against the locks that have been changed to evict families, in a space where clothes, colors and smells are allowed to discriminate the inside and outsides of citizenship, through struggles undertaken with regard to school cafeterias and child malnutrition, illness and solitude, or with regard to what kinds of pills are prohibited or allowed in order to govern rage and fear. A city, in the most obscure sites, of sadness and abandonment.

Antonio Gramsci's »force of things« – that is the ability of acting politically for those who do not belong to the civil and bourgeois order of discourse and politics (the slave, the woman, the poor, the subaltern) – gains renewed importance if we think about the capacity of things for changing real life, as part of a broader assemblage of emancipatory forces (Gramsci

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1975). We have to invent institutions, knowing that this force cannot be abstract and needs to intervene in the everyday life allowing objects and subjects to express their autonomous capacity of urban production. Beyond resubjectviation, the transition towards another urban life depends upon our ability of composing new social forms, new ways of life, assemblages of active objects and subjects that open new spaces of possibilities: Where to act, where to ›make stuff‹ and change reality? An experiment of *urban forming* that needs to be immersed in the city in order to change it.

Getting lost in this materiality does not mean renouncing a wide political strategy, but recognizing that we need to move from a sectorial to an integral understanding of policies if we want them to change urban life. Intervening in a community means acknowledging the housing conditions, the public health of a place, the labor paradigm and to grasp the fragilities and precarities of social life as a whole. But it also means understanding that the environment is composed of things, objects, infrastructures, dispositives and to work in this environment as a living ecology: *Gaia*. It means imagining education policies and at the same time intervening on the level of the community infrastructure of a neighborhood, improving health and thinking of ways to reinforce the link between public institutions and community dynamics.

This means challenging the fragility of a space through an integral approach to policies. Law and discourse are still fundamental, but they do no longer dominate policy making when we use an ›ecological‹ practice in the institutional space. In order to break the verticality of power, the closed political dialectic between legal objects (contracts, norms, protocols) and ideological objects (communication, abstraction, belongings) needs to be broken as well. An assemblage of subjects and objects is invading the political space, and the force of things, of the fragiles, of the imperceptibles can today drive a concrete and ulterior imagination of urban politics and urban life.

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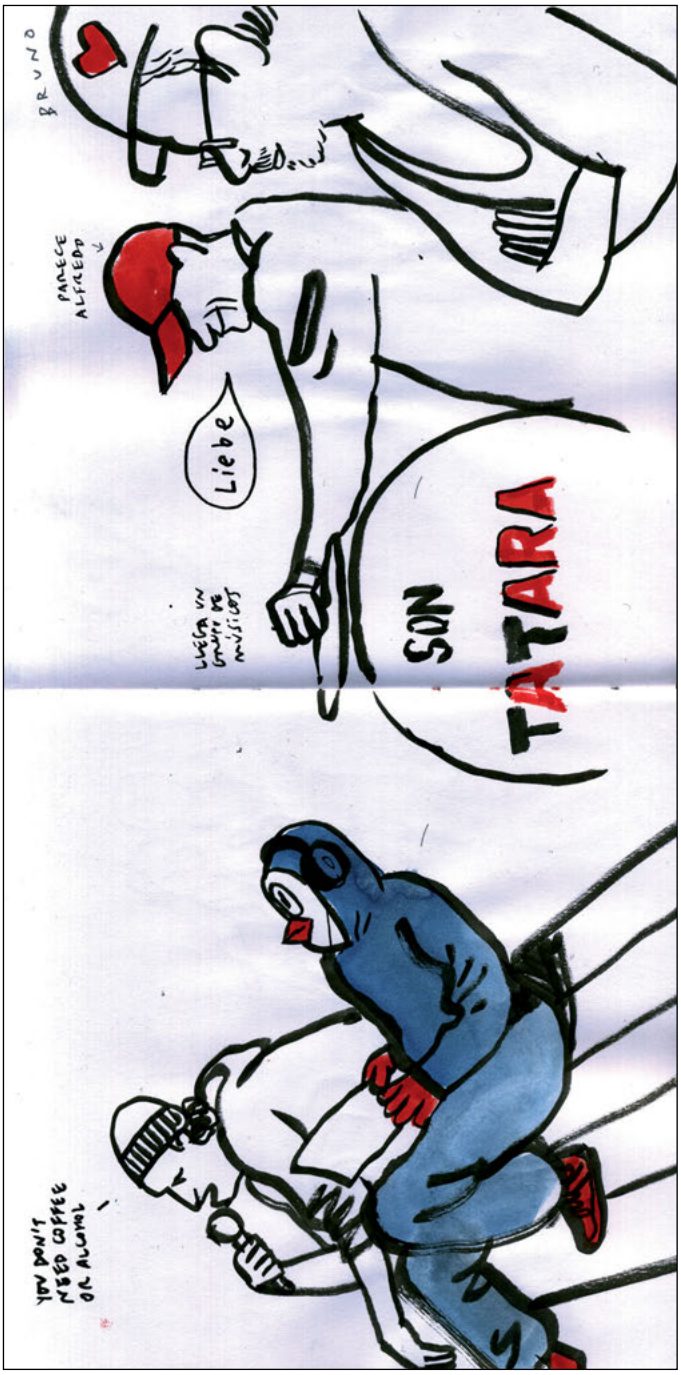

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Art & Jack-in-the-Box[1]

BRIGITTA KUSTER

Let us assume that examining the question of art would no longer make any sense, neither from the perspective of culture nor of art's adjectival differentiations (as for instance ›African art‹ or ›contemporary art‹), but rather from the perspective of an old, quirky and disturbing companion, who has been known to deceive tradesmen by substituting a box full of money with an empty one: Jack-in-the-box. He is likely to be traced back to ancient times, but no one knows for certain. What is for certain, though, is the surprise the whole thing holds: Jack inside the box, a trickster, a toy, a symbol, a piece of merchandise, a marvel, a commodity – a small figure that is always kept inside; a Jack who turns into a stereotype: He becomes a distorted average-personality type, exposed to the play of light and darkness, inner and outer worlds alongside his companions Sambo, Nat, Jezebel, and Mammy, whose characters were based upon a system that denied the personal status of human property in an area where it was forbidden to look. He was not born with the name of Henry but was simply called so, as he was born a slave in the 19th century. He acquired fame under the name of Henry Box Brown in allusion to the wooden box in which he transported himself into freedom. Boxing for dissidence. At a later stage, when the mirror of representation was splintered, Jack-in-the-box was accompanied by the uncanny and terrifying din of his own emptiness – like the maddening echo of the Marabar caves: *Ouboom* is the sound of colonial nonsense, the tam-tam to which Adela might have lis-

1 This contribution originates in the collaborative work of the artist and researcher group Artefakte in the context of their 2014/15 project *Künstliche Tatsachen* (artificialfacts.de).

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tened. But, there was never ever any Jackie involved. As far as she was concerned, the suppression of the right to look, of the right to the real outlived other figments of the other, so that she was constantly and persistently asked to move on, to be looked at, to represent the enigma and the secret, the new and the ancient – as though there was nothing in her eyes to see – neither beauty nor horror. She is the living proof that there is clearly no decolonial genealogy of visuality, but only to look, to look, to see ...

All things considered, with reference to the consumerism the J-form entails, to the idea of surroundings and inner versus outer worlds, or to notions of reproduction and conservation, it remains unclear whether Jack and his Box can ever be differentiated and separated from one another. In itself Jack-in-the-box is an inseparable entity. Obviously, within this strange entity, the relation of acting and being acted upon derives from arcane arts. Does Jack dispose of a shell that contains something, of a casing that keeps him inside like a snail? Jack-in-the box is a blinded figure who tries to escape but is nevertheless held back by a spring – a mobility already constantly being constrained. To produce such tension and release one needs a force that presses down. But does this bring about transcendence, an external reference and measuring point toward which Jack-in-the-box would become subservient? Like a game of *Fort-Da* (disappearance and reappearance), like a tireless repetition of the desire for control and domination? *O-o-o-o* ...

Incidents were also reported where the box was orphaned and became a kind of remains, a kind of witness of having been in touch. Consequently, the box was regarded as an icon for the loss of Jack. A leopard – was he a runaway or was he stolen? – used the box as shelter. Fear arose in the world and people were in doubt as to whether the leopard might be involved with a royal insignia, a trophy or a stunt, an illusion or mere camouflage – something which only pretends to remain within itself, a pretended immanence.

Jack-in-the-box is a configuration of the problem of form and substance. To obtain the merits or to reach the core of Jack-in-the box, one cannot simply rip Jack out of a picture frame as one does with a painting. And not forgetting the gradients of time, the duration within the necessarily obscure black box against the continuation and expansion of the seemingly timeless white space. Even though you might expect that a Jack would pop up somewhere, his appearance would invariably bedazzle and amaze – probably due to the rules of suspense ... and due to the centrifugality inherent in the uncertainty of every designation ...

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Perhaps we will never know if Jack-in-the-box is a specific formation, an artificial fact which derives its effect from a particular discursive framework, or if the whole assemblage, the constrained force within the coil he represents is trans-historical ... Jack-in-the-box is a deeply strange being, perhaps even related to Odradek. To date, it has not been possible to know with certainty whether Jack-in-the-box is a creature or a creator, if Jack-in-the-box constitutes a circularity like a dipping bird. Hence we cannot always state for certain how his worth is generated and circulated, and what his purpose consists of – to come outside or to remain hidden inside. We still do not know precisely to which conditions his existence is subject, or whether he is unconditional, which is said about the autonomy of art with its inherent element of impossibility. And not least with its power to transcend cultural difference and social hierarchies – a power that today becomes all too often endowed with a sort of ethical bonus, a surplus, an excess of goodness, malice or cynicism in the midst of all contemporary forms of enduring violent forces on a global scale ... so that it can almost count as a blessing that in contrast to Pandora's box the lid of Jack-in-the-box is not opened only twice. Jack-in-the-box has something bottomless and inexhaustible about it: Whether open or closed, whether the coil spring to which Jack is usually attached, whether in a state of strong tension or bobbing up and down in smooth oscillation, Jack-in-the-box has been activated all along.

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Third Projection: Collective Film Activation

The Archive of the National Film Institute of Guinea-Bissau and its Reactualization in the Mobile Cinema

NANNA HEIDENREICH

IN COLLABORATION WITH FILIPA CÉSAR AND AISSATU SEIDI
Translated by Daniel Hendrickson and Nanna Heidenreich

Cinema is capable of activation. It can activate multiple subject positions, a vast array of points of view, and its general ability *to move* played a significant role for the close relation of cinema to social and political movements in the 20th century – even if the question of affect and feelings has been a contested terrain in cinematic (thought) production on the political.

Cinema is also always about a collective experience: it was (and is) in effect a *mass* medium; just as its production has always been a group effort, a work of collaboration, even if marked as *auteur* cinema. Cinematic experience is never just about the singular, the individual contemplation, even if cinema produces subjectivities.

Cinema – as a system, a dispositif, an economy, a history, a practice, and not reduced to the body of films and videos produced since its inception – can be understood as a practice which lingers at the intersection of perception and action.

This legacy also comes into play in and with video, especially in the reviewing practices of cinema's radical histories enabled by digital processes (digitization, production, distribution). In what follows I am describing one such instant where the digitization of an archive, which contains documents of a radical political moment of the past (the anticolonial liberation movement in Guinea-Bissau), turns it into a contemporary practice of activation.

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Not simply the activation of material otherwise doomed to disintegrate and disappear, but the collective reviewing of this material which facilitates new forms of being together. Not by means of commemorating the past, but by turning the past into a tool to activate the present.

Visionary Archive: a collaborative translocal research project in five film archives (Cairo, Khartoum, Johannesburg, Bissau, and Berlin) on phases and facets of African Cinema with the term used as »an open bracket in which historical echoes come into their own, as do open questions.«[1] The project ended with a festival in Berlin in 2015. Within this festival, the curators of the project, Marie-Hélène Gutberlet and Tobias Hering, apply the concept of *reprendre*: the resumption, as a process of knowledge realignment with which the philosopher Yves Valentin Mudimbe describes contemporary African art production: »I mean it in the first sense of taking up an interrupted tradition, not out of desire for purity, which would testify only to the imaginations of dead ancestors, but in a way that reflects the conditions of today.« (1994: 154).

The artist Filipa César, born in Portugal but now living in Berlin, has been working on the history and the present of anti-colonial film in Guinea-Bissau since 2011. As part of her project »Animated Archive« and »Luta ca caba inda/The Struggle Is Not Over Yet«[2], she has digitized the remaining archival holdings of the National Film Institute of Guinea-Bissau (INCA: Instituto Nacional de Cinema e Audiovisual). These holdings consist of historical film material from the period of militant cinema and important documentary material from the period of the liberation struggle (1963-1974), although a large portion of the material was in fact destroyed during the civil war of 1998-99. With »From Boé to Berlin: A Mobile Lab on the Film History of Guinea-Bissau«[3] the artist, along with filmmakers Suleimane Biai,

1 Project description (http://www.arsenal-berlin.de/en/living-archive/projects/visionary-archive.html, accessed November 1, 2015).

2 Project descriptions (http://www.arsenal-berlin.de/en/living-archive/projects/living-archive-archive-work-as-a-contenporary-artistic-and-curatorial-pratice/individual-projects/filipa-cesar.html; http://www arsenal berlin de/en/living archive/projects/animated-archive-2012.html, accessed November 1, 2015).

3 In the context of Visionary Archive (http://www.arsenal-berlin.de/en/living-archive/projects/visionary-archive/from-boe-to-berlin.html, accessed November 1, 2015).

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Flora Gomes, and Sana na N'Hada[4] worked on making these archival holdings visible again. At the end of 2014 they took the newly digitized holdings on tour through Guinea-Bissau, with stations including Morés, Farim, Cacheu, Bafatá, Boé, and Buba. During this tour the journalist and radio worker Aissatu Seidi joined the project. She works for the association of community radios, and joined the team at the suggestion of Suleimane Biai.

The Mobile Cinema consists of public viewings: a mobile screen, a video projector, and if necessary a generator and loudspeakers. Depending on the location, César and N'Hada sometimes spontaneously select material during a viewing (the digitized material encompasses around 40 hours of film and 200 hours of audio tape), which then are viewed/heard by the people on site. Afterwards: Let's get talking. Questions, discussions, moderated by Aissatu Seidi, who invites, encourages, critically questions, intervenes, especially in matters of gender politics. Time and time again she asks for the women. Encouraging them to speak up. She also does this in her radio programs, above all on her weekly broadcast »Balur mindjer« [Women's Values].

The Mobile Cinema picks up on older traditions and at the same time works in the context of contemporary cinematic practice. For instance, mobile cinemas had already been introduced into certain colonized African countries, and were then taken up again in the post-colonial context, including in Guinea-Bissau, under new auspices.

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4 N'Hada and Gomes are both important protagonists in the history of militant cinema in Guinea-Bissau, who became filmmakers during/through the liberation struggle. Gomes studied film in Cuba and in Senegal, his film »Mortu Nega« (1988) was Guinea-Bissau's first feature-length fiction film. N'Hada quit his medical studies and at the behest of Ámilcar Cabral traveled along with Gomes to Cuba, to study with Santiago Àlvarez and to join the liberation movement with a camera instead of first aid kits. In 1979 N'Hada was appointed director of the INCA. Suleimane Biai belongs to a younger generation (*1968); he works as director, producer, and screenwriter. Since 2010 he has also served as *régulo* for the villages around his native town Farim. Like N'Hada and Gomes, Biai studied film directing at the Escuela Internacional de Cine y Televisión in Cuba. Alongside making his own films he has worked as an assistant to Flora Gomes and Sana na N'Hada. With César he co-authored the installation »Regulado« (2014), which was first presented at the Neuer Berliner Kunstverein (n.b.k).

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Sana na N'Hada was himself involved in attempts to organize a mobile cinema at the end of the 1970s to show the films and newsreels being produced at the time. The project was based around the Cuban model of a ›Departamento de Divulgación Cinematográfica‹ and was supposed to overcome the rural population's enforced immobility due to agricultural work and make a contribution towards communication and the creation of knowledge within the heterogeneous state entity.[5]

Today, film screenings in Guinea-Bissau

mostly take place at private and semi-public locations and draw on the DVD market. Films thus reach their audiences via informal means. A traveling cinema equipped with mobile technology which goes directly to its audiences thus links both to the past practice of communicating culture via film as well as to the formats of shared film watching common today.[6]

The stations of the Mobile Cinema were collectively documented by Filipa César, Suleimane Biai, and Sana na N'Hada and eventually presented at Visionary Archive in May 2015 at the Kino Arsenal in Berlin.

This is where I get the chance to see this footage. Aissatu Seidis is impressive, both on screen as well as off. She is in Berlin for a few weeks, the three of us meet to talk: Filipa César, Aissatu Seidi, and myself. Filipa also translates, but of course informally, not simultaneously or consecutively. I transcribe the German parts later. The notes from this meeting form the basis of this text.

At the Mobile Cinema the material was shown as it was found. Not modified, not edited together, not checked, but open and un/finished. It is a matter of making images accessible, and not foreclosing them with interferences.

The need for discussion is great. The conversations always take more time than the actual film material, that is, several hours. It tends to be the younger people who want to speak. The older ones, according to Seidi, are often too wounded by the disappointments after the death of Amílcar Cabral in 1973 and the military coup in 1980. Reserve and mistrust prevails among

5 From the project description (http://www.arsenal-berlin.de/en/living-archive/projects/visionary-archive/from-boe-to-berlin.html, accessed November 1, 2015).

6 From the project description (http://www.arsenal-berlin.de/en/living-archive/projects/visionary-archive/from-boe-to-berlin.html, accessed November 1, 2015).

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them. But the younger ones are fighting for their history: The memory of the anti-colonial liberation struggle is nominally managed by the still reigning PAIGC.[7] Tacked on as an instrument in power politics, this history gets monumentalized on the one hand, but is withheld on the other.

The discussions open up ways to connect. The young people demand to know what they are surrounded by, but have no access to: Buildings and streets bear the names of presumably important persons. But no one knows that they are former freedom fighters, or even worse, they do not know anything at all about their stories. At the Mobile Cinema in Buba a girl asks Sana na N'Hada if he could help her with something. Her school is called Siaca Touré, but no one at the school knows where the name is from. N'Hada explains to her that he was an important figure in the liberation struggle, the nephew of Sékou Touré, the first president of the country. He then shows a segment of his film from 1976 »O Regresso de Amílcar Cabral«, in which Siaca Touré appears.

Knowledge about the liberation struggle is stored in private memory banks, private archives, and today's PAIGC no longer has any interest in collectivization: The movement has become nothing more than a political party. Power politics have dissolved the project of forming a counter-society. Not only did Amílcar Cabral understand »theory as a weapon« (»Theorie als Waffe«, Heimer 1981:72)[8], he also developed and expanded alternative educational concepts aimed at specific groups. For instance, the Mobile Cinema also documents the practice of the »bush schools« (ibid: 74). Cabral's proposal for a decolonized society was left open in many essential points; the results were meant to be developed collectively. Political mobilization was understood as a social learning process.

Cabral's programmatic guidelines can almost entirely be traced back to the postulates of abolishing all oppression of people by other people, of trusting in one's own power and the development of social solutions. One important focus was his idea that every

7 The Partido Africano para a Independência da Guiné e Cabo Verde (PAIGC) was founded by Cabral and others in 1956.

8 This and the following quotes translated by Daniel Hendrickson and Nanna Heidenreich.

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solution had to be the result of a consistent participatory social learning process« (ibid: 73).[9]

The Mobile Cinema, according to César, is a research practice of the present. It activates the past in the present, says Seidi; the past makes it possible to critique the present. The Mobile Cinemas should also be seen as a gesture of giving, of giving back, and of giving way. Here Seidi introduces the image of the child who was gone and has now been given back to its mother for comparison. The people at the screenings have intense, but mixed feelings: great relief but also great rage – emotion and revolt, according to César. So the material from the film archive is lost property – which has now been given back. It makes it possible to speak in common in a country that has become increasingly ethnically divided since 1980. In Guinea-Bissau Portuguese is the official language of government, and thus also of schools and institutions of higher learning – but it is also a language spoken by only around 14 per cent of the population there. The lingua franca in Guinea-Bissau is Creole, and alongside that there are numerous regional languages. The Mobile Cinema takes place in Creole – but the word is: Anyone can and may speak, no matter the language, even if some of it has to be translated afterwards.[10]

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9 The anti-colonial liberation movements were essentially also transnational solidarity movements – an indication of this can also be seen in N'Hadas and Gomes's being educated in Cuba and Senegal. But such links can also be traced in light of educational politics. For instance, there was a close affinity to the liberation pedagogy of Paulo Freire in Brazil. He put the Institut d'Action Culturelle (IDAC), which he founded in Geneva in 1975, completely in the service of literacy and adult education in Guinea-Bissau, cf. Heimer (1981: 77).

10 Seidi has been continuing the project on the radio. She has already played several of the archival recordings on the radio–the flood of calls and reactions continued sometimes over weeks, especially after she broadcast Cabral's »Speech about Women«, which he had held in 1975 in Conakry. In conversation with Seidi and César we also speak about Bertold Brecht's »The Radio as an Apparatus of Communication« (1932) – not by chance, since Brecht's poem »Questions from a Worker Who Reads« (1935) was used as a leitmotiv in César and Biai's work together. The view of the victorious ruler displaces the view of those who pay the costs, of those who fought, cooked, built, cleaned, wept with him.

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Histories get activated by mobile cinema, and not only in Guinea-Bissau. For instance, the project is reminiscent of the pedagogy of liberation that was developed in Guinea-Bissau in the spirit of Paulo Freire (and in collaboration with him), and of the central role that militant cinema played in the anti-colonial liberation movements. It is in fact not about any specific format or the contents on the screen, but about activating all participants in and through its circulation: showing and watching are what creates the actual political space of the cinema in the first place. In 1969 the Argentine filmmakers Fernando E. Solanas and Octavio Getino wrote their anti-colonial cinema manifesto: *Hacia un tercer cine,*[11] »Towards a Third Cinema«. The text was first published in the magazine *Tricontinental*, which had come out of the legendary anti-imperialist conference held in Havana in 1966.[12] In the manifesto they described how this cinema was meant to open up possibilities: »The attempt to overcome neocolonial oppression calls for the invention of forms of communication; it opens up the possibility.« (1969: 130) It opens up the possibility – emphasized in bold: not ›the possibility *to*‹, but possibilities that remain undefined, the nature of which is an open end – and in this text they describe political, radical, anti-colonial film as an equally open form. Alongside discussions about forms and format and about production methods, Solanas and Getino emphasize the question of distribution and reception: »forms of communication.« They radicalize cinema not only from the aspects of the camera, the screen, and the projection, but as activating showing and seeing: »We [...] discovered a new facet of cinema: the participation of people who, until then, were considered spectators.« (ibid) Viewing as action: »The spectator made way for the actor, who sought himself in others« (ibid).

Solanas and Getino discover three essential elements available to them (»we had at hand«, ibid) and with them Third Cinema becomes an activating cinema, an activist cinema: »The participant comrade«, »The free space«,

11 In the »Third Text« issue from 2011 on »Militant Cinema: A Ciné-Geography«, Ros Gray and Kodwo Eshun write that the text did not actually represent a manifesto, but rather a proposal of hypotheses. In their introduction they refer to Jonathan Buchsbaum's analysis of the reception and monumentalization of »Hacer un tecer ciné« in the English-speaking realm, cf. Eshun/Gray (2011: 3).

12 Eshun/Gray comment in a footnote: »As Robert J C Young argues, this conference can be understood as the ›formal initiation of a space of international resistance of which the field of postcolonial theory would be a product‹« (2011: 1).

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and »The film«, which, they add, only serves as a »detonator or pretext«, as a »pretext for dialogue« (ibid: 131). This displacement of an empowering re-

> who sought himself in others« – identifying the events on screen with the space of the collective viewing – is supplemented, as Getino and Solanas describe their learning process, with additional moments that serve to collectivize what they now refer to as *film acts*: »As we gained in experience, we incorporated into the showing various elements (a stage production) to reinforce the themes of the films, the climate of the showing, the ›disinhibiting‹ of the participants, and the dialogue: recorded music or poems, sculpture and paintings, posters, a program director who chaired the debate and presented the film and the comrades who were speaking, a glass of wine, a few mates, etc. (ibid: 130)

No »showing«, but a »MEETING« (in the English version written in all capitals) (ibid: 131). The film is thus not the endpoint (no matter how it ›ends‹), but, in every case the result of showing and seeing, the beginning: »the film act means an open-ended film; it is essentially a way of learning.« The ›act‹ becomes activated.[13]

So far there have been eleven stations in the Mobile Cinema. According to Seidi, this is not enough. She has founded a group committed to working further with the material.[14]

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13 Eshun/Gray use the term »ciné-geography« here:
»It refers not just to individual films but also to the new modes of production, exhibition, distribution, pedagogy and training made possible by forms of political organisation and affiliation. A critical component is the invention of discursive platforms such as gatherings, meetings, festivals, screenings, classes and groups founded by a range of students, activists, workers, film-makers, artists, critics, editors, teachers and many others at decisive moments in order to mobilise collective strategies.« (Eshun/Gray 2011: 1)

14 The material is stored at the Institut Français for safety reasons. Sana na N'Hada, as the former director of the archive, functions as the material's guardian. Filipa César is also continuing to work on the material and with her project. She is currently completing a film on »Luta ca caba inda«.

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»This is why the film stops here; it opens out so that you can continue it.« (Solanas/Getino 1969: 131)

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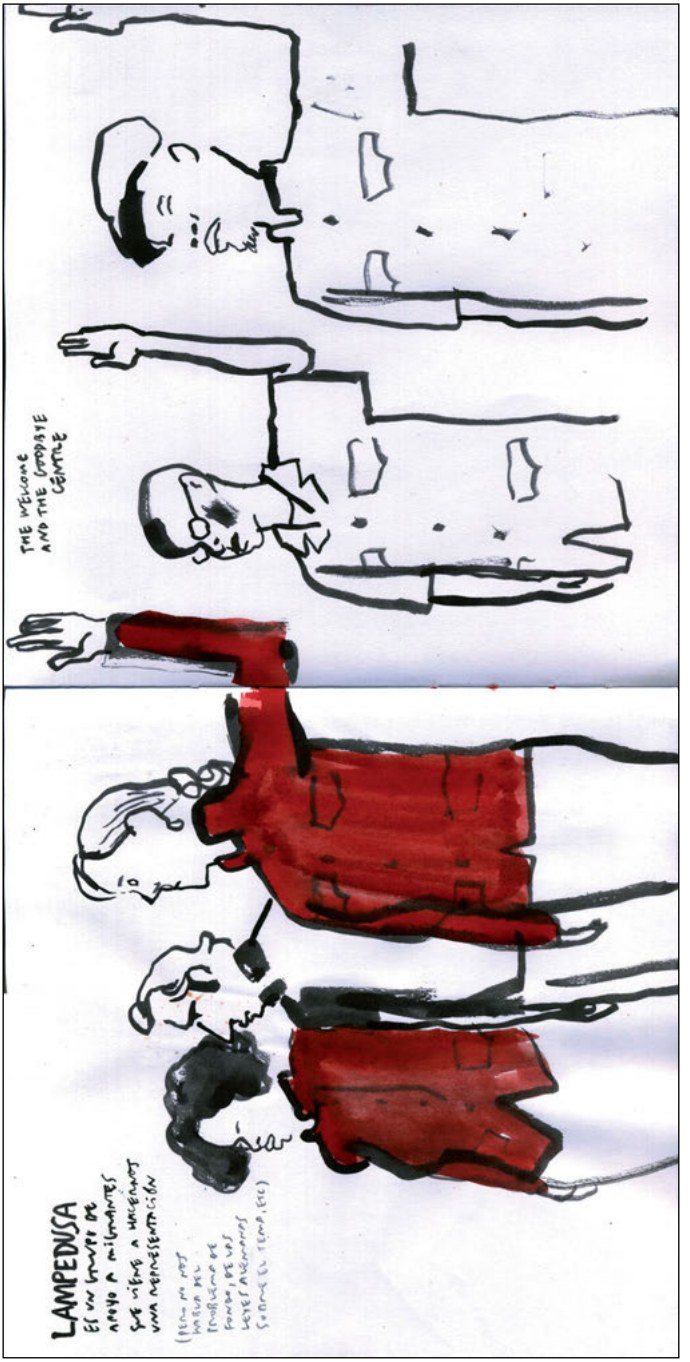

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