

The Art of Being Many

A Critical Review

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INTRODUCTION

Around the last weekend of September 2014, activists, researchers and artists from all over Europe gathered and fused in the so called *assembly of assemblies*, *The Art of Being Many*, which took place at Kampnagel Internationale Kulturfabrik in Hamburg¹. 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).

as to explore new paths of collective action. This new multitude² 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 mobilizations³.

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- 2 A favorable ›Spinozian‹ term used by new social movements, coined and re-appeared 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 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

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-critical⁴ 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

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).

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 Giovanopoulos⁵; 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).

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,

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 ›commons⁶ 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).

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

Cairo media Collective Mosireen⁷, which is monitoring protests, police abuses, illegal military trials, and creates a stream of information about the on-going revolution in post-Mubarak Egypt (cf. Żmijewski/Warsza/Voina 2012: 12), and Words of Women from the Egyptian Revolution⁸. 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 »temporality 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 Spain⁹: 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.

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 Thessaloniki¹⁰ 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.

10 A recent documentary, titled *Antidrastririo* (22 July 2015), by the Greek public broadcasting network ERT1 is available at <http://webtv.ert.gr/ert3/22iol2015-antidrastririo/>, 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

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 describe¹².

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‹ set-up 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:

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.

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 Germany¹³ 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.

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 Argentina¹⁴ 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 fluffiness¹⁵ 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 ›un-arrest‹ demonstrators taken by cops. The usage may derive from the UK« (Moore 2015: 13)

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.

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 legacies¹⁷ 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).

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.)

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 positions¹⁸. 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).

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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