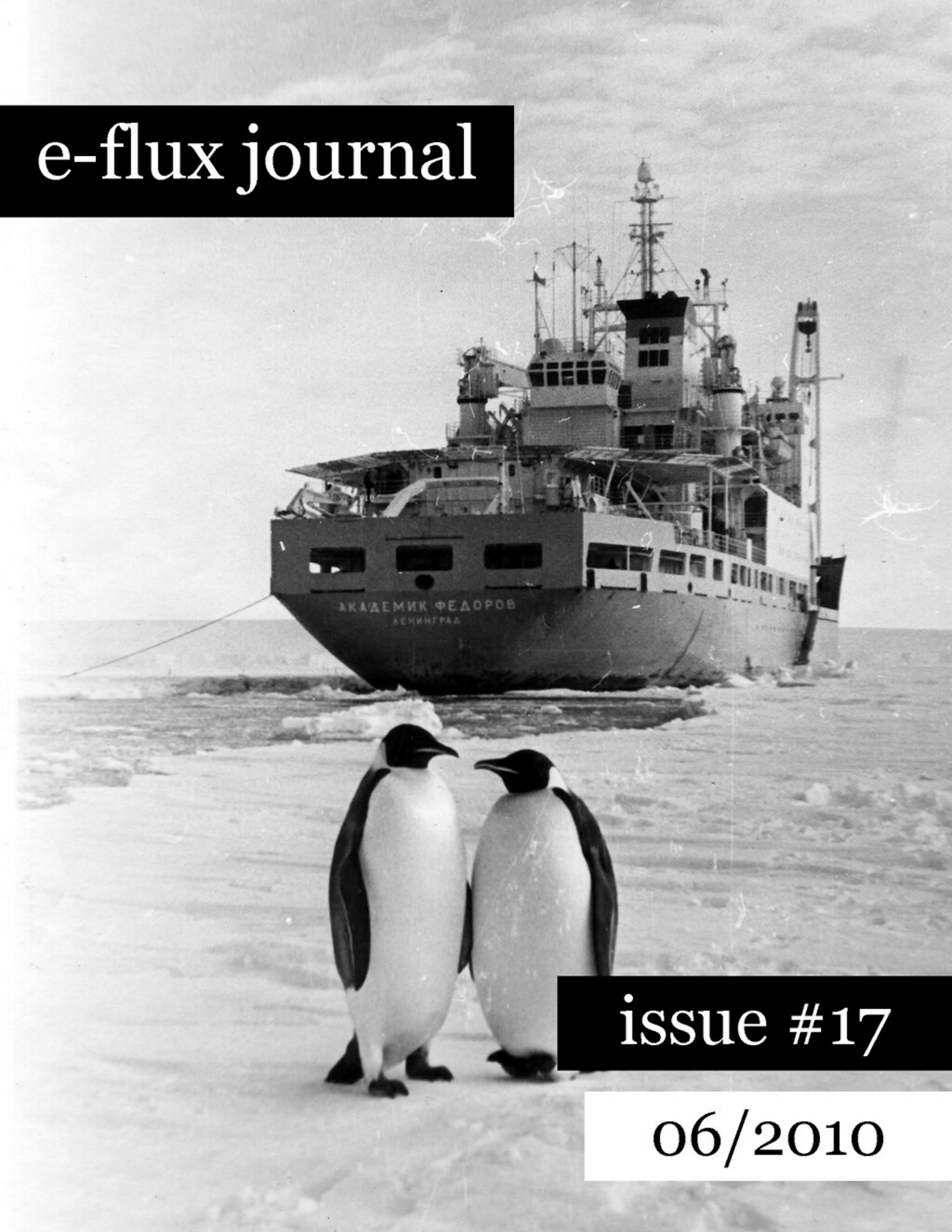
e-flux journal



issue #17

06/2010

e-flux Journal is a monthly art publication featuring essays and contributions by some of the most engaged artists and thinkers working today. The journal is available online, in PDF format, and in print through a network of distributors.

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Marion von Osten

Editorial— "In Search of the Postcapitalist Self"

A number of alternate, informal approaches to art and economy that arose in the Berlin of the 90s created a great deal of space and potential for rethinking relations between people, as well as possible roles for art in society. Today, however, much of this hope has since been obscured by the commercial activity and dysfunctional official art institutions most visible in the city's art scene, and though many of the ways of living and working that were formulated in the 90s are still in practice today (not just in Berlin), many of their proponents acknowledge a feeling that the resistant, emancipatory capacities inherent to their project have since been foreclosed upon. Our interest in inviting Marion von Osten to guest-edit e-flux journal *'s issue 17 had to do precisely with this widespread, prevailing sense of rapidly diminishing possibilities in the face of capitalist economy, and her extensive issue offers a broad and ambitious reformulation of how we might still rethink resistance and emancipation both within, and without capitalism—even at a time when alternate economies move ever nearer to everyday capitalist production, and vice-versa.*

—Julieta Aranda, Brian Kuan Wood, Anton Vidokle

The idea for this issue came about around a coffee table with Anton Vidokle. We were at a café in Berlin Mitte, a spot I wouldn't usually choose for an appointment—a sign of unfriendly changes in the city. Upon entering I immediately became aloof, but after a minute felt ashamed for assuming such a snobbish and unfriendly Berlin attitude, and had to ask myself how I could seriously claim to be a real Berliner in the first place—after all, for the last fourteen years, I've commuted almost every week to teaching jobs and projects. And most of my friends and colleagues have to organize their lives around similar routines (and there is less free will in it than the category of the "mobile class" might suggest). [1] Anyhow, moving on from these ambiguous thoughts, our conversation gave rise to some interesting afternoon dérives: the recent histories of Berlin's leftist art collectives, and their interest in self-organization, self-publishing, electronic music, new forms of collective production, gender, postcolonial, and urban theory, as well as resistance and action against the monstrous reconstruction of Berlin in the 1990s, and the history of the Berlin Biennale as a marketing strategy for the city.[2] We also reflected on the widespread university protests in Europe and the resistance to the implementation of the EU border regime, and the need for cultural institutions to find alternate means of establishing the grounds for more lasting forms of cultural production, education, and research beyond the "Become Bologna" and "Be Creative" imperatives.[3] How can we find the finances and collective energy to begin this work immediately, while still placed at the center of so many

contradictions? Finally, my own interest in contemporary feminist economists' engagement with new political imaginaries prompted the question of whether it would be possible to rethink contemporary and historical leftist cultural projects beyond the neoliberal horizon, and more specifically in relation to postcapitalist and postidentitarian politics.

This last shift in perspective gave rise to this guest-edited issue of *e-flux journal*, which can be understood as the beginning of a debate that asks whether the (cultural) Left is still capable of thinking and acting beyond the analysis of overwhelming power structures or working *within* the neoliberal consensus model. What would such thinking beyond the existing critical parameters disclose and demand? Wouldn't it call for spaces of negotiation and confrontation rather than of affirmation, cynicism, and flight? With the encouragement of the journal editors, I have invited artists, cultural producers, and theorists whom I know to be reflecting on these concerns, but who mostly have not articulated their thoughts publicly or alongside similar concerns; and yet, as readers will find, the authors provide few easy answers to the ab

ove questions—and conflicts resulting from alternate views and practices cannot be easily ignored. Rather than follow the exhausted master narratives of capitalism and crisis, this issue of *e-flux journal* investigates how cultural producers are already in the process of creating and reflecting new discourses and practices in the current climate of zombie neoliberalism. And what is disclosed and what changes if cultural production can be imagined precisely from the vantage point of postcapitalist politics?

Decentering Economy

For over thirty years, feminist economists, cultural scientists, and artists have argued convincingly against totalizing and essentializing views of capitalist economies. Feminist economists warned that describing capitalism as a self-perpetuating structure—with its ongoing need for crisis, renovation, and so forth—ignores on the one hand the heterogeneity of multiple economies, including household activities and pre- or postcapitalist economies, already existing inside Western and non-Western contexts alike. On the other hand, the anti-capitalist tradition tends to underestimate the problems of social asymmetries and gender and ethnic segregation occurring in formal and informal contexts due to patriarchy, discourses of modernization, and capitalism itself. Mainstream economists and critics have offhandedly referred to these contradictions as mere "side-effects" of capitalism, and with this same argument the traditional anti-capitalist stance has been to disregard historically sexist and racist forms of suppression—and even of non-capitalist economies—in Western societies and the global South alike.

These popular positions seem to understand capitalism as a

> dynamic, powerful, mobilizing, penetrating force, which is everywhere, driving societal and historical change. Capital is the structure of the world economy. It is the global logic. The capitalist economy is a "system" spanning the globe, integrating "first" and "third" worlds. . . . For, compared with capitalism, other modes of production are always less efficient, less dynamic, less productive. They are always found *lacking*.[4]

Thus, neither the limits, situatedness, and contextuality, nor the Eurocentrism of the very concept of capitalism—its politics and techniques—are usually examined as constructions. As a result, the existence of new, transnational solidarities and postidentitarian political subjectivities are underestimated as minor sideshows of the real thing, which necessarily remains capitalism as it is practiced by Western economies. The deconstruction of this ontological basis for economic discourse has been at the center of the work of feminist economists in the last decades.[5]

Moreover, feminism itself constituted a global movement that did not need to form global institutions or parties in order to be politically influential.[6] The feminist understanding that "the personal is political" has fostered ways of living that have opened up a variety of politics of becoming and has given rise to an understanding of the common or communal that is not fixed by sameness or homogeneity, by a singular identity such as "we women"—demonstrated by how conflicts between black, socialist, queer, and mainstream feminisms have served to strengthen the movement as a whole. This suggests the possibility that, in diverse social and economic conditions, among people living in vastly different places, without even sharing the same set of beliefs but actively sharing the experience of patriarchy, the goal of destabilizing the patriarchal system remains very much central. Today these views are also informed and enlarged by several postcolonial projects of decentering, such as "Provincializing Europe," as Dipesh Chakrabarty, historian and member of the famous subaltern studies group, proposes through the title of one of his books, or the acknowledgment of the constitutive power of new political publics created by subaltern actors, experts, economies, and knowledges, as found in the cultural anthropologist Arjun Appadurai's article "Deep Democracy".[7]

Change from Within

Though this issue of *e-flux journal* is in search for a postcapitalist perspective without supposing that we

already have access to it, it aims to offer a foundation for insights that challenge the common conception that in late or "cognitive" capitalism, all activities at work and in one's spare time are subordinate to capitalist accumulation and ultimately lead to commodification. This is an assumption that has disqualified every alternative move dedicated to social communication and political change as bound to become complicit with neoliberal powers or a stimulus for the next wave of capitalist accumulation. But the foundation of the anti-capitalist position remains of course capitalism itself—even though critics must concede that "good old capitalism" is no longer totally identical with itself, or that possibly even "the end of capitalism (as we knew it)" has come, as emphasized by the feminist authors collective J. K. Gibson-Graham.[8] Moreover, the concepts of the "social factory" and of "biopolitical labor," discussed by Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, have significantly influenced contemporary discourses surrounding social, political, and economic issues. But according to the authors of *Empire*, and as opposed to many interpretations, biopolitical labor creates not only material and immaterial goods, but also social conditions—and thereby social life itself. In this way, the production of social conditions must necessarily include possible grounds for change. According to Negri and Hardt, the term "biopolitical" indicates that the traditional distinctions between the economic, the political, the social, and the cultural have become increasingly blurred.[9] In their analysis, they highlight the emergence of multiple forms of critique and practice as well as that of a "multitude" of singularities with the potential to provoke transformations. Their ideas have proven highly relevant in the fields of art and culture as well, since their theses—and many similar ones have been advanced by other authors this past decade—have maintained that culture increasingly operates within the political arena.[10] But what is it that cultural production is capable of producing? What kind of political imaginaries does it help to constitute? How can cultural production act in relation to the productions of its time and change them from within, as Walter Benjamin asked ninety years ago?[11]

As Italian economist Massimo de Angelis argues, capital accumulation

> must attend to the needs of a variety of social actors and groups, and at the same time make sure that these needs, desires, and value practices, manifesting themselves in terms of struggles, do not break away from its ordering principles, but, on the contrary, become moments of its reproduction.[12]

This contestation has two possible ends: the first is, as De Angelis clarifies, that social cooperation—which, as social beings, we cannot avoid—including the creation of sociality at work and in the home and in all forms of cultural or activist knowledge-production, becomes an alien force under the laws of market competition; the other is—as he argues in his conversation with the editorial collective of *An Architektur* in this issue—that the very fact that we are social beings, that we possess an ability to produce commonness, and not only common goods, needs to be understood as a contradiction within capitalism's own relations of production, especially as this relates to its need for enclosure and scarcity.[13] The central question then would concern not only how we might change the conditions of production and redistribution in their existing forms (with more state intervention or less), but how it is possible to reclaim the relations of production themselves—to change them from within, to redirect and to occupy the "social factory." A problem that is usually brought up at this point is that the social factory, as the dominant contemporary form of the relations of production, does not appear to have a clear spatial or social boundary, and therefore seems unable to provide the same conditions for a common political movement. This is usually understood as a loss.

In Common

Some of this issue's contributors propose instead a new concept of the common and of the communal (with reference to the writings of Jean Luc Nancy and of Deleuze and Guattari) and engage with an idea of "becoming common" or "being-in-common" versus the idea of community as an identitarian and homogenous group.[14]], trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane. (London and New York: Continuum, 2004).] Heterogeneous, conflicting, and intertwined forms of connectivity and commonness are consciously placed against governmental techniques that categorize and fix social groups. The further question of whether these practices are simply a theoretical or representational exercise or indicative of a fundamental political dimension of its own is debated here in articles that engage with the question of how the political is constituted in postidentitarian and transnational ways under common, but also diverse conditions. This is highly relevant in texts concerned with commonness as created by modes of precarity or precarization or the movements of migration. The invited authors propose that commonness and possible politics are constituted not just as harmonious forms of identification, but also as a process of negotiation, and in conflict and confrontation with changes in statehood and global governance, flexible border regimes, and new means of accumulating wealth. But they are constituted through transnational relations and existing, constantly emerging social bounds.[15] Instead of creating new distinctions and new articulations of victimization, the concept of constituting politics focuses on what makes our being-in-common the ground for new political imaginaries that point beyond the nation-state, belonging, gender, and so forth. It is not the fictional model of the white male factory worker that forms

a political subject today; due to the many social struggles and movements taking place in the world, this subject can only be a heterogeneous multitude of singular forms of experience, diverse economies, and subjectivities from diverse but concrete places.

Moreover, those that are subjected to processes of precarization and migration create strategies and tactics in their everyday life that

work both against and within hegemonic structures. They are not only experts in the very contradictions inherent to relations of production and contemporary governance, but are also the producers of new relations of production and new ways of making a living, and these need to be considered alongside techniques of control and processes of recuperation. As local and mobile actors create new dimensions for postnational concepts of citizenship, new rights, and diverse economies, these efforts in effect constitute the political. Can such tactical moves then become public, political action? This question calls for an analysis of histories of ongoing struggles that have produced transversal movements within seemingly stable, Western concepts of governability. These subaltern tactics and strategies likewise call for a new language to articulate the composition of the present situation, and, at the same time, to decenter and decolonize the *common* production of knowledge.[16]

On Postcapitalist Politics

"Any image of society depends on the perspective one takes, and the perspective one takes influences what one sees," summarizes Antke Engel in her revision of the writings of J. K. Gibson-Graham.[17] And the title of this issue of *e-flux journal*, "In Search of the Postcapitalist Self," relates deeply to Gibson-Graham's latest book, *A Postcapitalist Politics*. Their approach focuses on an emerging political imaginary that "confounds the timeworn oppositions between global and local, revolution and reform, opposition and experiment, institutional and individual transformation." As they argue,

> It is not that these paired evaluative terms are no longer useful, but that they now refer to processes that inevitably overlap and intertwine. This conceptual interpenetration is radically altering the established spatiotemporal frame of progressive politics, reconfiguring the position and role of the subject, as well as shifting the grounds for assessing the efficacy of political movements and initiatives.[18]

Their concept of devising different economies for a non-capitalist future concentrates on "the need for a new language of economy to widen the field of economic possibility, the self-cultivation of subjects who can desire and enact other economies, and the collaborative pursuit of economic experimentation."[19]

In their most recent book, *Commonwealth*, Negri and Hardt also trace various feminist and queer approaches to subjectivation and decentering, and conclude that the production of wealth using biopolitical labor could also result in a situation in which the redistribution of "common" wealth does not end up in the hands of the rich, as has been ensured by neoliberal politics. According to Co *mmonwealth,* natural resources, as well as knowledge and information, are communal and shared goods.[20] While Gibson-Graham prefer to stress the common and communal in the present, they also look for a general perspective-change that enables postcapitalist politics to be one of subjectivation and contingency. If, as they suggest throughout their work, the economy has always acted on political, cultural, and social levels, then there is no big "other," no abstract and totalizing capitalism outside of us: there are but acting subjects who accept and implement the telos of competition, exclusiveness, and efficiency.[21] Thus, academic and political practice, research, socioeconomic experimentation, and cultural and artistic production are all involved in constituting the discourses and practices we live in—and the same will also counter, decenter, or queer them. Not by chance Gibson-Graham speak of *capitalisms* in the plural to mark the diversity and contextuality of the project(s).

Not Another Paradigm

For many, it might seem that cultural producers are not the most prepared to engage with these issues, that an activist approach would be more appropriate. But isn't the change in perspective, the intervention in common images and language, and the invention of a new ontological basis for decentering the common *capitalocentric* vision, already a possible ground?[22] Wouldn't this call for other images and assumptions than that of a totalizing capitalism, victimhood, or the division of social groups into minorities? Wouldn't it call for forms of participation that do not remain symbolic, but would constitute new public spaces for political as well as cultural negotiation? Aren't artists' historical and current forms of self-organization, and interventions into the art system's historical division of labor, signs of a détournement within the actual distribution of wealth and value, whether monetary, cultural, or symbolic?[23] Couldn't the emancipatory potential of aesthetic and cultural practices be enacted here?

It is no coincidence that the contributions to this issue focus not only on the constant privatization and capitalization of urban space, but also on ideas and concrete proposals of (urban) design as an aesthetic and spatial practice integrating manual and cognitive abilities, and in such a way that merits consideration through a

postcapitalist lens.[24] Taking this issue of *e-flux journal* as a platform for these concerns connects these debates with an international discussion, but to the extent that the issue is composed primarily of Berlin-based theorists, artists, and activists, it also asks whether the local is still relevant to these concerns. And it is likewise no coincidence that many of the contributions take the theses and proposals in Gibson-Graham's latest book as a leitmotif for a critical reading and revaluation of *existing* postcapitalist projects and cultural practices.

It is customary to note that postcapitalist practices act in the shadow of mainstream discourses and events, and this collection of essays intends to contradict that point on many levels, serving rather as an attempt to initiate a similar discussion, but with a sense of immanence: although the present is constituted by postcapitalist practices (and politics as well), we still have to engage in the discourse and establish a new language, whether textual or visual, in order to make these practices apparent, articulated, and applicable. Therefore, this issue of *e-flux journal* will endeavor to reflect upon the presence of the political against the backdrop of contingent aesthetic, social, and economic factors. It is not a call for a telos or a proclamation of the need for a new, completely different political design that asks, "What has to be done?" Rather, the contributions to this issue seek to promote a more empirical relationship to the presence of the political—one embedded in the genealogies of ongoing social struggles and postidentitarian subjectivity—and ask instead, "What has been done already? And how do we go on?"

Dedicated to Julie Graham

e-flux journal no. 17: In Search of the Postcapitalist Self is guest-edited by Marion von Osten as her contribution to the 6th Berlin Biennale.

X

Special thanks to Orit Gat, Jessie Cohen, Sasha Disco.

1
A question also raised by curator Adnan Yıldız in his article "Falling into Berlin," May 25, 2010.

2
These local histories are reflected—due to Anton Vidokle's awareness—in the articles of Berlin-based artists and writers Sebastian Luetgert ("Down and Out in All the Wrong Places (Berlin 2010)"), Natascha Sadr Haghighian ("What's the Time, Mahagonny?"), and Florian Zeyfang ("A Brief History of Poor Man's Expression").

3
For more information, see https://web.archive.org/web/20100202194612/http://www.edu-factory.org/edu15/ .

4
William Walters, "Decentring the economy," *Economy and Society* 28, no. 2 (May 1999): 316–317. The text is a review article of J. K. Gibson-Graham's, *The End of Capitalism (As We Knew It): A Feminist Critique of Political Economy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996).

5
See for example *The Strategic Silence: Gender and Economic Policy* , ed. Isabella Bakker (London: Zed Books, 1994); or *Beyond Economic Man: Feminist Theory and Economics, ed.* Marianne A. Ferber and Julie A. Nelson (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2003); *Reproduktionskonten fälschen! Heterosexualität, Arbeit und Zuhause* , ed. Pauline Boudry, Brigitta Kuster, and Renate Lorenz (Berlin: b_books, 1999); idem, Sexuell arbeiten (Berlin: b_books, 2007).

6
See Chandra Talpade Mohanty, *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

7
See Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); Arjun Appadurai, "Deep Democracy: Urban Governmentality and the Horizon of Politics," *Public Culture* 14, no. 1 (Winter 2002): 21–47.

8
J. K. Gibson-Graham, *The End of Capitalism (As We Knew It): A Feminist Critique of Political Economy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996).

9
See Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000); idem, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: Penguin, 2004); *Empire und die biopolitische Wende: Die internationale Diskussion im Anschluss an Hardt und Negri* , ed. Marianne Pieper (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 2007); *Das Phantom sucht seinen Mörder: Ein Reader zur Kulturalisierung der Ökonomie* , ed. Justin Hoffmann and Marion von Osten (Berlin: b_books, 1999).

10
See for example Michael Hardt in *Artforum* , December 2008,http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0268/is_4_47/ai_n42419604/ ; or the many examples in Isabell Lorey's article of how post-operaist thought has been negotiated in the cultural field.

11
See Walter Benjamin, "The Author as Producer," in *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings* , ed. Peter Demetz, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York: Schocken, 1986).

12
Massimo de Angelis, *The Beginning of History: Value Struggles and Global Capital* (London: Pluto Press, 2007), 79. The chapter from which this quotation is taken is also available at http://www.commoner.org.uk/?p=62 .

13
See An Architektur's interview with Massimo De Angelis and Stavros Stavrides in this issue . The relation between scarcity and enclosure was also recently debated by Fahim Amir, Eva Egermann, and Peter Spillmann in the roundtable "What shall we do...?" held in Berlin and Vienna in May 2001 on the shifts in extra-institutional knowledge production in the contemporary "educational turn." It is interesting to see how complicated it is to articulate ways out of the context in which one is enclosed.

14
See Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural* , trans. Robert D. Richardson and Anne E. O'Byrne (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000); Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* , vol. 1 [1972.

15
See texts in this issue: Isabell Lorey, "Becoming Common: Precarization as Political Constituting," and Manuela Boyadžijev and Serhat Karakayal?, "Recuperating the Sideshows of Capitalism: The Autonomy of Migration Today."

16
See Walter Mignolo "Epistemic Disobedience, Independent Thought and De-Colonial Freedom," *Theory, Culture, and Society* 26, nos. 7–8 (2009): 1–23.

17
See Antke Engel's article in this issue, "Desire for Economic Transformation / Desire in Economic Transformation."

18
J. K. Gibson-Graham, *A Postcapitalist Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), xix.

19
Ibid., 13.

20
Michael Hardt, Antonio Negri, *Commonwealth* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009).

21
The Spanish artist Daniel Garcia Andujar, for example, has been engaged in the collection of postcapitalist links and projects in his ongoing archive, http://www.postcapital.org/ .

22
Judith Hopf's declaration of independence in this issue, "Contrat entre les hommes et l'ordinateur," can be understood as such an act of détournement.

23
See Marion von Osten, "Producing Publics – Making Worlds!" in *Curating Critique*, ed. Marianne Eigenheer, Barnaby Drabble, and Dorothee Richter (Frankfurt am Main: Revolver, 2007).

24
See the articles in this issue "Hidden Labor and the Delight of Otherness. Design and Postcapitalist Politics" by the art historian Tom Holert, as well as "Design for a Post-Neoliberal City" by the artist and architect Jesko Fezer.

An Architektur

On the Commons: A Public Interview with Massimo De Angelis and Stavros Stavrides

An Architektur: The term "commons" occurs in a variety of historical contexts. First of all, the term came up in relation to land enclosures during pre- or early capitalism in England; second, in relation to the Italian *autonomia* movement of the 1960s; and third, today, in the context of file-sharing networks, but also increasingly in the alter-globalization movement. Could you tell us more about your interest in the commons?

Massimo De Angelis: My interest in the commons is grounded in a desire for the *conditions* necessary to promote social justice, sustainability, and happy lives for all. As simple as that. These are topics addressed by a large variety of social movements across the world that neither states nor markets have been able to tackle, and for good reasons. State policies in support of capitalist growth are policies that create just the opposite conditions of those we seek, since they promote the working of capitalist markets. The latter in turn reproduce socio-economic injustices and hierarchical divisions of power, environmental catastrophes and stressed-out and alienated lives. Especially against the background of the many crises that we are facing today—starting from the recent global economic crisis, and moving to the energy and food crises, and the associated environmental crisis—thinking and practicing the commons becomes particularly urgent.

A New Political Discourse: From Movement to Society

Massimo De Angelis: Commons are a means of establishing a new political discourse that builds on and helps to articulate the many existing, often minor struggles, and recognizes their power to overcome capitalist society. One of the most important challenges we face today is, how do we move from movement to society? How do we dissolve the distinctions between inside and outside the movement and promote a social movement that addresses the real challenges that people face in reproducing their own lives? How do we recognize the real divisions of power within the "multitude" and produce new commons that seek to overcome them at different scales of social action? How can we reproduce our lives in new ways and *at the same time* set a limit to capital accumulation?

The discourse around the commons, for me, has the potential to do those things. The problem, however, is that capital, too, is promoting the commons in its own way, as coupled to the question of capitalist growth. Nowadays the mainstream paradigm that has governed the planet for the last thirty years—neoliberalism—is at an impasse, which may well be terminal. There are signs that a new

governance of capitalism is taking shape, one in which the "commons" are important. Take for example the discourse of the environmental "global commons," or that of the oxymoron called "sustainable development," which is an oxymoron precisely because "development" understood as capitalist growth is just the opposite of what is required by "sustainability." Here we clearly see the "smartest section of capital" at work, which regards the commons as the basis for new capitalist growth. Yet you cannot have capitalist growth without enclosures. We are at risk of getting pushed to become players in the drama of the years to come: capital will need the commons and capital will need enclosures, and the commoners at these two ends of capital will be reshuffled in new planetary hierarchies and divisions.

The Three Elements Of The Commons: Pooled Resources, Community, And Commoning

Massimo De Angelis: Let me address the question of the definition of the commons. There is a vast literature that regards the commons as a resource that people do not need to pay for. What we share is what we have in common. The difficulty with this resource-based definition of the commons is that it is too limited, it does not go far enough. We need to open it up and bring in social relations in the definition of the commons.

Commons are not simply resources we share—conceptualizing the commons involves three things at the same time. First, all commons involve some sort of common pool of resources, understood as non-commodified means of fulfilling peoples needs. Second, the commons are necessarily created and sustained by *communities*—this of course is a very problematic term and topic, but nonetheless we have to think about it. Communities are sets of commoners who share these resources and who define for themselves the rules according to which they are accessed and used. Communities, however, do not necessarily have to be bound to a locality, they could also operate through translocal spaces. They also need not be understood as "homogeneous" in their cultural and material features. In addition to these two elements—the pool of resources and the set of communities—the third and most important element in terms of conceptualizing the commons is the verb "to common"—the social process that creates and reproduces the commons. This verb was recently brought up by the historian Peter Linebaugh, who wrote a fantastic book on the thirteenth-century Magna Carta, in which he points to the process of commoning, explaining how the English commoners took the matter of their lives into their own hands. They were able to maintain and develop certain customs in common—collecting wood in the forest, or setting up villages on the king's land—which, in turn, forced the king to recognize these as rights. The important thing here is to stress that these rights were not "granted" by the sovereign, but that already-existing common customs were rather acknowledged as *de facto* rights.

[figure 4965f9e8b35031e3b23d1f9f47c69d7b.jpg The seal of *Magna Carta*.
]

Enclosures, Primitive Accumulation, and the Shortcomings of Orthodox Marxism

An Architektur: We would like to pick up on your remark on the commons as a new political discourse and practice. How would you relate this new political discourse to already existing social or political theory, namely Marxism? To us it seems as if at least your interpretation of the commons is based a lot on Marxist thinking. Where would you see the correspondences, where lie the differences?

Massimo De Angelis: The discourse on the commons relates to Marxist thinking in different ways. In the first place, there is the question of interpreting Marx's theory of primitive accumulation. In one of the final chapters of volume one of *Capital*, Marx discusses the process of expropriation and dispossession of commoners, which he refers to as "primitive accumulation," understood as the process that creates the precondition of capitalist development by separating people from their means of production. In sixteenth- to eighteenth-century England, this process became known as "enclosure"—the enclosure of common land by the landed nobility in order to use the land for wool production. The commons in these times, however, formed an essential basis for the livelihood of communities. They were fundamental elements for people's reproduction, and this was the case not only in Britain, but all around the world. People had access to the forest to collect wood, which was crucial for cooking, for heating, for a variety of things. They also had access to common grassland to graze their own livestock. The process of enclosure meant fencing off those areas to prevent people from having access to these common resources. This contributed to mass poverty among the commoners, to mass migration and mass criminalization, especially of the migrants. These processes are pretty much the same today all over the world. Back then, this process created on the one hand the modern proletariat, with a high dependence on the wage for its reproduction, and the accumulation of capital necessary to fuel the industrial revolution on the other.

Marx has shown how, historically, primitive accumulation was a precondition of capitalist development. One of the key problems of the subsequent Marxist interpretations of primitive accumulation, however, is the meaning of "precondition." The dominant understanding within the Marxist literature—apart from a few exceptions like Rosa

Luxemburg—has always involved considering primitive accumulation as a precondition fixed in time: dispossession happens *before* capitalist accumulation takes place. After that, capitalist accumulation can proceed, exploiting people perhaps, but with no need to enclose commons since these enclosures have already been established. From the 1980s onwards, the profound limitations of this interpretation became obvious. Neoliberalism was rampaging around the world as an instrument of global capital. Structural adjustment policies, imposed by the IMF (International Monetary Fund), were promoting enclosures of "commons" everywhere: from community land and water resources to entitlements, to welfare benefits and education; from urban spaces subject to new pro-market urban design and developments to rural livelihoods threatened by the "externalities" of environmentally damaging industries, to development projects providing energy infrastructures to the export processing zones. These are the processes referred to by the group Midnight Notes Collective as "new enclosures."

[figure partialpage
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Image found on Wikicommons (searchword: IMF)
"Monetary Fund Headquarters, Washington, DC."

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The identification of "new enclosures" in contemporary capitalist dynamics urged us to reconsider traditional Marxist discourse on this point. What the Marxist literature failed to understand is that primitive accumulation is a continuous process of capitalist development that is also necessary for the preservation of advanced forms of capitalism for two reasons. Firstly, because capital seeks boundless expansion, and therefore always needs new spheres and dimensions of life to turn into commodities. Secondly, because social conflict is at the heart of capitalist processes—this means that people do reconstitute commons anew, and they do it all the time. These commons help to re-weave the social fabric threatened by previous phases of deep commodification and at the same time provide potential new ground for the next phase of enclosures.

Thus, the orthodox Marxist approach—in which enclosure and primitive accumulation are something that only happens during the formation of a capitalist system in order to set up the initial basis for subsequent capitalist development—is misleading. It happens all the time; today as well people's common resources are enclosed for capitalist utilization. For example, rivers are enclosed and taken from local commoners who rely on these resources, in order to build dams for fueling development projects for industrialization. In India there is the case of the Narmada Valley; in Central America there is the attempt to build a series of dams called the Puebla-Panama Plan. The privatization of public goods in the US and in Europe has to be seen in this way, too. To me, however, it is important to emphasize not only that enclosures happen all the time, but also that there is constant commoning. People again and again try to create and access the resources in a way that is different from the modalities of the market, which is the standard way for capital to access resources. Take for example the peer-to-peer production happening in cyberspace, or the activities in social centers, or simply the institutions people in struggle give themselves to sustain their struggle. One of the main shortcomings of orthodox Marxist literature is de-valuing or not seeing the struggles of the commoners. They used to be labeled as backwards, as something that belongs to an era long overcome. But to me, the greatest challenge we have in front of us is to articulate the struggles for commons in the wide range of planetary contexts, at different layers of the planetary wage hierarchy, as a way to overcome the hierarchy itself.

The Tragedy of the Commons

An Architektur: The notion of the commons as a pre-modern system that does not fit in a modern industrialized society is not only used by Marxists, but on the neoliberal side, too. It is central to neoliberal thinking that self-interest is dominant vis-à-vis common interests and that therefore the free market system is the best possible way to organize society. How can we make a claim for the commons against this very popular argument?

Massimo De Angelis: One of the early major pro-market critiques of the commons was the famous article "The Tragedy of the Commons" by Gerrit Hardin, from 1968. Hardin argued that common resources will inevitably lead to a sustainability tragedy because the individuals accessing them would always try to maximize their personal revenue and thereby destroy them. For example, a group of herders would try to get their own sheep to eat as much as possible. If every one did that then of course the resource would be depleted. The policy implications of this approach are clear: the best way to sustain the resource is either through privatization or direct state management. Historical and economic research, however, has shown that existing commons of that type rarely encountered these problems, because the commoners devise rules for accessing resources. Most of the time, developing methods of ensuring the sustainability of common resources has been an important part of the process of commoning.

There is yet a third way beyond markets or states, and this is community self-management and self-government. This is another reason why it is important to keep in mind that commons, the social dimension of the shared, are constituted by the three elements mentioned before: pooled resources, community, and commoning. Hardin could develop a "tragedy of the commons" argument

because in his assumption there existed neither community nor commoning as a social praxis, there were only resources subject to open access.

Furthermore, it is important to note that the problem of the commons cannot be simply described as a question of self-interest versus common interests. Often, the key problem is how individual interests can be articulated in such a way as to *constitute* common interests. This is the question of commoning and of community formation, a big issue that leads to many open questions. Within Marxism, there is generally a standard way to consider the question of common interests: these are given by the "objective" conditions in which the "working class" finds itself vis-à-vis capital as the class of the exploited. A big limitation of this standard interpretation is that "objectivity" is always an inter-subjective agreement. The working class itself is fragmented into a hierarchy of powers, often in conflicts of interest with one another, conflicts materially reproduced by the workings of the market. This means that common interests cannot be postulated, they can only be constructed.

[figure 540b38a4dce1ad68e65a30f990bd72ba.jpg Comic strip of Marx's *Capital* explaining "What is Society?"

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Conceptualizing The Subject Of Change

An Architektur: This idea of the common interest that has to be constructed in the first place—what consequences does it have for conceptualizing possible subjects of change? Would this have to be everybody, a renewed form of an avant-garde or a regrouped working class?

Massimo De Angelis: It is of course not possible to name *the* subject of change. The usefulness of the usual generalizations—"working class," "proletariat," "multitude," etc.—may vary depending on the situation, but generally has little analytical power apart from indicating crucial questions of "frontline." This is precisely because common interests cannot be postulated but can only be constituted through processes of commoning, and this commoning, if of any value, must overcome current material divisions within the "working class," "proletariat," or "multitude." From the perspective of the commons, the wage worker is not *the* emancipatory subject because capitalist relations also pass through the unwaged labor, is often feminized, invisible, and so on. It is not possible to rely on any "vanguard," for two reasons. Firstly, because capitalist measures are pervasive within the stratified global field of production, which implies that it hits everybody. Secondly, because the most "advanced" sections of the global "working class"—whether in terms of the level of their wage or in terms of the type of their labor (it does not matter if these are called immaterial workers or symbolic analysts)—can materially reproduce themselves only on the basis of their interdependence with the "less advanced" sections of the global working class. It has always been this way in the history of capitalism and I have strong reasons to suspect it will always be like this as long as capitalism is a dominant system.

To put it in another way: the computer and the fiber optic cables necessary for cyber-commoning and peer-to-peer production together with my colleagues in India are predicated on huge water usage for the mass production of computers, on cheap wages paid in some export-processing zones, on the cheap labor of my Indian high-tech colleagues that I can purchase for my own reproduction, obtained through the devaluation of labor through ongoing enclosures. The subjects along this chain can all be "working class" in terms of their relation to capital, but their objective position and form of mutual dependency is structured in such a way that their interests are often mutually exclusive.

The Commons As Community Versus The Commons As Public Space

An Architektur: Stavros, what is your approach towards the commons? Would you agree with Massimo's threefold definition and the demands for action he derives from that?

Stavros Stavrides: First, I would like to bring to the discussion a comparison between the concept of the commons based on the idea of a community and the concept of the public. The community refers to an entity, mainly to a homogeneous group of people, whereas the idea of the public puts an emphasis on the relation between different communities. The public realm can be considered as the actual or virtual space where strangers and different people or groups with diverging forms of life can meet.

The notion of the public urges our thinking about the commons to become more complex. The possibility of encounter in the realm of the public has an effect on how we conceptualize commoning and sharing. We have to acknowledge the difficulties of sharing as well as the contests and negotiations that are necessarily connected with the prospect of sharing. This is why I favor the idea of providing ground to build a public realm and give opportunities for discussing and negotiating what is good for all, rather than the idea of strengthening communities in their struggle to define their own commons. Relating commons to groups of "similar" people bears the danger of eventually creating closed communities. People may thus define themselves as commoners by excluding others from their milieu, from their own privileged commons. Conceptualizing commons on the basis of the

public, however, does not focus on similarities or commonalities but on the very differences between people that can possibly meet on a purposefully instituted common ground.

We have to establish a ground of negotiation rather than a ground of affirmation of what is shared. We don't simply have to raise the moral issues about what it means to share, but to discover procedures through which we can find out what and how to share. Who is this *we*? Who defines this sharing and decides how to share? What about those who don't want to share with us or with whom we do not want to share? How can these relations with those "others" be regulated? For me, this aspect of negotiation and contest is crucial, and the ambiguous project of emancipation has to do with regulating relationships between differences rather than affirming commonalities based on similarities.

Emancipatory Struggles: The Relation Between Means And Ends

An Architektur: How does this move away from commons based on similarities, towards the notion of difference, influence your thinking about contemporary social movements or urban struggles?

Stavros Stavrides: For me, the task of emancipatory struggles or movements is not only what has to be done, but also how it will be done and who will do it. Or, in a more abstract way: how to relate the means to the ends. We have suffered a lot from the idea that the real changes only appear after the final fight, for which we have to prepare ourselves by building some kind of army-like structure that would be able to effectively accomplish a change in the power relations. Focused on these "duties" we tend to postpone any test of our values until after this final fight, as only then we will supposedly have the time to create this new world as a society of equals. But unfortunately, as we know and as we have seen far too often, this idea has turned out to be a nightmare. Societies and communities built through procedures directed by hierarchical organizations, unfortunately, exactly mirrored these organizations. The structure of the militant avant-garde tends to be reproduced as a structure of social relations in the new community.

Thus, an essential question within emancipatory projects is: can we as a group, as a community or as a collectivity reflect our ideas and values in the form that we choose to carry out our struggle? We have to be very suspicious about the idea of the avant-garde, of those elected (or self-selected) few, who know what has to be done and whom the others should follow. To me, this is of crucial importance. We can no longer follow the old concept of the avant-garde if we really want to achieve something different from today's society.

Here are very important links to the discussion about the commons, especially in terms of problematizing the collectivity of the struggle. Do we intend to make a society of sharing by sharing, or do we intend to create this society after a certain period in which we do not share? Of course, there are specific power relations between us, but does this mean that some have to lead and others have to obey the instructors? Commons could be a way to understand not only what is at stake but also how to get there. I believe that we need to create forms of collective struggle that match collective emancipatory aims, forms that can also show us what is worthy of dreaming about an emancipated future.

Commoning Inside the Capitalist Structure

An Architektur: Massimo, you put much emphasis on the fact that commoning happens all the time, also under capitalist conditions. Can you give a current example? Where would you see this place of resistance? For Marx it was clearly the factory, based on the analysis of the exploitation of labor, which gave him a clear direction for a struggle.

Massimo De Angelis: The factory for Marx was a twofold space: it was the space of capitalist exploitation and discipline—this could of course also be the office, the school, or the university—but it was also the space in which *social cooperation of labor* occurred without the immediate mediation of money. Within the factory we have a non-commoditized space, which would fit our definition of the commons as the space of the "shared" at a very general level.

An Architektur: Why non-commoditized?

Massimo De Angelis: Because when I work in a capitalist enterprise, I may get a wage in exchange for my labor power, but in the moment of production I do not participate in any monetary transactions. If I need a tool, I ask you to pass me one. If I need a piece of information, I do not have to pay a copyright. In the factory—that we are using here as a metaphor for the place of capitalist production—we may produce commodities, but not by means of commodities, since goods stopped being commodities in the very moment they became inputs in the production process. I refer here to the classical Marxian distinction between labor power and labor. In the factory, labor power is sold as a commodity, and after the production process, products are sold. In the very moment of production, however, it is only labor that counts, and labor as a social process is a form of "commoning." Of course, this happens within particular social relations of exploitation, so maybe we should not use the same word, commoning, so as not to confuse it with the commoning made by people "taking things into their own hands." So, we perhaps should call it "distorted commoning," where the measure of distortion is directly proportional to the

degree of the subordination of commoning to social measures coming from outside the commoning, the one given by management, by the requirement of the market, etc. In spite of its distortions, I think, it is important to consider what goes on inside the factory as also a form of commoning. This is an important distinction that refers to the question of how capital uses the commons. I am making this point because the key issue is not really how we conceive of commoning within the spheres of commons, but how we reclaim the commons of our production that are distorted through the imposition of capital's measure of things.

[figure partialpage
166ab5b0fc49cefa04db6fe1cecb304c.jpg
Image found on Wikicommons (searchword: commoners)
"Wigpool Common.This was open land, grazed through commoner's rights."

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This capitalist measure of things is also imposed across places of commoning. The market is a system that articulates social production at a tremendous scale, and we have to find ways to replace this mode of articulation. Today, most of what is produced in the common—whether in a distorted capitalist commons or alternative commons—has to be turned into money so that commoners can access other resources. This implies that commons can be pitted against one another in processes of market competition. Thus we might state as a guiding principle that whatever is produced in the common must stay in the common in order to expand, empower, and sustain the commons independently from capitalist circuits.

Stavros Stavrides: This topic of the non-commodified space within capitalist production is linked to the idea of immaterial labor, theorized, among others, by Negri and Hardt. Although I am not very much convinced by the whole theory of "empire" and "the multitude," the idea that within the capitalist system the conditions of labor tend to produce commons, even though capitalism, as a system acts against commons and for enclosures, is very attractive to me. Negri and Hardt argue that with the emergence of immaterial labor—which is based on communicating and exchanging knowledge, not on commodified assets in the general sense, but rather on a practice of sharing—we have a strange new situation: the change in the capitalist production from material to immaterial labor provides the opportunity to think about commons that are produced in the system but can be extracted and potentially turned against the system. We can take the notion of immaterial labor as an example of a possible future beyond capitalism, where the conditions of labor produce opportunities for understanding what it means to work in common but also to produce commons.

Of course there are always attempts to control and enclose this sharing of knowledge, for example the enclosure acts aimed at controlling the internet, this huge machine of sharing knowledge and information. I do not want to overly praise the internet, but this spread of information to a certain degree always contains the seed of a different commoning against capitalism. There is always both, the enclosures, but also the opening of new possibilities of resistance. This idea is closely connected to those expressed in the anti-capitalist movement claiming that there is always the possibility of finding within the system the very means through which you can challenge it. Resistance is not about an absolute externality or the utopia of a good society. It is about becoming aware of opportunities occurring within the capitalist system and trying to turn them against it.

Massimo De Angelis: We must, however, also make the point that seizing the internal opportunities that capitalism creates can also become the object of co-optation. Take as an example the capitalist use of the commons in relation to seasonal workers. Here commons can be used to undermine wages or, depending on the specific circumstances, they can also constitute the basis for stronger resistance and greater working-class power. The first case could be seen, for example, in South African enclaves during the Apartheid regime, where lower-level wages could be paid because seasonal workers were returning to their homes and part of the reproduction was done within these enclaves, outside the circuits of capital. The second case is when migrant seasonal workers can *sustain* a strike precisely because, due to their access to common resources, their livelihoods are not completely dependent on the wage, something which happened, for example, in Northern Italy a few decades ago. Thus, the relation between capitalism and the commons is always a question of power relations in a specific historic context.

The Role And Reactions Of The State

An Architektur: How would you evaluate the importance of the commons today? Would you say that the current financial and economic crisis and the concomitant delegitimation of the neoliberal model brought forward, at least to a certain extent, the discussion and practice of the commons? And what are the respective reactions of the authorities and of capitalism?

Massimo De Angelis: In every moment of crisis we see an emergence of commons to address questions of livelihood in one way or the other. During the crisis of the 1980s in Britain there was the emergence of squatting, alternative markets, or so called Local Exchange Trading Systems, things that also came up in the crisis in Argentina in 2001.

Regarding the form in which capitalism reacts and reproduces itself in relation to the emergence of commoning, three main processes can be observed. First,

the criminalization of alternatives in every process of enclosure, both historically and today. Second, a temptation of the subjects fragmented by the market to return to the market. And third, a specific mode of governance that ensures the subordination of individuals, groups and their values, needs and aspirations under the market process.

An Architektur: But then, how can we relate the commons and commoning to state power? Are the commons a means to overcome or fight the state or do you think they need the state to guarantee a societal structure? Would, at least in theory, the state finally be dissolved through commoning? Made useless, would it thus disappear? Stavros, could you elaborate on this?

Stavros Stavrides: Sometimes we tend to ignore the fact that what happens in the struggle for commons is always related to specific situations in specific states, with their respective antagonisms. One always has to put oneself in relation to other groups in the society. And of course social antagonisms take many forms including those produced by or channeled through different social institutions. The state is not simply an engine that is out there and regulates various aspects of production or various aspects of the distribution of power. The state, I believe, is part of every social relation. It is not only a regulating mechanism but also produces a structure of institutions that mold social life. To be able to resist these dominant forms of social life we have to eventually struggle against these forces which make the state a very dominant reality in our societies.

In today's world, we often interpret the process of globalization as the withering away of states, so that states are no longer important. But actually the state is the guarantor of the necessary conditions for the reproduction of the system. It is a guarantor of violence, for example, which is not a small thing. Violence, not only co-optation, is a very important means of reproducing capitalism, because by no means do we live in societies of once-and-for-all legitimated capitalist values. Instead, these values must be continuously imposed, often by force. The state is also a guarantor of property and land rights, which are no small things either, because property rights establish forms of control on various aspects of our life. Claims of property rights concern specific places that belong to certain people or establishments, which might also be international corporations. The state, therefore, is not beyond globalization; it is in fact the most specific arrangement of powers against which we can struggle.

Building a Network of Resistance

Stavros Stavrides: I am thus very suspicious or reserved about the idea that we can build our own small enclaves of otherness, our small liberated strongholds that could protect us from the power of the state. I don't mean that it is not important to build communities of resistance, but rather than framing them as isolated enclaves, we should attempt to see them as a potential network of resistance, collectively representing only a part of the struggle. If you tend to believe that a single community with its commons and its enclosed parameter could be a stronghold of liberated otherness, then you are bound to be defeated. You cannot avoid the destruction that comes from the power of the state and its mechanisms. Therefore, we need to produce collaborations between different communities as well as understand ourselves as belonging to not just one of these communities. We should rather understand ourselves as members of different communities in the process of emerging.

An Architektur: But how can it be organized? What could this finally look like?

Stavros Stavrides: The short answer is a federation of communities. The long answer is that it has to do with the conditions of the struggle. I think that we are not for the replacement of the capitalist state by another kind of state. We come from long traditions, both communist and anarchist, of striving for the destruction of the state. I think we should find ways in today's struggles to reduce the presence of the state, to oblige the state to withdraw, to force the state to be less violent in its responses. To seek liberation from the jurisdiction of the state in all its forms, that are connected with economical, political, and social powers. But, for sure, the state will be there until something—not simply a collection of struggles, but something of a qualitatively different form—happens that produces a new social situation. Until then we cannot ignore the existence of the state because it is always forming its reactions in terms of what we choose to do.

Ongoing Negotiations: The Navarinou Park in Exarcheia, Athens

Massimo De Angelis: Yes, I agree that is crucial. The state is present in all these different processes, but it is also true that we have to find ways to disarticulate these powers. One example is the occupied park in Exarcheia, a parking lot that was turned into a park through an ongoing process of commoning. The presence of the state is very obvious, just fifty meters around the corner there is an entire bus full of riot police and rows of guards. One of the problems in relation to the park is the way in which the actions of the police could be legitimized by making use of complaints about the park by its neighbors. And there are of course reasons to complain. Some of the park's organizers told me that apparently every night some youth hang out there, drinking and trashing the place, making noise and so on. The organizers approached them, asking them not to do that. And they replied "Oh, are you the police?" They were also invited to participate in the assembly during the week, but they showed no interest.

According to some people I have interviewed, they were showing an individualistic attitude, one which we have internalized by living in this capitalist society; the idea that this is my space where I can do whatever I want—without, if you like, a process of commoning that would engage with all the issues of the community. But you have to somehow deal with this problem, you cannot simply exclude those youngsters, not only as a matter of principle, but also because it would be completely deleterious to do so. If you just exclude them from the park, you have failed to make the park an inclusive space. If you do not exclude them and they continue with their practices, it would further alienate the local community and provide an opening for the police and a legitimization of their actions. So in a situation like this you can see some practical answers to those crucial questions we have discussed—there are no golden rules.

Stavros Stavrides: I would interpret the situation slightly differently. Those people you refer to were not saying that they have a right as individual consumers to trash the park. They were saying that the park is a place for their community, a place for alternative living or for building alternative political realms. They certainly refer to some kind of commoning, but only to a very specific community of commoners. And this is the crucial point: they did not consider the neighbors, or at least the neighbors' habitude, as part of their community. Certain people conceive of this area as a kind of liberated stronghold in which they don't have to think about those others outside. Because, in the end, who are those others outside? They are those who "go to work everyday and do not resist the system."

To me, these are cases through which we are tested, through which our own ideas about what it means to share or what it means to live in public are tested. We can discuss the park as a case of an emergent alternative public space. And this public space can be constituted only when it remains contestable in terms of its use. Public spaces which do not simply impose the values of a sovereign power are those spaces produced and inhabited through negotiating exchanges between different groups of people. As long as contesting the specific character and uses of alternative public spaces does not destroy the collective freedom to negotiate between equals, contesting should be welcome. You have to be able to produce places where different kinds of lives can coexist in terms of mutual respect. Therefore any such space cannot simply belong to a certain community that defines the rules; there has to be an ongoing, open process of rulemaking.

Massimo De Angelis: There are two issues here. First of all, I think this case shows that whenever we try to produce commons, what we also need is the production of the respective community and its forms of commoning. The Navarinou Park is a new commons and the community cannot simply consist of the organizers. The organizers I have talked to act pretty much as a sort of *commons entrepreneurs*, a group of people who are trying to facilitate the meeting of different communities in the park, to promote encounters possibly leading to more sustained forms of commoning. Thus, when we are talking about emergent commons like these ones, we are talking about spaces of negotiation across diverse communities, the bottom line of what Stavros referred to as "public space." Yet, we also cannot talk about the park as being a "public space" in the usual sense, as a free-for-all space, one for which the individual does not have to take responsibility, like a park managed by the local authority.

The second point is that another fundamental aspect of commoning can be exemplified by the park—the role of reproduction. We have learned from feminists throughout the last few decades that for every visible work of production there is an invisible work of reproduction. The people who want to keep the park will have to work hard for its reproduction. This does not only mean cleaning the space continuously, but also reproducing the legitimacy to claim this space vis-à-vis the community, vis-à-vis the police and so on. Thinking about the work of reproduction is actually one of the most fundamental aspects of commoning. How will the diverse communities around this park come together to *share* the work of reproduction? That is a crucial test for any commons.

Beyond Representative Democracy: The Collective Self-Government Of The Zapatistas

An Architektur: But how can we imagine this constant process of negotiation other than on a rather small local level?

Stavros Stavrides: To me this is not primarily a question of scale, it is more a fundamental question of how to approach these issues. But if you want to talk about a larger-scale initiative, I would like to refer to the Zapatista movement. For the Zapatistas, the process of negotiation takes two forms: inter-community negotiation, which involves people participating in assemblies, and negotiations with the state, which involves the election of representatives. The second form was abruptly abandoned as the state chose to ignore any agreement reached. But the inter-community negotiation process has evolved into a truly alternative form of collective self-government. Zapatistas have established autonomous regions inside the area of the Mexican state in order to provide people with the opportunity to actually participate in self-governing those regions. To not simply participate in a kind of representative democracy but to actually get involved themselves. Autonomous communities established a rotation system that might look pretty strange to us, with a regular change every fifteen or thirty days. So, if you become some kind of local authority of a small municipality, then, just when you start to know what

the problems are and how to tangle with them, you have to leave the position to another person. Is this logical? Does this system bring about results that are similar to other forms of governing, or does it simply produce chaos? The Zapatistas insist that it is more important that all the people come into these positions and get trained in a form of administration that expresses the idea of "governing by obeying the community" (*mandar obedeciendo*). The rotation system effectively prevents any form of accumulation of individual power. This system might not be the most effective in terms of administration but it is effective in terms of building and sustaining this idea of a community of negotiation and mutual respect.

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Zapatista "rebel" territory. Photo: Hajor, 2005

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Yes, establishing rules and imposing them is more effective, but it is more important to collectively participate in the process of creating and checking the rules, if you intend to create a different society. We have to go beyond the idea of a democracy of "here is my view, there is yours—who wins?" We need to find ways of giving room to negotiate the differences. Perhaps I tend to overemphasize the means, the actual process, and not the effective part of it, its results. There are of course a lot of problems in the Zapatista administration system but all these municipalities are more like instances of a new world trying to emerge and not prototypes of what the world should become.

We can also take as an example the Oaxaca rebellion, which worked very well. Those people have actually produced a city-commune, which to me is even more important than the glorious commune of Paris. We had a very interesting presentation by someone from Oaxaca here in Athens, explaining how during those days they realized that "they could do without them"— *them* meaning the state, the power, the authorities. They could run the city collectively through communal means. They had schools, and they had captured the radio and TV station from the beginning. They ran the city facing all the complexities that characterize a society. Oaxaca is a rather small city of around 600,000 inhabitants and of course it is not Paris. But we had the chance to see these kind of experiments, new forms of self-management that can produce new forms of social life—and as we know, the Oaxaca rebellion was brutally suppressed. But, generally speaking, until we see these new forms of society emerging we don't know what they could be like. And I believe we have to accept that!

About Principles: Connecting Discourse to Practice

An Architektur: Stavros, you mentioned that the administration and rotation system of the Zapatistas should not be taken as a prototype of what should come. Does this mean that you reject any kind of idea of or reflection about models for a future society?

Stavros Stavrides: I think it is not a question of a model. We cannot say that some kind of model exists, nor should we strive for it. But, yes, we need some kind of guiding principles. For me, however, it is important to emphasize that the commons cannot be treated only as an abstract idea, they are inextricably intertwined with existing power relations. The problem is, how can we develop principles through which we can judge which communities actually fight for commons? Or, the other way round, can struggles for commons also be against emancipatory struggles? How do we evaluate this? I think in certain historical periods, not simply contingencies, you can have principles by which you can judge. For example, middle-class neighborhoods that tend to preserve their enclave character will produce communities fighting for commons but against the idea of emancipation. Their notion of commons is based on a community of similar people, a community of exclusion and privilege.

Principles are however not only discursive gestures, they have to be seen in relation to the person or the collective subject who refers to these principles in certain discourses and actions. Therefore, reference to principles could be understood as a form of performative gesture. If I am saying that I am for or against those principles what does this mean for my practice? Principles are not only important in judging discursive contests but can also affect the way a kind of discourse is connected to practice. For example, if the prime minister of Greece says in a pre-election speech that he wants to eradicate all privileges we of course know he means only certain privileges for certain people. So, what is important is not only the stating of principles, but also the conditions under which this statement acquires its meaning. That is why I am talking about principles presuming that we belong to the same side. I am of course also assuming that we enter this discussion bearing some marks of certain struggles, otherwise it would be a merely academic discussion.

If We Were Left Alone, What Would We Do?

An Architektur: Let's imagine that we were left alone, what would we do? Do we still need the state as an overall structure or opponent? Would we form a state ourselves, build communities based on commons or turn to egoistic ways of life? Maybe this exercise can bring us a little further . . .

Massimo De Angelis: I dare to say that "if we are left alone" we may end up doing pretty much the same things as we are now: keep the race going until we re-program

ourselves to sustain different types of relations. In other words, you can assume that "we are left alone" and still work in auto-pilot because nobody knows what else to do. There is a lot of learning that needs to be done. There are a lot of prejudices we have built by becoming—at least to a large extent—homo economicus, with our cost-benefit calculus in terms of money. There is a lot of junk that needs to be shed, other things that need to be valorized, and others still that we need to just realize.

Yet auto-pilots cannot last forever. In order to grow, the capitalist system must enclose, but enclosures imply strategic agency on the part of capital. Lacking this under the assumption that "we are left alone," the system would come to a standstill and millions of people would ask themselves: What now? How do we reproduce our livelihoods? The question that needs to be urgently problematized in our present context would come out naturally in the (pretty much absurd) proposition you are making. There is no easy answer that people could give. Among other things, it would depend a lot on power relations within existing hierarchies, because even if "we are left alone" people would still be divided into hierarchies of power. But one thing that is certain to me is that urban people, especially in the North, would have to begin to grow more food, reduce their pace of life, some begin to move back to the countryside, and look into each other's eyes more often. This is because "being left alone" would imply the end of the type of interdependence that is constituted with current states' policies. What new forms of interdependence would emerge? Who knows. But the real question is: what new forms of interdependence can emerge *given the fact* that we will never be left alone?

[figure partialpage
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Image found on Wikicommons (searchword: money)
"English 'Money-tree' near Bolton Abbey, North Yorkshire, Papa November (cc)"

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Concerning the other part of your question, yes, we could envisage a "state," but not necessarily in the tragic forms we have known. The rational kernel of "the state" is the realm of context—the setting for the daily operations of commoners. From the perspective of nested systems of commons at larger and larger scales, the state can be conceptualized as the bottom-up means through which the commoners establish, monitor, and enforce their basic collective and inter-commons rules. But of course the meaning of establishing, monitoring, and—especially—enforcing may well be different from what is meant today by it.

Stavros Stavrides: Let's suppose that we have been left alone, which I don't think will ever be the case. But anyway. Does that mean that we are in a situation where we can simply establish our own principles, our own forms of commons, that we are in a situation where we are equal? Of course not!

A good example is the case of the occupied factories in Argentina. There, the workers were left alone in a sense, without the management, the accountants, and engineers, and without professional knowledge of how to deal with various aspects of the production. They had to develop skills they did not have before. One woman, for example, said that her main problem in learning the necessary software programs to become an accountant for the occupied factory, was that she first had to learn how to read and write. So, imagine the distance that she had to bridge! And eventually, without wanting it, she became one of the newly educated workers that could lead the production and develop strategies for the factory. Although she would not impose them on the others, who continued to work in the assembly line and did not develop skills in the way she did, she became a kind of privileged person. Thus, no matter how egalitarian the assembly was, you finally develop the same problems you had before. You have a separation of people, which is a result of material circumstances. Therefore, you have to develop the means to fight this situation. In addition to producing the commons, you have to give the power to the people to have their own share in the production process of these commons — not only in terms of the economic circumstances but in terms of the socialization of knowledge, too. You have to ensure that everybody is able to speak and think, to become informed, and to participate. All of these problems have erupted in an occupied factory in Argentina, not in a future society.

Anthropological research has proved that there have been and still exist societies of commoning and sharing and that these societies — whether they were food gatherers or hunters—do not only conceive of property in terms of community-owned goods, but that they have also developed a specific form of eliminating the accumulation of power. They have actively produced forms of regulating power relations through which they prevent someone from becoming a leader. They had to acknowledge the fact that people do not possess equal strength or abilities, and at the same time they had to develop the very means by which they would collectively prevent those differences from becoming separating barriers between people, barriers that would eventually create asymmetries of power. Here you see the idea of commons not only as a question of property relations but also as a question of power distribution.

So, coming back to your question, when we are left alone we have to deal with the fact that we are not equal in every aspect. In order to establish this equality, we have to make gestures—not only rules—but gestures which are not based on a zero-sum calculus. Sometimes somebody must offer more, not because anyone obliges him or her but because he or she chooses to do so. For example, I respect that you cannot speak like me, therefore I step

back and I ask you to speak in this big assembly. I do this knowing that I possess this kind of privileged ability to talk because of my training or talents. This is not exactly a common, this is where the common ends and the gift begins—to share you have to be able to give gifts. To develop a society of equality does not mean leveling but sustaining the ability of everybody to participate in a community, and that is not something that happens without effort. Equality is a process not a state. Some may have to "yield" in order to allow others—those more severely underprivileged—to be able to express their own needs and dreams.

Massimo De Angelis: I think that the gift and the commons may not be two modalities outside one another. "Gift" may be a property of the commons, especially if we regard these not as fixed entities but as processes of commoning. Defining the "what," "how," and "who" of the commons also may include acts of gifts and generosity. In turn, these may well be given with no expectation of return. However, as we know, the gift, the act of generosity, is often part of an exchange, too, where you expect something in return.

Arenas for Constituting the Commons and Their Limitations

Massimo De Angelis: The occupied factory we just talked about exemplifies an arena in which we have the opportunity to produce commons, not only through making gift gestures but also by turning the creative iteration of these gestures into new institutions. And these arenas for commoning potentially exist everywhere. Yet every arena finds itself with particular boundaries—both internal and external ones. In the case of the occupied factory, the internal boundaries are given by the occupying community of workers, who have to consider their relation to the outside, the unemployed, the surrounding communities, and so on. The choices made here will also affect the type of relations to and articulation with other arenas of commoning.

Another boundary that comes up in all potential arenas of commoning, setting a limit to the endeavors of the commoners, is posited *outside* them, and is given by the pervasive character of capitalist measure and values. For example, the decision of workers to keep the production going implies to a certain extent accepting the measuring processes given by a capitalist market which puts certain constraints on workers such as the need for staying competitive, at least to some degree. All of a sudden they had to start to self-organize their own exploitation, and this is one of the major problems we face in these kind of initiatives, an issue that can only be tackled when a far higher number of commoning arenas arise and ingenuity is applied in their articulation.

But before we reach that limit posed by the outside, there is still a lot of scope for constitution, development, and articulation of subjectivities within arenas of commoning. This points to the question of where our own responsibility and opportunity lie. If the limit posed from the outside on an arena of commoning is the "no" that capital posits to the commons "yes," to what extent can our constituent movement be a positive force that says no to capital's no?

An Architektur: But then, when will a qualitative difference in society be achieved such that we are able to resist those mechanisms of criminalization, temptation, and governance Massimo spoke about before? What would happen if half of the factories were self-governed?

Stavros Stavrides: I don't know when a qualitative difference will be achieved. 50% is a very wild guess! Obviously that would make a great difference. But I think a very small percentage makes a difference as well. Not in terms of producing enclaves of otherness surrounded by a capitalist market, but as cases of collective experimentation through which you can also convince people that another world is possible. And those people in the Argentinean factories have actually managed to produce such kind of experiments, not because they have ideologically agreed on the form of society they fight for, but because they were authentically producing their own forms of everyday resistance, out of the need to protect their jobs after a major crisis. Many times they had to rediscover the ground on which to build their collectively sustained autonomy. The power of this experiment, however, lies on its possibility to spread—if it keeps on enclosing itself in the well-defined perimeter of an "alternative enclave," it is bound to fail.

I believe that if we see and experience such experiments, we can still hope for another world and have glimpses of this world today. It is important to test fragments of this future in our struggles, which is also part of how to judge them—and I think these collective experiences are quite different from the alternative movements of the 1970s. Do we still strive for developing different life environments that can be described as our own "Christianias"? To me, the difference lies in the porosity, in the fact that the areas of experiment spill over into society. If they are only imagined as liberated strongholds they are bound to lose. Again, there is something similar we could learn from the Zapatista movement that attempted to create a kind of hybrid society in the sense that it is both pre-industrial and post-industrial, both pre-capitalist and post-capitalist at the same time. To me, this, if you want, unclear situation, which of course is only unclear due to our frozen and limited perception of society, is very important.

Athens' December Uprising

An Architektur: How would you describe Athens' uprising last December in this relation? At least in

Germany much focus was put on the outbreak of violence. What do you think about what has happened? Have things changed since then?

Stavros Stavrides: One of the things that I have observed is that at first both the leftists and the anarchists didn't know what to do. They were not prepared for this kind of uprising which did not happen at the very bottom of the society. There were young kids from every type of school involved. Of course there were immigrants taking part but this was not an immigrant revolt. Of course there were many people suffering from deprivation and injustice who took part but this was not a "banlieue type" uprising either. This was a peculiar, somehow unprecedented, kind of uprising. No center, just a collective networking without a specific point from which activities radiated. Ideas simply criss-crossed all over Greece and you had initiatives you couldn't imagine a few months ago, a lot of activities with no name or with improvised collective signatures. For example, in Syros, an island with a long tradition of working-class struggles, the local pupils surrounded the central police station and demanded that the police officers come outside, take off their hats and apologize for what happened. And they did it. They came out in full formation. This is something that is normally unimaginable.

This polycentric eruption of collective action, offering glimpses of a social movement, which uses means that correspond to emancipating "ends," is, at least to my mind, what is new and what inspired so many people all over the world. I tend to be a bit optimistic about that. Let me not overestimate what is new, there were also some very unpleasantly familiar things happening. You could see a few "Bonapartist" groups behaving as if they were conducting the whole situation. But this was a lie, they simply believed that.

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The Navarinou Park in Exarcheia, Athens

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What is also important is that the spirit of collective, multifarious actions did not only prevail during the December days. Following the December uprising, something qualitatively new happened in various initiatives. Take the initiative of the Navarinou Park in Exarcheia. This would not have been possible without the experience of December. Of course, several anarchist and leftist projects around Exarcheia already existed and already produced alternative culture and politics, but never before did we have this kind of initiative involving such a variety of people in such different ways. And, I think, after December various urban movements gained a new momentum, understanding that we weren't simply demanding something but that we had a right to it. Rejecting being governed and taking our lives into our own hands, no matter how ambiguous that may be, is a defining characteristic of a large array of "after December" urban movement actions.

The City of Thresholds: Conceptualizing the Relation Between Space and the Commons

An Architektur: We have discussed a large variety of different events, initiatives, and projects. Can we attempt to further relate our findings to their spatial and urban impacts, maybe by more generally trying to envision a city entirely based on the commons?

Stavros Stavrides: To think about a city based on commons we have to question and conceptualize the connection of space and the commons. It would be interesting to think of the production of space as an area of commons and then discuss how this production has to be differentiated from today's capitalist production of space. First of all, it is important to conceive space and the city as not primarily quantities—which is the dominant perception—the quantified space of profit-making, where space always has a value and can easily be divided and sold. So, starting to think about space as related to the commons means to conceptualize it as a form of relations rather than as an entity, as a condition of comparisons instead of an established arrangement of positions. We have to conceive space not as a sum of defined places, which we should control or liberate but rather as a potential network of passages linking one open place to another. Space, thus, becomes important as a constitutive dimension of social action. Space indeed "happens" as different social actions literally produce different spatial qualities. With the prospect of claiming space as a form of commons, we have to oppose the idea that each community exists as a spatially defined entity, in favor of the idea of a network of communicating and negotiating social spaces that are not defined in terms of a fixed identity. Those spaces thus retain a "passage" character.

Once more, we have to reject the exclusionary gesture which understands space as belonging to a certain community. To think of space in the form of the commons means not to focus on its quantity, but to see it as a form of social relationality providing the ground for social encounters. I tend to see this kind of experiencing-with and creation of space as the prospect of the "city of thresholds." Walter Benjamin, seeking to redeem the liberating potential of the modern city, developed the idea of the threshold as a revealing spatiotemporal experience. For him, the *flaneur* is a connoisseur of thresholds: someone who knows how to discover the city as the locus of unexpected new comparisons and encounters. And this awareness can start to unveil the prevailing urban phantasmagoria which has reduced modernity to a misfired collective dream of a liberated future. To me, the idea of an emancipating spatiality could look like a city of

thresholds. A potentially liberating city can be conceived not as an agglomerate of liberated spaces but as a network of passages, as a network of spaces belonging to nobody and everybody at the same time, which are not defined by a fixed-power geometry but are open to a constant process of (re)definition.

There is a line of thinking that leads to Lefebvre and his notion of the "right to the city" as the right that includes and combines all rights. This right is not a matter of access to city spaces (although we should not underestimate specific struggles for free access to parks, etc.), it is not simply a matter of being able to have your own house and the assets that are needed to support your own life, it is something which includes all those demands but also goes beyond them by creating a higher level of the commons. For Lefebvre the right to the city is the right to create the city as a collective work of art. The city, thus, can be produced through encounters that make room for new meanings, new values, new dreams, new collective experiences. And this is indeed a way to transcend pure utility, a way to see commons beyond the utilitarian horizon.

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This interview is part of *An Architektur*, no. 23: "On the Commons." It is based on a public interview and workshop held in the context of the Athens Biennial 2009 as part of "live," curated by Dimitris Papaioannou and Zafos Xagoraris. Issue edited by Oliver Clemens, Sabine Horlitz, Anita Kaspar, and Andreas Müller. Proofreading by Sasha Disco. See **www.anarchitektur.com**.

Tom Holert

Hidden Labor and the Delight of Otherness: Design and Post-Capitalist Politics

1. Ritualistic Negativity

One of the most intriguing tasks of the theme and thesis of this issue of *e-flux journal* is the imagining and reframing of cultural and aesthetic practice in decidedly post-capitalist terms—that is, as embedded in and engendered by processes of globally networked solidarity, diversity, cooperation, interdependence, and so forth. I would like to begin by supplementing the notion of practice with the notion of design, which may provide the discussion with an initial spin. Of course, "design" is a contested term, and its meaning and function can differ dramatically. In this article, "design" will be taken to be synonymous with "urban design," though even this specification doesn't help much to reduce the problem of reference and cultural difference, as "urban design" is deployed in highly ideological ways and is necessarily steered by varying institutional interests.[1]

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Workers on a modern assembly line, Ford Mustang.

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The very notion of "design," not to mention the ideologies and machinations implied in "designerly approaches to problem-solving as potential disciplining force," are most questionable.[2] Moreover, the "logics of design" are being mixed and modulated to transform society in heretofore-unknown ways. According to Michael Hardt, "design" has become a "general name" for post-Fordist types of production, which is to say that nobody can claim to be outside of design anymore. As Hardt argues, this marks "a position of great potential" for the immaterial laborer, and can also indicate "a certain kind of critique and struggle that can be waged from within."[3] Hence, the usual rebuttal of design (and urban design in particular) to accusations of being a top-down, master-planning imposition of value-making schemes of urbanity (justified as it may be) needs rephrasing, as it tends to freeze the critique in predictable anti-capitalist stances without looking for ways of negotiating differing visions of urban and cultural production pursued within the practice itself. As Hardt points out, the immanence of design—the fact that design cannot be escaped because it effectively organizes post-Fordist subjectivity, both materially and metaphorically—necessitates a political and ontological reframing of design discourse, as a discourse on being as both designed and designing.

That said, a perspective might be proposed that goes beyond well-rehearsed figures of critique, namely, those accusing design and its practitioners of being complicit with capitalist commodification and, ultimately, exploitation; or looking at the neoliberal city in the only way that seems viable and acceptable from and for a position of the radical Left: as something to be relentlessly opposed, denounced, and scandalized.

While there are certainly countless reasons for criticism, rejection, and disgust, one may also agree with Adrian Lahoud—an architect and critic from Sydney who maintains the (quite fantastic and tellingly titled) blog "Post-Traumatic Urbanism"—in his opinion that

> Lists and examples of urban injustices like uneven development, gentrification, and zero-tolerance policing make for an appropriate corrective to the historical account of capitalist development but fall short of any transformational consequence. . . . By constraining political agency to action within the confines of a given political landscape, we exclude the contours and limits of this landscape as a site for political action. The system itself must be up for grabs.[4]

Any consideration of "design" in this quest for political agency should allow for the dialectical tensions between, say, planning and change, destruction and construction, critique and mapping, and so forth. If there is no outside to design, political action would have to address the designed as much as the designable nature of reality, the techno-social fallouts and catastrophes of design processes and the palliative step-by-step cures of vernacular, informal, low-visibility ways of going about design. These tensions relate to the relationship between micropolitics and radical politics, between on the one hand a *longue durée* practice of small steps, dispersed moments of counter-hegemonic resistance amounting to change, and, on the other, the single decisive act—the "event" so eloquently evoked by Alain Badiou, Slavoj Zižek, and others—seems key. What is to be done to unchain criticism from ritualistic negativity, from being simply the "anti-" of capitalism or neoliberalism? The current dispensation connects thinking and doing to the idea of fighting rather than overcoming, of confronting the enemy directly rather than rendering it obsolete. The "system itself" must be up for grabs, indeed, but its suspension may not necessarily come through the means and strategies proposed so far.

2. Thinking Like a Craftsman

Dedicated to the ideas of libertarian communism, libcom.org is a website that pursues the "political expression of the ever-present strands of co-operation and solidarity." In March 2009 a contributor posting under the alias "Kambing" ventures the interesting thought that "the artisan" may qualify as "a rather attractive concept for a post-capitalist subject—it certainly beats the bourgeois star artist or proletarianized designer as a way of organizing creative activity." However, "Kambing" continues, the concept of the artisan is at the same time doomed as an attempt to overcome capitalism, as it can be so easily drawn back into capitalist processes of accumulation and dispossession. This is precisely the problem with a lot of autonomist (and anarchist) strategies for resistance or "exodus"—including some forms of anarcho-syndicalism.[5]

This skepticism is only too familiar by now—any candidate put forward for the new revolutionary subject will be quickly rendered inappropriate, deficient, co-optable. The reasons for such pre-emptive skepticism, popular even among the most hard-line autonomists, anarchists, or anarcho-syndicalists, are manifold. However, a central argument for this co-optation is linked to the awe-inspiring malleability and adaptability of capitalism as such, accompanied by post-political renderings of "democracy," helpful in reducing politics "to the negotiation of private interests," as Slavoj Zižek puts it in his discussion of what he considers to be a symptomatic proximity between contemporary biopolitical capitalism and the post-operaist productivity of the multitude: "But what if, in a parallax shift, we perceive *the capitalist network itself as the true excess over the flow of the productive multitude*?"[6]

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The Fable of the Hedgehog and the Hare.

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The structure of the argument has been so thoroughly rehearsed in past decades that it has assumed a somewhat mythical truth. Capitalism is the shape-shifting creature-beast always already ahead and above—regardless of which revolutionary force tries to overthrow or subvert it—as it continually vampirizes any signs of resistance. It may be necessary to deploy the perceptual model of the parallax, as Zižek does, in order to maintain the structurally paranoiac—if absolutely legitimate—belief in capitalism's shrewdness, which sometimes seems to resemble the clever hedgehog family in the Grimms' fairytale "The Hare and the Hedgehog." Its remarkable ability to re-invent itself and stay alive even as the current full-fledged crisis in interlinked systems of state and corporate capitalism turn capitalism-as-such into a transcendent miracle and/or metaphysical force with increasingly violent repercussions on the ground, with its most recent turn being the recruitment of state and legal powers. Referring to Carlo Vercellone's 2006 book *Capitalismo cognitivo*, Zižek points to how profit becomes rent in postindustrial capitalism.[7] The more capitalism behaves in "de-regulatory, 'anti-statal,' nomadic, deterritorializing" fashions, the more it "relies on increasingly authoritarian interventions of the state and its legal and other apparatuses."[8] While the "general intellect" in reality doesn't appear to be that "general" or shared—with the products of the innumerable and increasingly dispersed multitudes becoming copyrighted,

commoditized, and legally encapsulated as part of the accumulation of wealth by way of "rent"—the unity of the proletariat has split into three parts, following Zižek's Hegelian idea of the future: white-collar "intellectual laborers," blue-collar "old manual working class," and the "outcasts (the unemployed, those living in slums and other interstices of public space)."[9] Any possibility of solidarity amongst these factions appears to have been foreclosed, and in many respects the separation seems absolute. The liberal-multicultural self-image of the cognitive workforce doesn't rhyme particularly well with the populist, nationalist position of the "old" working class, and both are further ostracized by the unruliness, illegality, and poverty of the outcasts who alienate white collar workers and blue collar workers alike, as they seem to indicate through their fate how imperiled their remaining privileges of citizenship may be.

But Zižek's Hegelian triad of postindustrial proletarian factions is debatable. The identities (intellectual laborers, working class, outcasts) are much too unstable, much too fluid and transient for a theorization of the (im)possibilities of overcoming capitalism. And it remains doubtful whether their insertion into the discourse provides more than a paralysis characterized by deadlock, tribal oppositions, and endless desolidarity.

In fact, these and other identities shift according to (but also against) the self-transformation of capitalist institutions enabled by various neutralizations and recuperations. And these self-transformations entail wars of position, to use Gramsci's term. As Chantal Mouffe put it a few years ago in pre-9/11, pessimism-of-the-intellect/optimism-of-the-will style: "although it might become worse, it might also become better."[10] Even Zižek—who has always endorsed a strong idea of capitalism, evincing a certain obsession with the task of proving capitalism's fascinating, horrifying, and stupefying superiority as one that could only be seriously challenged by a return to the Leninist act—is himself looking for other actors and different processes now. Currently, his hope lies with the hopeless, the people fooled and victimized by "the whole drift of history"—in other words, the very "outcasts" from the proletarian triad mentioned above, those who are forced into improvisation, informality, clandestinity, as this is supposedly all they are left with in a "desperate situation."[11]

To rely on the desperation of others for one's own idea of a successful insurrection is of course deeply romantic and utopian. Zižek may be right in asserting that waiting for the Revolution to be undertaken by others has been the fundamental error of too many leftists. However, would he count himself or anyone in his vicinity to be "desperate" enough to act, especially in a spirit of voluntarism and experimentation that would effectively dissolve the constraints of "freedom" as it is granted by neoliberalism?

The "artisan" evoked by "Kambing," though immediately disregarded as allegedly "doomed" to fail in the face of capitalism like so many others, may be an interesting figure to reconsider here—less out of interest in revolutionary politics than in envisioning alternate ways of organizing "creative activity" to replace and/or evade capitalist modes of production. As Raqs Media Collective have pointed out in their essay "Stubborn Structures and Insistent Seepage in a Networked World," the figure of the artisan arrived historically before the worker and the artist, before "the drone and the genius," while it enabled the "transfiguration of people into skills, of lives into working lives, into variable capital."[12] "The artisan," Raqs claim, "is the vehicle that carried us all into the contemporary world." However, after the artisan's role in "making and trading things and knowledge" had been replaced by those of the worker and the artist, by the ubiquity of the commodity and the rarity of the art object, the artisan now seems to be returning, but in different guises—the migrant imbued with all kinds of tactical knowledges, the electronic pirate, or the neo-luddite, many of whom are immaterial laborers, pursuing processes of "imagining, understanding, and invoking a world, mimesis, projection and verisimilitude as well as the skillful deployment of a combination of reality and representation."

Interestingly (and similarly), "Kambing" distinguishes the "artisan" from the "bourgeois star artist" and the "proletarianized designer." However, one may also imagine these distinct figures aligning—with each other and with others beyond themselves. These alignments or fusions would depend on an ability and a willingness to recognize and accept difference and diversity not only in one's own social surroundings, but also within oneself as a subject. To acknowledge the fact that one may simultaneously inhabit more than one identity leads almost inevitably to co-operation with others that would go beyond the model of the homogeneous community.

But, in *Capital*, Marx is highly skeptical of "co-operation" as a way out of capitalism: "Co-operation ever constitutes the fundamental form of the capitalist mode of production." Its power is

> developed gratuitously whenever the workmen are placed under given conditions and it is capital that places them under such conditions. Because this power costs capital nothing, and because, on the other hand, the labourer himself does not develop it before his labour belongs to capital, it appears as a power with which capital is endowed by Nature—a productive power that is immanent in capital.[13]

The very power of co-operation that Marx located at the center of the capitalist project has become the keystone of post-operaist theories of post-Fordism. They have observed that the value-increasing function of

co-operation has become increasingly tangible in a system based on an essential superfluity of labor and the permanence of unemployment, a system that simultaneously captures and exploits the very "power" of non-labor-based communality and communication. "Since social cooperation precedes and exceeds the work process, post-Fordist labor is always, also, *hidden labor*," as Paolo Virno wrote in *A Grammar of the Multitute*. [14] Defining hidden labor as "non-remunerated life" in the very "production time" of post-Fordism that exceeds "labor time," Virno also provides an opportunity to discuss unaccounted for, unpaid labor – exploitable and valorized by capital as it is – as a realm of potential freedom and disobedience. Indeed, the politics of cooperation and communication (which include affective labor) operate at the mingled and sometimes dirty practices of such cooperation between factions of contemporary laborers are illustrated by one of the many examples of the hidden labor of artisanry in Richard Sennett's book *The Craftsman*. Reflecting on the debilitating split between head and hand that occurred when architects and designers began to use computer-aided design (CAD) programs, Sennett postulates the need "to think like craftsmen in making good use of technology," and to consider the " sharp social edge" of such thinking. Thinking like craftsmen could entail a certain kind of work that one executes after the designers have left the building. Particularly interested in the parking garages of Atlanta's Peachtree Center, Sennett noticed a specific, inconspicuous kind post-factum cooperation between designers and artisans/craftsmen:

> A standardized bumper had been installed at the end of each car stall. It looked sleek, but the lower edge of each bumper was sharp metal, liable to scratch cars or calves. Some bumpers, though, had been turned back, on site, for safety. The irregularity of the turning showed that the job had been done manually, the steel smoothed and rounded wherever it might be unsafe to touch; the craftsman had thought for the architect.[15]

The labor of modifying and repairing the work of others is certainly not groundbreaking in terms of anti-capitalist struggle per se. However, the physical skills, the attitude of care and circumspection, the inscription of a hand that performs “responsible” gestures, and so forth, all engender a shared authorship—in this case a cooperation between the absent architect’s and/or construction company’s work and the subsequent, careful labor of detecting and correcting the building’s design problems. This cooperation is neither contractually negotiated nor socially expected, but instead results from a specific situation in which a problem called for a solution. It is inseparable from local conditions and constraints, and should not be taken as a model for action. Yet, on other hand, it is intriguing, as it displays relationalities within material-social practices that usually remain unnoticed, and whose resourcefulness is thus overlooked.

[figure dc66fc83dd15939f5076deda8c193f10.jpg *Paris scene with a goldsmith's shop* , detail of a miniature from "La Vie de St Denis", 1317. Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris.

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In some respects Sennett’s concept of “thinking like craftsmen” resembles a definition of “design” that Bruno Latour introduced the same year *The Craftsman* was published. Speaking at a conference held by the Design History Society in Cornwall, Latour differentiated “design” from the concepts of building or constructing. The process of designing, according to Latour, is marked by a certain semantic modesty—it is always a retroactive, never foundational, action, always re-design, and hence “post-Promethean.” Furthermore, the concept of design emphasizes the dimension of (manual, technical) abilities, of “skills,” which suggests a more cautious and precautionary (not directly tied to making and producing) engagement with problems on an increasingly larger scale (as with climate change). Then, too, design as a practice that engenders meaning and calls for interpretation thus tends to transform objects into things—irreducible to their status as facts or matter, being instead inhabited by causes, issues, and, more generally, semiotic skills. And finally, following Latour, design is inconceivable without an ethical dimension, without the distinction between good design and bad design—which also always renders design negotiable and controvertible.[16] Here, at this site of dispute and negotiation, especially on an occasion in which the activity of design is “the whole fabric of our earthly existence,” Latour finds “a completely new political territory” opening up.[17]

3. “Weak Theory”

Such a notion of politics, based on a specific, if slightly idiosyncratic idea of design as a modest and moderating practice that follows rather than leads, can now be linked to another project that envisions a “politics of (economic) possibility.” J. K. Gibson-Graham, the pen-name of two feminist economists and geographers, whose elaborate argument draws on a pioneering spirit of “disclosing new worlds” rather than flocking to the same subject position, take an approach that may initially appear overly optimistic in its rhizomatricy, but that is well founded in fieldwork and action research in the Pioneer Village in Massachusetts, the Asian Migrant Centre in Hong Kong, and the Latrobe Valley in Australia. They obviously know what they are talking about when they refer to the “cultivation of subjects” for these “community enterprises and initiatives” of post-capitalist “new commons,” which are capable of affording an understanding and, even more, an enjoyment of difference, as well as “new ways of ‘being together.’ ”

J. K. Gibson-Graham's books, *The End of Capitalism (As We Knew It)* (1996) and *A Postcapitalist Politics* (2006), are organized around what they call "techniques of ontological reframing (to produce the ground of possibility), rereading (to uncover or excavate the possible), and creativity (to generate actual possibilities where none formerly existed)."[18] Gibson-Graham base their ideas, which are informed by, among other schools of thought, feminist poststructuralism and queer theory, on strong notions of *un-thinking* (avoiding notions such as economic determinism), *anti-essentialism* (avoiding any understanding of causality), *anti-universalism*, and *anti-structure*, all in order to conceptualize "contingent relationships" that replace "invariant logics." By way of this substitution, "the economy loses its character as an asocial body in lawful motion and instead becomes a space of recognition and negotiation."[19]

Gibson-Graham use words that denote a deliberate weakness, pliability, and openness, such as "underlaboring," and the two intensely advocate a tolerance of "not-knowing." Contingency, difference, and differentiation lie at the core of their thinking, as do the empiricism and materialism of actor-network theories and object-oriented ontologies that offer a means of describing and thinking through the unfolding logic within an object as a thing, but also as "a very concrete process of eventuation, path-dependent and nonlinear," thereby de-privileging global systems under the auspices of emergence and becoming.

As they put it, "With the aim of transforming 'impossible into possible objects,' reading for absences excavates what has been actively suppressed or excluded, calling into question the marginalization and 'non-credibility' of the nondominant."[20] Underscoring the "always political process of creating the new," Gibson-Graham consider politics to be "a process of transformation instituted by taking decisions on an ultimately undecideable terrain"—and their own thought process as "starting in the space of nonbeing that is the wellspring of becoming"; it is here that they discover the "space of politics" and its "shadowy denizens"—the "subject" and "place."[21] Gibson-Graham are not naıve, however, when it comes to theorizing the dynamics of subjection, the question of "how to understand the subject as both powerfully constituted and constrained by dominant discourses, yet also available to other possibilities of becoming."[22] But they call for an acknowledgment of the necessity to withdraw from a "traditional [leftist] paranoid style of theorizing" that also brings about changes in the effects that give rise to social transformation and communal becoming, a "wonder as awareness of and delight of otherness" combined with a "growing recognition that the other is what makes self possible."[23] This bewildering and enjoyable "recognition" drives Gibson-Graham's research, and their (pedagogical) vision of a post-capitalist politics is inseparable from a belief in the possibility of "cultivating subjects"—citizens for a different, community-based, cooperative economy. And in contradistinction to theorists such as Zižek or Badiou, Gibson-Graham actually speak of individual agency, of specific persons whose subjectivities have registered the experiences of community economies and their particular potentiality, embracing the weakness and micrological scale of such fieldwork, also in terms of theory.

Writing in the vein of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Gibson-Graham suggest that

> Weak theory can be strong politics—it opens up social options that would be inaccessible to a theorist intent on eliminating surprise (by exploring the unknown rather than extending and confirming the known). It widens the affective possibilities of politics (who knows what emotions will arise in an experimental, only partly mapped space?) and allows for the possibility of maximizing positive affect (something we all want to do, which means that participation in politics would not be limited to the stoical cadre of the already politicized).[24]

Although Gibson-Graham do not address the realm of culture and cultural production explicitly, their thinking remains relevant to the question of how design can be approached within the scope of a post-capitalist project. Even if aspects of their discourse appear familiar in the context of theories pertaining to art and to cultural production in general—and may therefore lack the scandalizing or provocative edge they purportedly have in the disciplines of economics and geography—even savvy readers trained in narratives of "becoming" should gain a sense of how politics can be framed differently with regard to predominant "progressive" discourses of radical-democratic or neo-Maoist persuasion. Moreover, Gibson-Graham's attention to contingency and agency, to singularity and a "place-based politics of subjectivation" can be enormously helpful in providing a framework for approaching cooperative cultural production in a different way—as a politics that boldly centers on the local and the particular without falling victim to a retrograde romanticism of the homogenous community or the "neighborhood." As much as Gibson-Graham are critically aware of the governmentality of the cooperative found in the "third way" politics of 1990s neoliberalism (with their rhetoric of "trust," "mutual obligation," "reciprocity"), so should one be aware of the misuses of terms such as "participation" in urban government and design discourses.[25] However, the capacity for Gibson-Graham's path-dependent, de-disciplining, and place-specific methodology to be extended towards cultural (discursive and material) practices of doing—such as design and craftsmanship (conceived roughly along the lines of Sennett or Latour)—make them vital for articulating a means of going beyond the failure of grand designs,

demonstrated so drastically by the current crisis of large-scale state and economic institutions. Given that everyone is affected—if to different degrees (but much too often disastrously)—by the neoliberal abolishment of everything, small-scale endeavors of solidarity, however networked, that intentionally neglect or dismiss the disciplining effects of capital (and of anti-capitalist politics as well), and that develop humble ways of altering and improving inherited designs, do not appear to be the worst option available at the moment.

[figure 36eda54f813c975fbc746f99731c3872.jpg
Richard Latham, *Hallicrafters T-54 7-inch (18cm) television*, Designed in 1948 by Raymond Loewy's firm.

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4. Participation

What would be necessary to transform "design" into a discipline of un-disciplinary moves and motions, into a practice of possibility and an articulation of becoming? In "Design and Human Values," a legendary Aspen design conference that took place in 1957, the American designer Richard Latham interrogated the ideas that designers cater to and the kind of responsibility they should take:

> As designers, we may properly assume responsibility for goodness and badness in the work we create; we are called upon, and entitled, to make value decisions. We are also entitled to a pioneering spirit and a desire to see things change for the better; we need not assume that *what is* is always inevitable or for the best. I believe that change, even for its own sake, can be a good thing. But I contend that, before we dare assume this right to judge and shape other people's values, we had better first examine our own values and our own motives for wanting to exercise this control over the lives of others. . . . We designers . . . can begin to build a meaningful aesthetic culture if we are willing to prepare ourselves for a new learning experience, and we cannot learn unless we participate.[26]

Unless one simply dismisses these lines as old-school navel-gazing or as the exhortative sophistry of someone who made a good living from the value systems of the design trade, the statement conveys a surprising desire to open the profession to the uncertainties and challenges of a becoming. Terms such as "change" and "learning experience" can be read as a purposeful destabilization of the social and aesthetic contracts of the design profession. Latham's punch line, "we cannot learn unless we participate," certainly suggested, in 1957, a paradigmatic re-orientation of the role and position expected of the future designer. Interestingly, participation was not yet considered to be integral to a designer's or planner's role, but only a means of improving knowledge and experience: in order to learn, one has to take part. Yet the question remains: *who* is invited to participate, and who is inviting them? The desire to participate must not necessarily meet recognition by others. You may ask whether you are allowed, but the question can be refuted. An inherent right to participate cannot be taken for granted by the designer, much less the non-expert citizen. One may further ask whether a right to design should be declared and henceforth claimed, based on the fundamental role assignable to design, designing, and, particularly, the contemporary condition of a weak and hidden (post-)artisanal potentiality distributed throughout networks, whether global or local. Granted that these networks are subject to "seepage," as Raqs Media Collective call it—to "those acts that ooze through the pores of the outer surfaces of structures into available pores within the structure," resulting in a "weakening of the structure itself"—design may be conceived and enacted as a multiplicity of acts that persistently erode such structures while eliciting conversations between neighboring, shared, and communal practices.[27]

X

Some parts of this essay were written for the conference "Design for the Post-Neoliberal City," organized by Jesko Fezer and Matthias Görlich for Civic City/Design2Context, ZHdK, Zurich, March 12–13, 2010.

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1
Reading a syllabus such as the one penned by Richard Plunz, director of the "urban design" graduate program at Columbia University, New York, may give an idea of the nature of the semantic and discursive investments in play. "Urban Design is pursued as a critical re-assessment of conventional approaches relative to questions of site, program, infrastructure, and form-mass, as they have been defined by urban design practice during the past century. The Urban Design curriculum is pedagogically unique on the role of architecture in the formation of a discourse on urbanism at this moment of post-industrial development and indeed, of post-urban sensibility relative to traditional Euro-American settlement norms." (Urban Design, Open House for GSAPP Architecture Programs – MArch, MSAAD, MSAUD, Columbia University, November 4, 2009). The expression "post-urban sensibility" is intriguing, as it points to the possibility of thinking beyond the discipline which is advertising itself by using it. Although the term "post-urban" has developed a very specific meaning in the architectural and urbanist debate of late, imagining a "post" of the "urban" in historical and/or systematic terms could be considered in various ways, for instance, as looking for a different kind of conceptualization of what the "urban" is and should be; or, as a call to overcome a specific imagination and representation of the "urban" as well as overcoming the binarisms of public and private, corporatism and street-level resistance, revanchist fortification and insurgent survival strategies, all characterizing key features of the "urban" that have been rehearsed for such a long time.

2
See Juris Milestone, "Design as Power: Paul Virilio and the Governmentality of Design Expertise," in *Culture, Theory & Critique* 48, no. 2 (October 2007): 175–198.

3
See Michael Hardt and Christopher Hight, "Designing Commonspaces: Riffing with Michael Hardt on the Multitude and Collective Intelligence," in *Architectural Design* 76, no. 5 (September/October 2006): 70–73.

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Adrian Lahoud, review of *Urban Politics Now: Reimagining Democracy in the Neoliberal City* , ed. BAVO (Gideon Boie and Matthias Pauwels) (Rotterdam: NAi, 2008), Post-Traumatic Urbanism.com, May 14, 2009.

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"Kambing," comment on "Autonom(ous)(ist) Marxism – Half baked anarcho-syndicalism?," libcom.org, comment posted June 5, 2009.

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Slavoj Zižek, *First as Tragedy, Then as Farce* (London and New York: Verso, 2009), 136, 141.

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Carlo Vercellone, *Capitalismo cognitivo: conoscenza e finanza nell'epoca postfordista* (Rome: Manifestolibri, 2006).

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Zižek, *First as Tragedy*, 145.

9
Ibid., 147.

10
Chantal Mouffe, "Every Form of Art Has a Political Dimension," interview by Rosalyn Deutsche, Branden W. Joseph, and Thomas Keenan, *Grey Room*, no. 02, (Winter 2001): 118.

11
Zižek, *First as Tragedy*, 155.

12
Raqs Media Collective, "Stubborn Structures and Insistent Seepage in a Networked World," in Seepage (New York/Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2010). See http://xenopraxis.net/readings/Raqs_Xnotesonpractice.pdf .

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Karl Marx, *Capital: The Process of Capitalist Production* , trans. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling, and ed. by Frederick Engels. Volume 1 of Capital: A Critique of Political Economy (London: Charles H. Kerr & Company, 1921), 365–6.

14
Paolo Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude: For an Analysis of Contemporary Forms of Life* , trans. Isabella Bertoletti, James Cascaito, and Andrea Casson (New York: Semiotext(e), 2004), 103.

15
Richard Sennett, *The Craftsman* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2008), 44.

16
See Bruno Latour, "A Cautious Prometheus? A Few Steps Toward a Philosophy of Design (with Special Attention to Peter Sloterdijk)," keynote lecture at the "Network of Design" meeting held by the Design History Society in Falmouth, Cornwall, September 3, 2008, text available at http://www.bruno-latour.fr/sites/default/files/112-DESIGN-CORNWALL-GB.pdf . This paragraph is partly cited from Tom Holert, "Design and Nervousness," trans. Gerrit Jackson, *Texte zur Kunst* 72 (December 2008):108f.

17
Ibid.

18
J. K. Gibson-Graham, *A Postcapitalist Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), xxix–xxx.

19
Ibid, xxx.

20
Ibid, xxxii.

21
Ibid., xxxii–xxxiii, xxxiii.

22
Ibid., xxxvi.

23
Ibid., 5, 20.

24
Ibid., 205.

25
Cf. ibid., 224.

26
Richard Latham, "Communication of Values Through Design," in *The Aspen Papers: Twenty Years of Design Theory from the International Design Conference in Aspen* , ed. Reyner Banham (London: Pall Mall Press, 1974), 91.

27
Raqs Media Collective, "Stubborn Structures."

Natascha Sadr Haghighian

What's the Time, Mahagonny?

> Right now I feel that I've got my feet on the ground as far as my head is concerned.
>
> —Baseball pitcher Bo Belinsky

1. The great cities in our day are full of people who do not like it there

1

My roommates and I received a letter in the mail the other day. It was addressed to "The owners of: [address of our building]." I opened it and it said:

> Real estate urgently needed!
>
> Dear Owner,
> Are you considering selling your house? Please let us know. Together with our partner, PlanetHome, we are urgently looking for houses, apartments, and properties, private and commercial.
>
> Kind regards,
> UniCredit Bank AG
>
> P.S. If you know of somebody and your reference leads to a successful sale through PlanetHome, we will give you 500 Euros!

I assume that every household in our neighborhood, Berlin's east Kreuzberg, received a similar letter, written with the assumption that it would happen upon some actual owners and not just humble tenants like us. We had recently heard about an increasing conversion of communal or tenant-occupied buildings into condominiums, as part of the intensified buying-up of Berlin by global investment banks.[2] As a city in financial trouble, Berlin makes for a nice buy. We also understand that this is as much part of a local situation shaped by Berlin's recent past as it is related to larger global developments. But things you are told in a letter feel different somehow.

Sitting in the kitchen with my roommates, studying this hard evidence of the acquisitions battle taking place around us, we are unsure as to whether we should feel worried or simply frame the letter and hang it on our wall as a piece of PlanetHome satire. I inevitably wonder how people in Greece must feel these days, when German politicians openly propose that they sell the Acropolis and a couple of their islands to pay back their debt. When it comes to debt, we all have to share the responsibility,

have-nots and property owners alike.

The absurd suggestion to sell the Acropolis helps to remind us of how grotesque the notion of ownership actually is, especially when it comes to places and locations. The temple of our most priceless emblem of democracy is up for grabs— *Etwas wird Sichtbar* (Something Becomes Apparent), as Harun Farocki beautifully titled his 1981 film. The sword of Damocles over the Acropolis and over our household also reminds us that all that is supposedly owned can also be sold, and that we are just the tenants. We, sitting in the kitchen of "our" flat in Kreuzberg, are tenants in a city that was continuously plundered after the fall of the Wall, first under the auspices of the Treuhandanstalt, and later by the Berliner Bankgesellschaft.[3] Berlin is a city that shifted its inevitable crisis onto the heads of its inhabitants, and is now referred to as "poor but sexy," a slogan coined by mayor Klaus Wowereit in 2003.[4]

So here we have it: a bunch of tenants in Berlin who have retreated to their kitchen and online communities because their city has been hijacked by hordes of tourists desperately seeking the poor and sexy "capital of creativity." Staying mostly in their hideouts, the locals' interactions with what is happening on the ground consist mainly of sneaking out on special trips to a nearby Lidl supermarket or to conspiratorial meetings at friends' homes. These locals are disillusioned by much of what has happened to this city in recent years, and still struggle with the extent to which, as culturally active individuals of various kinds, they have been (made into) part of the problem. From their online communities they hear of similar issues in other places. A manifesto from a loose alliance of music, DJ, art, theater, and film people in Hamburg announces "Not in our Name—Marke Hamburg!"[5]

Marke (brand) refers to the attempts by local municipalities and investors to market Hamburg as a "creative city." "Cities without gays and rock bands are losing the race for economic development," explains the manifesto:

> There could not be a more unequivocal definition of the role that "creativity" is supposed to play: namely of *profit centre* for the "growing city."
>
> And this is where we draw the line. We don't want any of the district developers' strategically placed "creative real estate" or "creative yards." We come from squatted houses, stuffy rehearsal rooms, we started clubs in damp cellars and in empty department stores. Our studios were in abandoned administrative buildings and we preferred un-renovated over renovated buildings because the rent was cheaper. In this city, we have always been on the lookout for places that had temporarily fallen off the market—because we could be freer there, more autonomous, more independent. And we don't want to increase their value now. We don't want to discuss "how we want to live" in urban development workshops. As far as we are concerned, everything we do in this city has to do with open spaces, alternative ideas, utopias, with undermining the logic of exploitation and location.
>
> We say: A city is not a brand. A city is not a corporation. A city is a community. We ask the social question which, in cities today, is also about a battle for territory. This is about taking over and defending places that make life worth living in this city, which don't belong to the target group of the "growing city." We claim our right to the city—together with all the residents of Hamburg who refuse to be **a location factor**.[6]

The tenants in Berlin are encouraged by the manifesto. It seems that there are people out there who are once again up for a battle to regain territory, and they ask: what and where are the common grounds today?

2. So get away to Mahagonny, the gold town situated on the shores of consolation far from the rush of the world [Enter the Land]

Jimmie Durham's work *Building a Nation* refers to the privatization and subsequent selling-off of communal land in the US, often so that mining companies can harvest the natural resources located under Indian reservations. During a recent conversation between the artist and Michael Taussig at the House of World Cultures in Berlin, somebody from the audience commented that she was struck by the fact that visitors had to walk on Durham's work[7]. She asked him about his intention behind engaging the ground in the piece. In his answer, Durham expressed how ridiculous the very idea of ownership of land is to the Indian. He joked about people putting up fences and declaring a piece of land their own. What a stupid idea, he laughed. He described how, while ownership seems to matter a great deal, little attention is given to the actual ground. The notion of the ground, the land, seems to remain abstract for most people. People live in cities far away from the land. Land has no use for them, no purpose beyond recreation and fun trips to "nature." You go out to nature to use it for things like whitewater rafting. You wear special gear that you buy from special outdoor shops in the city. He went on poking fun at whitewater rafting for quite some time before eventually returning to the question from the audience, explaining that he wanted to reactivate the ground. He wanted to make people pay attention to what they were walking on.

The ground, the land—what an anachronistic idea in a time when everybody seems busy chatting on Skype, acquiring network friends, and debating over intellectual property. Perhaps this is because people think that the battles over the actual ground are long lost, the territories already portioned and sold off. What difference does it make if the land we dwell on is sold by one owner to another? And, for that matter, what difference does it make who owns the Acropolis?

[figure fullpage 51adfe1c3f1b85d2022936e580f5918d.jpg]

3. Here in Mahagonny, life is lovely [Enter Volkseigentum, the squatter, and a water cannon]

In 1988 the Lennè-Dreieck (Lennè triangle), a piece of land on Berlin's Potsdamer Platz, located on the west side of the wall, was squatted by a group of a few hundred people. In the course of the occupation the area was renamed "Kubat-Dreieck" after Norbert Kubat, who had died in police custody on May 1, 1987.[8] Since 1938 the area had belonged to Berlin's Mitte district, but when Berlin was partitioned into East and West, it fell into an administrative void. It was physically located on the west side of the Wall, while judicially and administratively falling under the part of Mitte belonging to East Berlin, which meant that the West German police were not allowed to enter the area to evict the squatters. Over a few months people built a village on the land, with huts, communal kitchens, and gardens. When the land was eventually handed over to the West in a barter transaction, the police could finally raid the village. When the inhabitants of Kubat-Dreieck began to climb over the Wall to escape the police, the East German border troops, who were apparently prepared for this illegal border crossing, helped the escaping two hundred squatters over the 3.6 meter-high concrete wall, loaded them into vans, briefly interviewed them over breakfast, and dropped them off at another checkpoint. The West German police seized and sealed off the land after the squatters had escaped, and today the area is owned by Otto Beisheim—a prominent businessman and former member of Adolf Hitler's personal bodyguard regiment, the Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler (LSSAH)—who built the Beisheim Center on it in 2004.

This incident could be seen as a forerunner to the peculiar circumstances that surrounded unsettled buildings and land ownership after the fall of the Wall, and the various, divergent ways it was dealt with. In the GDR a great deal of land and real estate, including around 98 percent of industrial facilities, was *Volkseigentum*—literally "public property," understood more specifically as a socialist form of public ownership distinct not only from private property, but from state ownership as well, and mainly accumulated through dispossession.

After the fall of the Wall, it became unclear what would happen to this public property. In February 1990 the activist group Demokratie Jetzt (Democracy Now) initiated the founding of a fiduciary organization called Treuhandanstalt, which set out to protect the rights of GDR citizens with regard to the Volkseigentum. In the course of Germany's reunification the same year, the 8,500 publicly owned enterprises as well as other publicly owned real estate and land—including agricultural land and forests, but also the property of the Stasi, the army, and political parties—were handed over to the Treuhandanstalt by mandate. However, under the legislature of the now reunified Germany, its new objective was to work as quickly as possible to privatize and redistribute the public property of the former GDR according to the terms of the market economy. The German Federal government staffed Treuhand's board with experienced, exclusively West German managers, and stated that due to the unprecedented scale of the undertaking, the board was to be exempt from any negligence liability. A privatization and restructuring of vast proportions took its course, which was mostly a matter of incorporating East German production facilities into West German companies, followed by the subsequent closing of many of those facilities (partly in order to eliminate competitors).

A few months before the Treuhand was founded, and very close to its headquarters in the former Nazi Air Ministry, a group of people squatted the former WMF (Württembergische Metallwarenfabrik) building. It was one of many squats in the former East German capital. The ambiguous ownership and apparent absence of law enforcement had led to a renewed squatting movement that had previously been strong in the West Berlin of the 1970s and '80s. Botschaft, the group that squatted the WMF building, worked collectively and between disciplines to provide a platform for activism and cultural practice outside the frameworks of traditional formats such as art, film, or politics.[9] Botschaft's first large public event was a weeklong series of performances, discussions, and presentations of various kinds addressing the privatization of Potsdamer Platz, city planning, and public space in the age of "Dromomania," which was the title of the event. "Dromomania" took place just a few days after the police brutally evicted the inhabitants of several squats in the Friedrichshain district using 3,000 Federal Police (the Bundespolizei, or BPOL) and special forces (the Spezialeinsatzkommandos, or SEK), ten armored water-cannon trucks, helicopters, tear gas, stun grenades, and actual live ammunition. Among these squats were the houses of Mainzer Strasse, comprised of twelve units inhabited by a diverse community including a women's center, a queer squat called "Tuntenhaus," a community kitchen, a bookstore, and much more.[10] As opposed to other squats, the inhabitants of Mainzer Strasse had decided to follow a non-negotiation policy with regard to the police and the municipality. The division between the squats opting for

and those opting against negotiation had already led to tensions in the squatter assembly, and the fissure was by now a fait accompli.

"Dromomania" was shaped by these events as much as by the activities around Treuhand and friends. In a moment between the past and the future, a variety of possible worlds seemed feasible, and there was no doubt that one had to get involved. However, there were various opinions as to just how long such a moment should last and what measures should be taken. Whereas some insisted upon the wish that the moment would last forever, others fought to establish more sustainable models of collective ownership and communally run spaces. The moment in fact contained a multiplicity of truths—the truths of the commons as much as the truths of capitalism.

4. But even in Mahagonny there are moments of nausea, helplessness, and despair [Enter Zwischennutzer—and art]

Zwischennutzer sings:

> Show me the way
> To the next whiskey bar
> Oh, don't ask why
> Oh, don't ask why
>
> For, if we don't find the next whiskey bar,
> I tell you we must die.
> I tell you, I tell you,
> I tell you we must die.[11]

In 1991 Botschaft moved from the squat in Leipziger Strasse into a building around the corner. The same year the president of Treuhandanstalt was assassinated by the Red Army Faction. The situation became more complicated.

After the fall of the Wall a huge number of temporary bars, clubs, exhibition spaces, theater venues, and restaurants emerged alongside the squats, none of which had legal licenses. Some of them were part of the squatting movement, but others had special contracts, called "Zwischennutzungsvereinbarung"—a concept that seemed relatively innocent at the time, but has since become a notorious tool of urban development and gentrification. The Zwischennutzungsvereinbarung (literally "interim agreement") was a temporary agreement between public administrations responsible for legally overseeing a lot of empty real estate, and potential users. The contract included no rent, only running costs such as water and heating, and was terminated when the owner of the building could be determined and/or the owner filed a claim on the space.

In practice, the nature of these contracts was somewhat informal and spontaneous. One would just go to the housing association in Mitte and talk to Jutta Weitz, one of the employees there, and explain what one envisioned doing and what kind of space would probably be required for it. A few spaces would be discussed, sometimes keys handed over, and eventually a contract would be signed with a one-month notice. It was solely through the initiative of Jutta Weitz, who interpreted her job in her own way and wanted to make space for the various dreams and life plans of people, that people's often quite vague proposals were facilitated. Many activities that shaped the cultural scene in Berlin in the 1990s would probably not have taken shape without her. Her motivation was genuine, her ways radically unbureaucratic, and her attitude socialist. She knew the time and she did everything in her limited power to turn idle property into an anarchic version of Volkseigentum. Knowing the time in this case means "keeping good time," a phrase Avery Gordon uses in her reflections on knowledge, power, and people:

> Keeping good time is about knowing how to tell the time, even if you don't own a real watch, and simultaneously about knowing whose time it is. In a phrase, keeping good time is about taking sides.[12]

The complications that accompany the beauty of an ephemeral moment, efforts to make more permanent claims on common territory, and the dynamics of capitalist interests that slowly (or not so slowly) establish themselves in such Eldorados of untapped markets, are painfully epic. Keeping good time seems difficult when any approach is co-opted in the end. What, in effect, are the sides? And whose time is it?

Botschaft, of which I was a member, struggled to tell the time in the midst of this free-for-all. In endless group meetings, attempts at co-option were detected and repelled. An inevitably reactive focus entered the discussions, in part a symptom of an emerging art market in Berlin and increasing international interest in activities taking place there. An indicator of this development was the increasing number of commercial galleries and visitations by curators, players that we were unfamiliar with and very suspicious of. Why should we collaborate with any of them when we could have an exhibition or make a film any time we wanted? It seemed a very silly idea that you would need a curator for such things.

In the meantime, the uncontrolled and unchanneled activities in this temporary autonomous zone of Zwischennutzung and squatting had attracted not only art

people. Rich folk from around the world arrived in expensive cars and made their way through the dirt and rubble to the various illegal fun parks and had a ball. Parties are dark zones outside of time, absorbing bodies into their rhythm, momentarily suspending power relations, contradictions, differences. In the daylight, however, bodies return to being carriers of agendas, translating their desires into very different modes of action. While some would sleep until the next party, the people you were dancing with last night might be out buying the very building where the party took place.

The suspension of time found in the party and the logic of the Zwischennutzung contracts seemed to be the perfect expression of the void that Berlin found itself in at that moment—a void of definition, institution, government, industry, and control, an amazing situation that shaped people's thinking and the landscape of the city. In this sense, the party was a political experience as much as it served the ones who just saw it as a self-service shop. By "political experience," I mean the challenging and empowering experience of the commons, the creative commons that one shares by working in a collective, and in sharing use of common spaces—an experience that shaped me and probably many others for life. By "self-service shop," I mean the whitewater rafting mentality on the one hand, and the utilization of the void, the selling of the party for personal or corporate assets, on the other.

As the activities induced by the Zwischennutzung changed into a form of whitewater rafting, events such as "37 Räume" were early and very successful attempts at capitalizing on that mentality. "37 Räume" was an art exhibition in 1992 that invited the international art crowd to trample through the morbidly authentic atmosphere of tiny apartments in the Spandauer Vorstadt, a "jump-start into the international art scene" as its curator Klaus Biesenbach put it.[13] Following that, the curator—by then director of Kunst-Werke—presented "Club Berlin" at the Venice Biennale in 1995, and a year later founded the Berlin Biennale together with real estate agent and construction magnate Eberhard Mayntz (who then became vice-chairman of the executive board of directors of Kunst-Werke e.V. and member of the Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art advisory board).[14] All of these projects followed the same logic as "37 Räume."

After Zwischennutzung was discovered by real estate developers and their buddies in the municipalities to be a successful tool for managing urban development and gentrification, it entered the realm of asset accumulation. From its inception, the Berlin Biennale was clearly a collaborative effort between local initiatives seeking to promote Berlin as the future capital of the creative class, and an international crowd eager to throw their seeds onto this seemingly virgin land. But this virgin land was in fact a habitat to many species, the kind of species found on what are called wastelands, uncultivated lands. So the international art "community" came to do their version of whitewater rafting on these lands before their developer friends began bulldozing, partitioning, and selling it off.

5. The men of Mahagonny are heard replying to God's inquiries as to the cause of their sinful life [Exit, exit, exit, re-enter tenants]

While still sitting in the kitchen, my roommates and I receive an email announcement for a video screening at Basso.[15] They are showing films about the eviction of Mainzer Strasse twenty years ago. The email announcement reads:

> While the galleries open up the town for a dogfight on "their" weekend and thus push forward another stage in the consumerization of art, and the Biennale decides to place objects of real estate speculation in Kreuzberg—a scandalous decision which hopefully will not be without (fiery) consequences—we turn our eyes back to another time when it was not yet so clear what changes were to come in Berlin.
>
> In the year 1990, before the so-called reunification of Germanies, Western leftists squatted empty buildings in the East, as well as thirteen buildings in what was to become the legendary Mainzer Straße in Friedrichshain. For the twentieth anniversary of the squattings, Katrin Rothe shows her just-completed MYTHOS MAINZER STRAßE - RESEARCH 1, followed by the great classic THE BATTLE OF TUNTENHAUS, Juliet Bashore's documentary on the Tuntenhaus (house of [drag] queens), also in the Mainzer Strasse.[16]

This is the first we hear of the Biennale's new locations. We check their website and, to our dismay, find the majority of its new venues to be in close proximity to our house. Why don't they just stay in Mitte, the quarter that has already been through every stage of gentrification, already a willing servant to the needs of art mutants, ransacking hordes of budget-airline customers, and other extraterrestrial life forms? We sit in the kitchen and fantasize about the (fiery) consequences this should have. One can imagine that our fantasies are quite raw and juicy, which is often the case when one feels powerless.

For some time now, art has been turning to other domains, to territories and locations unconsecrated by the art canon. These foreign domains seem to be closer to life, more authentic, easier to access, and far more interesting. One of the expressions of this shift has been the claim to site specificity, which also expresses a desire to expand the role of art in society by escaping the ivory tower by way

of the public sphere.

Tenant sings:

> The liberal arts . . . being all my study,
> The government I cast upon my brother,
> And to my state grew stranger, being transported
> And rapt in secret studies.[17]

But site specificity does not create agency by default. On the contrary, it might become a fig leaf for promoting locations, but also a means for self-deceiving traveling artists to think that we can actually really refer to a place by spending some days there and doing a bit of "research." It is a problem I increasingly encounter in my own work.

So what do we learn from this intricate affair?

6. Lovely Mahagonny crumbles to nothing before your eyes [Enter the Diggers and re-enter]

In October 2008, I suggested to Avery Gordon that we have a conversation in Whole Foods for my Night School seminar at the New Museum in New York. Whole Foods is the largest organic supermarket chain in the US, and Avery and I met at one located just around the corner from the New Museum. The New Museum and Whole Foods both raise a number of questions about the contradictions that come into play when grass-roots movements turn into major corporations. But these contradictions seemed somehow easier to access from within Whole Foods.

While the corporation imitates all the gestures of political agency, it turns them into slogans for a "consumerism without shame." Clearly, looking at signs that say "power to the people" while purchasing something to eat can actually turn you into a walking zombie. But even in this environment of the undead, the store still appears to be haunted by the struggles that initiated what is now a very profitable enterprise. Perhaps there are ways to reclaim a "life beyond utility," which is, according to Bataille, "the domain of sovereignty."[18]

A key moment in our conversation came when Avery read the Diggers' declaration of 1649 in the lunch section of the store. The declaration had the heading, "A Declaration from the poor oppressed People of England directed to all that call themselves, or are called Lords of Manors, through this Nation; that have begun to cut, or that through fear and covetousness, do intend to cut down the Woods and Trees that grow upon the Commons and Waste Land":

> We whose names are subscribed, do in the name of all the poor oppressed people in *England*, declare unto you that call your selves lords of Manors, and Lords of the Land . . . That the Earth was not made purposefully for you, to be Lords of it, and we to be your Slaves, Servants, and Beggers; but it was made to be a common Livelihood to all, without respect of persons: And that your buying and selling of Land and the Fruits of it, one to another is *The cursed thing*, and was brought in by War; which hath, and still does establish murder and theft, In the hands of some branches of Mankinde over others, which is the greatest outward burden and unrighteous power . . . For the power of inclosing land, [privatizing public or common land] and owning Propriety, was brought into the Creation by your Ancestors by the Sword; which first did murther their fellow Creatures, Men, and after plunder or steal away their Land, and left this Land successively to you, their children. And therefore though you did not kill or theeve [although they did!] yet you hold that cursed thing in your hand by the power of the Sword; and so you justifie the wicked deeds of your Fathers; and that sin of your Fathers should be visited upon the Head of you, and your Children, to the third and fourth Generation and longer too, till your bloody and theeving power be rooted out of the Land . . . And to prevent your scrupulous Objections, know this, That we Must neither buy nor sell; Money must not any longer . . . be the great god, that hedges in some, and hedges out others; for Money is but part of the Earth; And surely, the Righteous Creator . . . did never ordain That unless some of Mankinde, do not bring that Mineral (Silver and Gold) into their hands, to others of their own kinde, that they should neither be fed, nor clothed; no surely, For this was the project of Tyrant-flesh (which Land-lords are branches of) to set his Image upon Money. And they make this unrighteous Law that none should buy or sell, eat or be clothed, or have any comfortable Livelihood . . . unless they bring this Image stamped upon Gold or Silver onto their hands.[19]

As Avery read from the declaration, it seemed as if we were invisible to all the other people in the store, as if we were acting out the apparition that haunted the space: namely, the very struggles that founded the organic movement, among other things, struggles that the marketing slogans carried on, but void of their political agency. But the declaration also expanded the range of possible activities within the space of the supermarket. Returning to Whole Foods after our conversation there, I didn't think of shopping, but of the Diggers and our discussions as we walked through the checkout aisles without exchanging anything. The experience overwrote the established intention of a supermarket.

At Whole Foods that day, I learned from Avery that

storytelling is important. And I learned that telling the time and taking sides is also about storytelling, about whose story and which version is being told. It's about *whose* time it is.

Jutta Weitz sings:

> Say here's a little story that must be told
> About two young brothers who got so much soul
> They takin' total control, of the body and brain
> Flyin' high in the sky, on a lyrical plane[20]

Now is the time, Mahagonny. It is *our* time.

X

Natascha Sadr Haghighian works in the fields of video, performance, computer, and sound, primarily concerned with the sociopolitical implications of constructions of vision from a central perspective and with abstract events within the structure of industrial society, as well as with the strategies and returning circulations that become apparent in them. Rather than offer highlights from a CV, Haghighian asks readers to go to **www.bioswop.net**, a CV-exchange platform where artists and other cultural practitioners can borrow and lend CVs for various purposes.

1
This and subsequent section titles reprise the scene titles from Kurt Weill and Bertolt Brecht's *Mahagonny-Songspiel* (1927).

2
See Oliver Clemens and Sabine Horlitz, "Immobilienfonds und die Privatisierung gesellschaftlichen Eigentums" (Real Estate Funds and the Privatization of Public Property), in *Wohnmodelle – Experiment und Alltag* , ed. Oliver Elser, Michael Rieper, and Künstlerhaus Wien (Vienna: Folio Verlag, 2008), published in conjunction with the exhibition at Künstlerhaus Wien. A bilingual (German–English) version of the essay is available at http://tempelhof.blogsport.de/images/immobilienfonds_clemens_horlitz.pdf .

3
See Ambit ERisk's July 2002 case study (in German) on the bank at https://web.archive.org/web/20101101164803/http://www.erisk.com/learning/CaseStudies/BankgesellschaftBerlin.asp .

4
A Debt Clock located in the federal taxpayer organization building in Berlin indicates the city's debt in real time, including the speed of increase and the personal share of each citizen: http://www.rbb-online.de/nachrichten/politik/2009_07/berliner_schuldenuhr.html .

5
The "Not in our Name, Marke Hamburg!" manifesto was posted to the eponymous (German-language) blog in November 2009. See http://wiki.rechtaufstadt.net/index.php/Manifest_Not_In_Our_Name,_Marke_Hamburg! .

6
Ibid. The English version of the manifesto—"Not in our name! Jamming the gentrification machine: a manifesto"—cited here in a slightly modified translation, appeared on the sightandsign.com website on November 23, 2009, http://www.signandsight.com/features/1961.html .

7
"An Evening with Jimmie Durham and Mick Taussig" (conversation, House of World Cultures, Berlin, April 29, 2010).

8
See image of Kubat-Dreieck, Berlin 1988. The story of Kubat-Dreieck, including an image archive, can be found at Umbruch Archiv (in German): http://www.umbruch-bildarchiv.de/bildarchiv/ereignis/20jahre_kubat.html . Images from the eviction: http://www.umbruch-bildarchiv.de/bildarchiv/foto1/kubat_galerie/index_3.htm .

9
The only information on Botschaft available online is here: http://www.medienkunstnetz.de/works/botschaft-ev .

10
More information (in German) and images of Mainzer Strasse and the eviction can be found at Umbruch Archive: http://www.umbruch-bildarchiv.de/bildarchiv/ereignis/141190mainzer_strasse.html .

11
Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill, "Alabama Song (Whiskey Bar)," *Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny* (1930).

12
Avery Gordon, *Keeping Good Time: Reflections on Knowledge, Power, and People* (Boulder: Paradigm Press, 2004), viii.

13
See "Von der Margarinefabrik ins MoMa: Klaus Biesenbach erster deutscher Kurator," *RP Online*, last updated November 22, 2004, http://www.rp-online.de/kultur/Von-der-Margarinefabrik-ins-MoMa_aid_69617.html .

14
In a unilateral reorganization of the collectively run art venue Kunst-Werke, Klaus Biesenbach became the director of the institution in 1995. One event that prompted the protests around this peculiar takeover was the awarding of the Hanno Klein Medal to Klaus Biesenbach, Hans Kollhoff, and Gerhard Merz for "a new Gründerzeit with prominence and brutality" on June 24, 1995. Hanno Klein, a Senate member responsible for inner-city investment, was a key figure in large-scale projects such as the Daimler-Benz Building on Potsdamer Platz and the Friedrichstadtpassagen. In an interview with the magazine *Der Spiegel* he is quoted as saying that Berlin needs a new Gründerzeit "with prominence and brutality." He was killed by a letter bomb on June 14, 1991. See Stefan Bullerkotte, "Gegen die ästhetische Nobilitierung der Macht: Eklat bei der Verleihung der Hanno-Klein-Gedenkmedaille," *Scheinschlag* 14 (1995), http://www.scheinschlag.de/archiv/2005/09_2005/texte/07.html ; and "Rosen für das Publikum, eine makabre Drohung für den Redner," *Art* 10 (1995).

15
See http://www.basso-berlin.de/.

16
Email announcement, April 29, 2010.

17
William Shakespeare, *The Tempest* , act 1, scene 2, lines 72–76.

18
Georges Bataille, *Sovereignty*, in *The Accursed Share, Volumes II & III* , trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Zone Books, 1992), 198.

19
The declaration, by Gerrard Winstanley, is available at http://www.bilderberg.org/land/poor.htm .

20
The Roots feat. Mos Def, "Double Trouble."

Jesko Fezer

Design for a Post-Neoliberal City

Our cities have become key arenas in a primarily market-driven globalization process, a process that primarily unfolds in circumstances and at the mercy of protagonists with little or nothing to do with planning and design. The sweeping decisions of multinational companies, individual consumer preferences, ecological disasters, international politics, cultural differences, and other phenomena associated with globalization render very unrealistic the idea that collective action or even design might be able to steer urban development. Cities are widely regarded as "non-planable" entities that can be observed but only barely influenced, let alone designed. Both an urban politics perspective and design as an intentional and political practice are menaced not only by neoliberal and neoconservative forces but also by the "post-planning" approach taken by progressive planners and urban researchers. In such an approach, criticism of urban inequalities or injustice is interpreted as the failure to grasp the complexity of contemporary urban landscapes—an argument supporting the current de-politicization of the city by private companies and neoliberal government policies.[1]

The law of supply and demand has become the primary force in urban development, blocking any urban policy. Particularly in the urban context, this leads to a post-political situation, in which spaces of democratic engagement are swallowed up by an ongoing radical economization and de-politicization of social space—a process that does not seem to have been interrupted by the current global economic crisis. Even though it is still unclear whether the crisis serves to accelerate or modify these tendencies, it is necessary to discuss how the crisis of neoliberal ideology may simultaneously be an opportunity to imagine urban concepts that challenge the primacy of economic maneuvers.

From being strategic sites for the implementation of neoliberal policy, cities may possibly become a new political arena for experiments in democracy—and thus require a new design. Designers continue to hold back with criticism and proposals, but the time has come to redefine the role of design in a social city—and to take action. Design in the context of cities could redefine itself as a search for an alternative urban practice, beyond the techniques and the ideology of crisis-ridden, late-capitalist urbanism. For it is precisely in the field of design, which has hitherto seen only a cautious approach to urban issues, that one finds unexplored potential for an intentional (re)design of space.

[figure a732c85fd976680f83214f1be293573b.jpg
Metahaven, *Stadtstaat – Sozialstaat (Governance by Everyone)*, 2009, Poster 120x180 cm, screenprint, courtesy Metahaven, Künstlerhaus Stuttgart, and Casco Utrecht.
]

Post-Political Cities

Premised on a substantive retreat of the state and the surrender of social interests to market forces,[2] the constitution of cities have become strategic spaces for the implementation of neoliberal logic.[3] Cities are not just victims of a takeover but are at the same time actors, since neoliberalism as a practice is embedded in the urban context; it always takes place in national, regional, or local contexts and relies on their respective institutional and political parameters, local regulatory practices, and political controversy. This context-relatedness also explains, for example, the "revival of the local" that occurs at the very moment when allegedly uncontrollable supra-national transformations are underway.[4]

But the radical market orientation of local neoliberal arrangements, which mark the local as a place of politics, generally develops alongside the Foucauldian concept of governmentality as a technique of governance. This regulatory practice replaces social conflict and protest with technocratic techniques that promote unanimity and consensus. Oriented to principles of economic efficiency, power legitimizes itself through the self-responsibility of those acting within the parameters of this post-Fordist form of urban government. Given the ubiquitous demand to exploit the individual as a resource, the difference between techniques of the self and techniques of dominance becomes blurred. Particularly in the urban context, this leads to a post-political, post-democratic situation, in which spaces of democratic engagement, which could resist and tackle neoliberal demands, are swallowed up.[5]

Belgian philosopher Chantal Mouffe defines the political as the antagonistic dimension, which is to be regarded as constitutive of society.[6] Mouffe analyzes how, on the contrary, contemporary Western political models negate the potential of conflict and opposition by seeking to attain a morally construed consensus. They deny the existence of social power relations and conflicts and thus close the political arena. Like Jacques Rancière, Mouffe sees in this a "post-political" or "post-democratic" moment.[7] Every contradiction, claims Mouffe, is thereby expelled from this arena and categorically excluded. For Mouffe, the major obstacle to democratic politics, that is, to politics based on conflict and contradiction, lies particularly in neoliberalism's self-image: its fundamental assertion that there is no alternative to the existing order.[8] She calls for a "common symbolic space"[9] that would facilitate confrontation. To create such a space would be a design task in the widest possible sense of the term.

[figure fullpage 8eab7b22fa82b2431f1afdf0645b676f.jpg
Bildwechsel / Image-Shift: Krrrrise?, poster series, campaign for Mayday Berlin 2008, "Call for the First of May parade". Mayday Berlin is an alliance of local political and social activist initiatives. It is part of the International EuroMayDay network, a web of media activists, labor organizers, migrant collectives convening each year in a different European city. Since 2001, it organizes a transnational demonstration of precarious and migrant workers held on May 1st in more than a dozen European cities. EuroMayday is a project in which actions and demands are put forward to fight the widespread precarization of youth and the discrimination of migrants in Europe and beyond: "no borders, no workfare, no precarity!"
]

Beyond the Hyperliberal Disaster

Cities today are no longer seen as comprising only buildings, streets, squares, and parks. Text and images in public space, branding campaigns, street art, guidance systems, temporary installations, processual and interactive design, and cartographic illustrations influence our use, experience, and perception of the city, as do signage, urban furnishings, vehicles, infrastructures, and the appearance of public façades. The term "Environmental Graphic Design" has established itself in this field to denote a universal design at the interface of the disciplines of architecture, graphic design, product design, and urban planning. Originally coined in order to convey the new complexity of urban mega-structures, it has come to be used at almost all levels of urban design. Graphic design, for example, now substantially shapes not only the visible surfaces of a city but also its infrastructure and everyday life.

Such discursive and symbolic representations indicate an effort to treat cities as enterprises to be governed and marketed. As phenomena to be understood in light of the escalating crisis of neoliberalism, the emerging design practices in question have until now been almost exclusively top-down strategies to further control and commercialize urban spaces. They developed effective tools for the production of space, capable of being employed more rapidly, flexibly, and openly, and with greater attention to detail than urban planning and architecture. The proliferation of visual-communications strategies in urban spaces is both a characteristic of the neoliberal city as well as a set of potential tools with which to transcend it.

A search for a new, idealistic design practice will refer to this potential, if it does not simply seek to re-implement the heroic perspective of "master plan" programs at all levels of society and will not support the contemporary euphoria about individualistic urban dynamics driven solely by profit prospects. The crisis of the contemporary city can no longer be handled only with the classic tools of large-scale top-down planning. Social-spatial practices are too complex and heterogeneous for that, too dynamic and contradictory. *Not* to plan, however—a Darwinist demand that people take care of themselves; the fittest urban players thrive unchecked—is to abandon too easily the project of design. And yet new design for the city is

urgently needed: for, by its very nature, a city cannot be anything but designed. It is socially produced.

Against the background of the "urban drama," the emancipatory promise of design may well undergo concrete renewal. For, as Bruno Latour apprehended, the very vagueness of that "little word 'design' " enables it to imbue reality with an ethical dimension; makes it incapable of hiding behind alleged facts while enabling it to pass (political) judgments that remain, however, always negotiable, and also to address contradictions. By referencing "the city" both as process and as the everyday—as a concrete dimension of reality—the purpose of design will be reflected anew: how would design look if it were inspired by an open, processual, micro-political, interventionist, communicative, and participatory approach that relates to everyday urban life? Would it be destined to be merely an element in the commodified colonization of social spaces, or could it be a strategic tool with a political and social character that can make an essential contribution to a social city? Or are graphic design and the visual representation of urban issues themselves the key means by which alternative or utopian spaces may be created upon the ideological ruins of existing cities?

If design is to transcend its complacent function as a tool of urbanization in the service of private interests, the intentions of designers, as well as the potential of critical action beyond economic considerations, must be considered. The current emergence of ethically motivated attempts to redefine the paradigms of design, employing the catchwords "sustainability," "social compatibility," and "producer-consumer equity, generally fall short. They argue vigorously in terms of market-alignment and reflect a consumer-oriented or individualist approach, with the result that urban or social objectives—and hence also any design-political dimensions—remain off the map. In order to deal productively with this dilemma, one must necessarily challenge the self-image of the design profession. How do protagonists see themselves, and who commissions their work? What alliances are worth striving for and what role should the public and the users play? When it comes to a design for the city, which strategies, procedures, and perspectives do we need?

[figure 6e4617240479fa3a2676382e1349a9f7.jpg Peter Zuiderwijk, *Conflict-ID*, poster, campaign for the Todaysart festival 2009, the Hague, Netherlands. After a group of artists developed animated reinterpretation of these designs the campaign became the center of a huge controversy. Todaysart director Olof van Winden was arrested by secret service agents, detained for a day and charged with instigating terrorism. A public discussion evolved immediately online, in newspapers, on the radio, through local politics, official petitions and eventually inquiries to the Dutch parliament, demanding an explanation.
]

Designing the Post-Neoliberal City

However, a rather ill-conceived amplification of the term "design" seems to be spreading at present, and has long since abandoned any pretense to autonomy in the face of market forces. Art critic Hal Foster—echoing for example Gert Selle's critique of the ideological function of design—criticized how representation of the seamless transition from production to consumption is currently held to be design's primary task. To cater to the market in this way is also what justifies design's new and growing significance.[10] Foster notes an inflation of design, which has become an agent of the out-and-out consumer society. The individualization of consumption and the creation of niche markets lead to an incessant (re)profiling of products. Dominated by the media economy, this permanent manipulation of products and their representation—design, redesign, and perpetual consumption—constitutes a perfect, unending cycle, a consumerist loop "without much 'running-room' for anything else."[11] Would it be possible to create or at least enable such a space by design, by exactly this discipline that seems to squeeze it tighter and tighter?

Likewise, American author Mike Davis evokes "a future in which designers are just the hireling imagineers of elite, alternative existences," but nonetheless makes a consciously optimistic demand for utopian thinking and action.[12] He connects planetary environmental disaster—irreversible, in his opinion—with massively expanding global socioeconomic injustice, and posits that both are encouraged by the worldwide economic crisis. Davis focuses on the town: even as rapidly progressing worldwide urbanization has to be seen as one of the primary causes of these problematic developments, it can also suggest a way toward their solution. He confronts the very realistic scenario of segregated zones of abundance in an otherwise economically and ecologically disastrous environment with his ideal picture of the city. In an updating of the Utopian-ecological urban criticism of the socialists and anarchists of the early twentieth century and the social experiments of the early modern age (in particular those of the socialist town concepts of the Soviet Constructivists) lies for him a starting point from which to invent cities based on democratic communal thinking. The environmental efficiency of urban density and the necessity of efficient collectivity in urban systems form the alternative to the dominant suburban-sprawl paradigm and its negative ecological and social effects. Davis sees a close connection between social responsibility and environmental responsibility, between municipal disposition and an ecological urbanism, and connects social and economic issues with pressing environmental problems. An environmentally friendly town would hence be based on relatively few new technologies of ecological town planning and prioritize general prosperity and generosity over privately accumulated wealth. The collective character of a town and its infrastructure offer the potential for overcoming the

looming social and ecological disaster. To create sustainable town models requires for Davis "a vast stage for the imagination" and "a radical willingness to think beyond the horizon of neo-liberal capitalism."[13]

[figure cabb7d53785c175228b97ca2017b09ed.jpg Stefan Marx, *Die Stadt gehört Allen! (The City Belongs to Everyone!)*, poster for demonstration against rent speculation, privatization and evictions in Hamburg, 2009.

]

Whether pessimistically or optimistically, it is at least interesting to note that design is again on the agenda in urban and political theory. Mouffe refers vaguely to design as a political tool for the construction of a common space, and Foster laments the lack of room for alternatives, but these could also be (mis)read as pleas for the design of a "stage for the imagination," as Davis puts it. All of them could be considered as having in mind a kind of proto-design, producing fewer solutions (and new problems), but also social situations and processes enabling social imagination, debate, and conflict.

What such a political approach to design might look like is indicated by Gui Bonsiepe, who taught at the Ulm School of Design and currently works in Argentina as a designer and theorist. He has introduced a concept of democracy that he defines as the aim of dismantling dependence in favor of real self-determination, an ideal opposing the neoliberal understanding of democracy, which he characterizes as "synonymous with the predominance of the market as an exclusive and almost sanctified institution for governing all relations within and between societies."[14] Bonsiepe argues in this context against the use of design as "a tool of domination" and calls for an emancipative practice, "resisting a harmonizing discourse that is camouflaging the contradictions."[15] In this regard close to Davis, he demands on the one hand a really non-universalistic Utopian perspective; on the other hand, Bonsiepe insists, as does Mouffe, on the articulation of conflicts as a design task and on the contradiction-relatedness of design.

The places and zones of actual contradictions are for Bonsiepe the starting points for Utopian-formative interventions. To name and articulate such conflicts and their intentional transformation is to act on the assumption that design has a social relation that aims less at the solution of problems than the critical handling and thematization of social relations and disavowals. In such a practice, the discipline's professional actors—just as amateurs responsible for the informal and "illegitimate" practices of design—would regard the urban space as a place for discussion and make their contribution to the debate and negotiation of political issues. Especially if designers start to connect their efforts to the worldwide "Right to the City" movement, the project of accommodating conflicts by design will refer to tangible and specific social and spatial situations and become more than a rhetorical gesture. The English geographer and social theorist David Harvey, referring to Henri Lefebvre, defines the "right to the city" as a "right to change ourselves by changing the city."[16] As a common and intentional act giving new form to urban conditions experienced as repressive with regard to our ideals and necessities, this is nothing less than a fundamental challenge to design.

X

Jesko Fezer renegotiates the traditional media of architecture as a publisher, curator, artist, and exhibition designer. He is the co-founder and manager of the thematic bookshop "Pro qm" in Berlin and the co-editor of the political architecture magazine *An Architektur* which also initiated the international "Camp for Oppositional Architecture" in Berlin and Utrecht. In the frame of his cooperation "ifau und Jesko Fezer" he realized projects in Munich, Stuttgart, Berlin, Utrecht, Graz, New York, and London. Having taught at various universities, he was a visiting professor for Urban Research in the master's degree course at the Academy of Fine Arts in Nuremberg and currently leads the research project "Civic City" at the ZHDK in Zürich. Fezer's publications include *Hier entsteht. Strategien partizipativer Architektur*, *Lucius Burckhardt: Wer plant die Planung?*, *Planungsmethodik gestern*. He has curated the exhibitions "Urban Conditions" at the 3rd Berlin Biennial (2004), "Social Diagrams. Planning reconsidered" (Künstlerhaus Stuttgart, 2008). He is currently the head of the research project "Civic City" at the Institute für Design at ZHdK, Zurich.

1
Bavo have pointed to "the rise of a neoliberal take on the city in which market players, together with their new ally the entrepreneurial government, have increased their grip on the production of the city – in fact adding a new chapter to the much criticized tradition of central planning and the malleable city." Bavo: "Democracy & the Neoliberal City", in: *Urban Politics Now: Re-Imagining Democracy in the Neoliberal City* , ed. BAVO (Rotterdam: NAi Publishers, 2007), 229.

2
See Noam Chomsky, *Profit over People: Neoliberalism and Global Order* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 1999).

3
"Cities have become key institutional arenas in and through which neoliberalism is itself evolving." *Spaces of Neoliberalism: Urban Restructuring in North America and Western Europe* , ed. Neil Brenner and Nik Theodore (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2003), ix.

4
"In short, the new localism has become a forceful call to arms through which local (and, in some cases, national) political-economic elites are aggressively attempting to promote economic rejuvenation from below." Ibid., v.

5
Erik Swyngedouw, "The Post-Political City," in *Urban Politics Now* , 59.

6
Chantal Mouffe, *On the Political* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 16.

7
Cf. Jacques Rancière, *Aesthetics and its Discontents* , trans. Steve Corcoran (Cambridge and Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2009).

8
Mouffe, *On the Political*, 31.

9
Ibid., 52.

10
Hal Foster, *Design and Crime: And Other Diatribes* (London and New York: Verso, 2002), xiv. Cf. Gert Selle, *Ideologie und Utopie des Design: Zur gesellschaftlichen Theorie der industriellen Formgebung* (Cologne: M. DuMont Schauberg, 1973).

11
Foster, *Design and Crime*, 18.

12
Mike Davis, "Who Will Build The Ark?" *New Left Review* 61 (Januar y–February 2010): 45.

13
Ibid.

14
Gui Bonsiepe, "Design and Democracy," *Design Issues* 22, no. 2 (Spring 2006): 29.

15
Ibid. 31.

16
David Harvey, "The Right to the City," *New Left Review* 53 (Septe mber—October 2008): 23.

Florian Zeyfang

A Brief History of "Poor Man's Expression"

A Mexico-based computer programmer coined the phrase "poor man's expression" to illustrate a relatively simple means of developing a programming process. This reminds us of the claim made in theoretical physics that, in place of complicated test arrangements, all you need is a pencil. For Martin Ebner and me, "poor man's expression" became just such a "pencil," with which we designed an exhibition in May 2006 around our general ideas regarding technology, film, and conceptual art. Now, I would like to return to what originally fascinated us about this combination of words and why it became the title of our project. Secondly, the phrase might serve as a framework for a certain mode of operation.

Originally for us, the exhibition title "Poor Man's Expression" suggested a simplified means of visualizing complex relationships. The first installment of the project was in Vienna; then it traveled to the Filmhaus Berlin, where it was exhibited in cooperation with the Arsenal Institute for Film and Video Art. The exhibition aimed to examine the relationships between film, video, technology, and art, with a particular focus on the reciprocal influences between conceptual art and experimental film. In a third development of the project, there will be a publication expanding the ideas surrounding this concept.[1]

But the phrase "poor man's expression" also signifies, for me, an *idea* for an ongoing development of projects and ideas, a history of minor stories that began for me twenty years ago with the Botschaft collective.[2] A certain moment of self-organization and independence, a taking-of-ground within a limited period of time, was explored by a number of self-organized spaces in Berlin throughout the 1990s, and as many of those spaces were later institutionalized, this era of activities and practices deserves to be revisited. By interpreting "Poor Man's Expression" as a possible development of those strategies, I want to review also the ideas employed then and propose a reciprocal interpretation.

[figure splitpage
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The model for the architecture of "Poor Man's Expression." Photo: Martin Ebner.]

DIY Battleground

The title "Poor Man's Expression" suggests a do-it-yourself aspect. For some, DIY is an attitude as well as a punk-related ideology, one whose adaptability to cultural practices has been analyzed by theorists—and yet it appears to remain somehow "homemade," especially against the backdrop of the art boom in recent years, as witnessed by events like the Miami Basel Beach fair. The rapid selling-out of punk has lead many to lose interest in its ideals, but that is the wrong impulse. It has always been about creating a basis instead of accepting one, however tempting the offer might be. In contrast, the ability to

create one's own environment—to determine one's own context as much as possible, even if it can never be complete or wholly autonomous—is luxury. Perhaps this is an illusion, a distorted mirror image. Ideally, however, freely chosen conditions allow for a clear view of the exhibition/idea/image/film without obstructions that might ruin the concept.

"Poor Man's Expression" did not begin in a specific location, but the context was given at an early stage: the experimental films in the archive of Arsenal cinema, founded in 1970 by the Friends of the German Cinematheque, giving insights into a century-long film history.[3] We would have relocated this collection of extraordinary films to display our concept of entangled, contemporary artists—a group that was selected not for use of moving image, but rather for a conceptual approach that combined formal experiment and "minimal" means with a certain narration and most often political awareness. However, when visiting different institutions in Berlin we soon shied away from places that meant nothing to us, from rooms we could not define, from places that were already the canvas for something else—so culturally present were their white walls. We went away without even talking to anyone and turned to the Arsenal, a sort of foreign body in the vicinity of the Sony Center and its creepy corporate architecture—a choice recalling the improbable spaces that were turned into exhibition venues, makeshift cinemas, and bars two decades ago; this time, instead of being off-site, we would return to the scene of the crime.

At the glass tower of the Sony Center, whose perforated floors are surrounded by metal-plated wall coverings, up through which shoot what were once Europe's fastest elevators, being self-determined did mean using the blinder chairs from Peter Kubelka's Invisible Cinema, as various debates about dissolving the cinema space into the museum would suggest. Rather, this was a place to start a debate on a field where mainstream cinema meets the railway employee, where the Sony image-production machine meets Dunkin' Donuts, where Japanophile mall architecture meets the experimental film archive of the Arsenal.

[figure partialpage
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A perforated baseplate from Sony Center. Computer rendering during preparation phase for "Poor Man's Expression".

]

In his contribution to the *Poor Man's Expression* volume, Anselm Franke uses the term "battleground"—a surprising metaphor in it's reference to war—to describe as the background of this situation "the impossibility to take the interface between subject and technology into consideration." He locates this ground where "the omnipresent practice of mediality, which finds no expression, seeks a symptomatic arena, which constantly restages the structurally repetitive conflict."[4] In this moment, "poor man's expression" turns into a *Kampfbegriff* (fighting words) in the battle between mediatization through the "image-production machine," and the location of the self. Soft fighting words though, and symbolic ones, since a translation into reality—as poverty—is neither legitimate nor desirable, as it would only transpose the "poor" computer-poetry onto a social level—a move that does not work on our playing field . . .

An Imperfect Process

In this context, two things keep coming up: Julio García Espinosa's "cine imperfecto" (imperfect cinema) and Franz Kafka's "minor literature," and their contemporary applications. Espinosa's text "Por un cine imperfecto" (For an Imperfect Cinema) is one of the most important texts of Third Cinema.[5] We could imagine adapting to the art world its assumption that "the perfect cinema—technically and artistically masterful—is almost always reactionary cinema." However, we are primarily interested in its anti-elitist approach and its focus on process over outcomes and analysis. When referring to the late 1960s and early 1970s, today's art-cinema practitioners rarely acknowledge that experimental film and conceptual art developed in parallel with political, emancipatory, and anti-colonial projects.[6] We now assume a correlation between political awareness and artists' formal innovation, and it is via this assumption that we want to engage the term "poor" to establish a schema in contrast to on the one hand mass entertainment, on the other to the preciosity of some current art production that happily appropriates values of production management and artistic omnipotence.

It is well known that reduced means can result from economic necessity. Though 16 mm film was introduced in 1923, it became recognized as an innovation of the 1940s, as the need for lower production costs and smaller cameras around that time made the format appealing to many people.[7] Those who could not afford film at all used the carousel projection of slides to create their "films." Only later did 8 mm and video formats become available (and let's not ignore the fact that most filmmakers initially despised the video image). The "poor means" of the experimental filmmaker—as well as, in a distant relation, those of Espinosa—further expanded the field of material possibilities for production, invitation, and inclusion. For our project, this included YouTube, UbuWeb, and other open-source database archives and image resources, which constitute poor man's expressions par excellence. It is symptomatic that today the 16 mm projector has found its luxurious home in art centers and galleries, while YouTube has become the place to watch an interview with Hollis Frampton.

A Minor Exhibition

Researching poor means of production leads us to the narration of little stories, and to their interpretations. Michael Eng adapted Kafka's "minor literature" for another film/art project I worked on:

> A minor cinema is not another, alternative form of cinema, nor is it a fixed state of the image. It is a cine-pragmatics that exploits "official, domesticated ways of seeing" by queering the very conditions of perception and by producing an exiled relation between images.[8]

While rediscovering our project consensus, Martin and I agreed that a fundamentally more complex, and perhaps sociocultural, understanding of the development of art was necessary to expand the conventional hero narrative: a simultaneous development of and exchange between different protagonists, as Lucy Lippard described it apropos of conceptual art in *Six Years*.[9] Michael Eng's definition of minor cinema supports this:

> Whereas a major cinema might still consider a film or a work to be the reflection of the agency of an intentionality of a director or auteur, that is to say, a reflection of mastery . . . a minor cinema collapses such a conception out of hand, eschewing the model of a unified mind presiding over a unified object in favor of a certain schizophrenia arising out of a confrontation with the sheer materiality of the image. Whereas a major cinema insists on a general homogeneity of the production, reception, and representation of images—a cinematic common sense—a minor cinema actualizes dormant potentialities of the image in order to make way for the heterogenisation and othering of a mad cinematic space.[10]

[figure 85d7840145cfe8f6b5989f6ef6258be8.jpg
The (still empty) architecture of "Poor Man's Expression". Photo: Martin Ebner.

]

When developing the exhibition architecture for "Poor Man's Expression" into a double room in the open space of the Arsenal foyer, we thought of the technology of stereoscopy—which uses a compensating mechanism in the eye to dissolve the technical illusion—as what Axel John Wieder called "an attempt to dispossess the contingency of thematic configurations of their sometimes so obvious-seeming logic, and instead to keep visible the interdependence of theses and historical developments to less objective factors."[11] This "mad space" within the Sony Center displayed an ambiguous relation to the Arsenal space—a dichotomy between entertainment giant and auteur cinema. Each artist in the exhibition placed one work next to a second work, designating a sort of heterotopic space of the image in our exhibition, what Michael Eng called "the advent of a shizocinema."[12]

Returning to the metaphor of battle, when tackling terms like "major" and "minor," one should bear in mind that, as Branden Joseph puts it, the major

> is instituted in . . . the interests of erecting or maintaining a hierarchical power. This is true even if that power is an avowedly revolutionary one. . . . In contrast, the "minor" is not the qualitatively or quantitatively inferior, but what is marked by an irreducible or uncontainable difference. It is not a subcategory or subsystem in a conventional sense, but what Deleuze and Guattari call at one point an "outsystem" (hors-système).[13]

"Poor Man's Expression"—as an operating principle—used "minor expression" to situate itself outside the tradition of "grand battles" and in contrast to the arrogance and exclusion of grand narratives.

The Living Archive

The archive of the Arsenal Institute came into being through the programming of the Arsenal cinema, soon contained films shown in the Berlinale Forum section of the Berlin International Film Festival, and has been continually expanded through its staff's interest in collecting excellent films. It sees itself as making formal experiments, political avant-garde films, and films from marginal areas of the world visible—a virtual "outsystem" of official historiography. The very diverse contributors to the archive share an understanding of film characterized by the mutual entanglement of aesthetics and politics. Just as it is impossible to built up such an archive as an individual, neither can it be built by a single collector. As a side effect of such strategies, many filmmakers and artists contributed their works as a gesture of friendship and as a sign of solidarity with the Arsenal archive. This has been made possible in part due to the informal copyright status attached to many of the works.

[figure partialpage
c5a1ba62422cc78b658bfcd6b9c84de7.jpg
Arsenal archive editing table, with filmstill from Harry Smith: "Mirror Animations". Photo: Martin Ebner.

]

Next to the permanent use by researchers and curators, it is the informal status of those works that constantly reaffirm the "living" nature of the Archive. In contrast, when a film's author is deceased, a number of legal issues arise, and in some cases a film cannot be shown for this reason, which renders it effectively non-existent.[14] Seeing the Archive through the eyes of the contributing artists allowed us a very subjective view within "Poor Man's Expression," with a collaborative selection process that came close to appropriating the historic works altogether. For eight successive evenings during the exhibition, the selected experimental films were confronted with all kinds of additional programming contributed by the artists: Kim Jung Il's various film projects, Dziga Vertov's newsreels, a musically accompanied reading, and a presentation on steganography. The atypical quality of this process was underlined by projecting the films outside the cinema space, onto our architecture, for a different means of addressing the audience—a "deviant" usage, resulting in a very lively space, a truly living archive.

In Light of Diversity

In developing the concept for "Poor Man's Expression," Martin Ebner and I worked in close collaboration with the artists, a strategy based partly on our experiences of self-organization during the 1990s in Berlin, but also indebted to a tradition of artist-organized exhibitions that have taken place throughout art history, particularly in periods of open experimentation such as the 1960s. In light of our already diverse group of participants, we defined our mode of cooperation as a means of expanding the landscape of possibilities for reinterpreting the curatorial principle altogether.

These considerations run parallel to the realm of capabilities I discussed earlier as a means of minimizing external influences and maximizing the probable definitions available to a hors-système. It might be a short-lived system: Botschaft, the group in which I experienced the potential of such strategies, laid claim to earlier unknown locations, the exploration of the local as a basis for artistic activities on a global level, the social within this process, the need for a political agenda, the demand for surprising concepts. It was a predecessor to aforementioned curatorial experiments, Our ways of working could be established within a limited period of time and through the constructive use of empty real estate, and we decided to close down after six years. When those tactics were instrumentalized for commercial development, and some spaces institutionalized, this era of activities and practices needed to be abandoned. But the principles of such "outsystems" ask for reinterpretations. "Poor Man's Expression" is one of those reinterpretations.

X

Translated from the German by Michael Lattek.

Florian Zeyfang is an artist and lives in Berlin. He works with multiple media, including photography, video, and installation, and is concerned with the relations between politics, social movements, and art. He has been active in collaborations and curatorial initiatives, most recently in projects related to Cuban film and architecture (*Pabellon Cuba*, Berlin: b_books 2003). His interest in experimental video and cinema resulted in exhibitions like "Slow Narration Moving Still" (Umeå 2009), "1,2,3... Avant-Gardes" (Warsaw/Stuttgart/Bilbao 2007/8) and "Poor Man's Expression." He is Professor for Moving Image at the Academy of Fine Arts in Umeå, Sweden.

1
For more information on the exhibition in Berlin, see http://www.poormansexpression.com/ ; for a preview of the publication *Poor Man's Expression* , see http://www.sternberg-press.com/index.php?pageId=1271 .

2
More on Botschaft can be found in the text of Natascha Sadr Haghighian in this issue, see https://www.e-flux.com/journal/17/67365/what-s-the-time-mahagonny/ . There is not much information online about the Botschaft (Berlin, 1990–1996), as the group actively rejected being historicized. Brief profiles can be found here: http://www.medienkunstnetz.de/works/botschaft-ev/ and here, the beginning of an upcoming source archive: http://botschaft-berlin.org/ .

3
In 2009 Freunde der Deutschen Kinemathek (Friends of the German Cinematheque) was renamed Arsenal – Institute of Film and Video Art. See their website: http://www.arsenal-berlin.de/en/ .

4
Anselm Franke, "Tilting in the Image-Space of Social and Technological Worlds," in *Poor Man's Expression* , ed. Martin Ebner and Florian Zeyfang (Berlin: Sternberg Press, forthcoming).

5
Julio García Espinosa's *Por un cine imperfecto* first appeared in *Cine cubano* 66/67 (1969), then, in an incomplete English translation, in *Afterimage* 3 (Summer 1971), and finally in a new translation by Julianne Burton in *Jump Cut* , no. 20 (1979), available at http://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/onlinessays/JC20folder/ImperfectCinema.html . See also Hito Steyerl, "In Defense of the Poor Image," in *e-flux journal*, no. 10, https://www.e-flux.com/journal/10/61362/in-defense-of-the-poor-image/ .

6
Volker Pantenburg recently underscored this in a lecture, "Experimentalfilm und Kunsträume," delivered at the conference "Entgrenzung des Kinos – Grenzen des Films" (Cinema without Walls – Borderlands of Film) at ICI Berlin, April 23, 2010. The text is due to be published.

7
In Eastern Europe 16 mm was less available, so most experimental films were done through film academies on 35 mm film.

8
Michael Eng, "Numéro un et *Numéro Deux* : It was Outside, The Rejection of the Imag *e*," in *I s aid I love. That is the promise. The Tvideo Politics of Jean-Luc Godard* , ed. Gareth James and Florian Zeyfang, OE Critical Readers in Visual Cultures no. 4 (Berlin: b_books, 2003), 291.

9
Lucy Lippard, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

10
Eng, "Numéro un et *Numéro Deux* ," 291.

11
Axel John Wieder, "To Be Lit and to Illuminate," in *Poor Man's Expression* , l.

12
Eng, "Numéro un et *Numéro Deux* ," 291.

13
Branden Joseph, "What Is a Minor History?" in *Poor Man's Expression* , l.

14
As in the recent example of Jack Smith and Bruce Conner, the administration aims at achieving an understanding with testamentary executors and copyright owners to show these films.

Manuela Bojadžijev and Serhat Karakayalı

Recuperating the Sideshows of Capitalism: The Autonomy of Migration Today

This text is a reflection on our 2007 contribution to the TRANSIT MIGRATION research project, "The Autonomy of Migration: Ten Theses Towards a Methodology."1 Within the project, we analyzed the movements of migration and the migration policies deployed against them at the edges of the EU, in order to decipher the contours of a new regime of emerging migration politics. We were interested in investigating, from the perspective of social theory, what was symptomatic in movements of migration. We were interested in tracing the crossing of borders, the traversing of territories, the enmeshing of cultures, the unsettling of institutions (first among them nation-states, but also citizenship), the connecting of languages, and the flight from exploitation and oppression—interested, in other words, in investigating what migration teaches us about the conditions of contemporary forms of sociality, and that which goes beyond them. With this article, we pick up the thread and offer some further thoughts.

Ten years ago, we gave a name to our efforts to create a new basis for political work dealing with migration: the autonomy of migration. Dazzling term, slogan, and program all at once, its use, first and foremost, functioned for many as an act of liberation. It not only demanded that migrants *themselves* be allowed to speak of their struggles (or, more generally, that migration discover its own language) nor did it simply seek to interrupt the helpless recourse to the history of victimhood that oppresses through racism; and it certainly was not about adding another decentralized social movement to those that replaced the workers' movement after its demise—on the contrary, the idea was to contribute to the construction of new connections within the social struggles concerned with migration, in order to gather the different layers of subjectivity (as men and women, as workers and employees, as citizens and the illegalized) to form a foundation with which to accelerate these struggles in emancipatory ways. Ultimately, this opens the possibility for analytically and practically connecting various struggles within the context of migration, beyond national limits; for understanding the transformation of borders both on the edges of the European Union and within it; for allowing these transformations to become the locations of conflict.

We considered the autonomy of migration to be a program of research into both the political and the pitfalls of an emancipatory politics that was too purely focused on either the global or national levels. We hoped that migration, understood from this perspective, could offer a research framework that could take into consideration both the local and the global, while also revealing the separations and segregations that characterize our lives

today—a framework, in other words, able to bring the contradictions of capitalist sociality to the fore in a manner that might indicate how those same contradictions can be left behind.

[figure f31d754cb822e48152a26054d3fe9783.jpg Poster of Kanak Attak's first Berlin event, SO 36, Kreuzberg, 1999.

]

Various effects followed from the deployment—by ourselves and others—of the concept of the autonomy of migration. It unsettled several things that had until then been taken for granted within anti-racism debates; a coherent "politics of autonomy," however, did not emerge. The autonomy thesis was rebuffed where it was interpreted phenomenologically, as an empirical description of processes of migration; as if we had presumed migrants to be autonomous individuals who "did their thing" regardless of border controls and migration policies. There was fear that the turn away from the misery of migration could prove a flawed strategy; that the emphasis on the agency of migrants would play into the hands of those who had always inferred *homo economicus* and the pursuit of self-interest in migrants. But this quickly becomes a fatal, circular argument that rests on the precondition that migrants may only ever be regarded as the victims of circumstance. The liberals set the precedent, and for the Left there only remains the option to play along or lay the groundwork for the Right. Instead, one must ask how it could be possible to lay the foundation for a broader movement in the concerns of migrants? Beyond basic pity and general human rights, what could be brought into play as a common terrain?

The following questions have emerged, owing not only to the difficulties that have arisen within political practice, but also to the pace with which the parameters of the struggles, the issues, and the lines of conflict have shifted within Europe and beyond in recent years. These are questions that we cannot answer at this point, but that we are completely convinced have to be posed if we are to initiate a discussion among all those who no longer believe the struggles of migration to be a sideshow of history.

1. "Fortress Europe"

The original focus of the debate that started roughly ten years ago surrounding the concept of the autonomy of migration was a critique of the metaphor of "Fortress Europe." An important aspect of this critique was its questioning of the presumption that migration policies were exclusively determined by states and the institutions of border control. The metaphor of the "Fortress" also had consequences for the understanding of the political, and this served to illuminate the debate over the last ten years. In other words, how does critical knowledge about migration "ally" itself with political stratagems? While revealing the deadly realities of the border regime was intended to mobilize a humanistic public against such a "Fortress," this strategy did not address the tricks and ruses used by migrants to slip over borders unnoticed. These issues mostly became the preserve of right-wing opponents of immigration, engaged in the baiting of "asylum cheats" and "illegals." In the tragic tale told by supporters of "Fortress Europe," the "migrants' perspective" ultimately resembles an obituary—that is, it is assumed that they will absolutely fail. Hence the Mediterranean is often described as a mass grave, and rightly so. In light of a skewed discussion in which the "migrants' perspective" is only ever included as a supplement to the discourse of walling-off, we ask ourselves wherein a possible alternative conception could arise and, therefore, what political project could be articulated through migration? In the first instance, it is an appeal to investigate "Fortress Europe" from the perspective of the practices of migration.

The border regime does not transform of its own accord, but rather obtains its dynamic from the forms of migration movements. This is not to say that states are helpless in the face of population movements; rather, it is in part to pose the questions: What defines states' activities in relation to migration and the efforts to control it? Wherein arises the function of containment of a population in a territory under the conditions of its Europeanization? And which different interests come into play in the process? The metaphor of "Fortress Europe" presumes that within the "Fortress" a truce prevails. In truth, however, the discussion and the representation of the entity called "Europe" is itself a part of the political effort to produce this unity. Europe, and every nation-state within the hegemonic European project, is in reality traversed by fundamental conflicts, concerning among other things the question of borders and their respective degrees of (im)permeability. If and when migrants cross the borders—which, generally, does not happen on boats—they do not step into a closed container. They are already (and then, in a new way) a part of national and global social relations, which they also themselves transform.

2. Control

In the "Not on Tap" section of our "Autonomy of Migration" paper, we appealed against the view of migration as a phenomenon that can be directed through immigration policies alone. An important issue for us, in relation to the limits of the governability of migration, was that the subjectivity of migrants is not reducible to their role as labor-power, as the economic notion of *homo economicus* would have us believe. And this remains the case: migration cannot be turned on and off like a tap. But what is the consequence of this for critical thinking about migration? It is too simplistic to merely turn the power

relations on their head, as has sometimes happened in contributions from the field of research on transnationalism. Perceiving migrant practices as a subversive Other to nation-states, or even to capitalism, is not the answer. Rather than conceptualize every form of migration that is not regulated by the state (especially undocumented migration) as a form of counter-power to national state practices of territorialization, we are concerned with exploring migratory lines of flight as a social movement in the intermediate zones, where migration slips out of the hands of regulative, codifying, and stratifying policies. With lines of flight, here, we address that which literally seeks to escape capitalism: migration as escape routes, migration as living labor. In contrast, the super-exploitation of migrant labor is the opposite of this line of flight; it is its recuperation. The political option lies where this contradiction comes into play.

3. Integration—Cosmopolitics

A new focus on integration has become the leitmotif of recent policies on immigration almost everywhere in Europe. The subtle changes through which the term "integration" has passed in recent years point towards a structural shift. If the term once had the function of cashing in on both everyday practices of migration and demands that were collectively articulated through social conflicts, converting them into another currency (namely, individual adaptation), another dimension appears to occupy the foreground today. The entry into Europe of numerous countries from which labor-power was once recruited has led to a new understanding as to who counts as not-belonging; in other words, as migrant. Therefore, the question of precisely who is the migrants are, and what constitutes contemporary migration in their respective countries, remains significant for determining those who can be integrable and those who cannot.

A further aspect of the new focus on integration, however, plays a "unifying" role for Europe. The transformation of the entire discourse on migration into a regional discourse is symptomatic; it is testimony to the inversion of a hegemonic project brought into play by notions such as "European cultural identity." A symptom of this is the transformation of the traditional Right everywhere in Europe away from an anti-Semitic and towards an anti-Muslim racism, illustrated by the success of populist right-wing parties who tout themselves as the watchpeople of liberal rights to freedom. This is not only accompanied by a culturalization of the term "integration," but also a mutation of the term itself into a vehicle for the invocation and emergence of a hegemonic project oriented towards a "European people." This project, which is simultaneously a neoliberal one, is made possible through the "Muslim Other," which forms the basis of the new discourse on integration. Liberalism and its meritocratic principles construe the culture of the Occident as radically bourgeois, through which poverty is also increasingly culturalized, seen as a result of individual failure—of having made the wrong choices in one's life—and not as the systematic, necessary (by)product of a commodity-producing economy. However, in the cultures of those regions relegated by global capitalism to the third division, all those who have learned to react to the denial of opportunities—whether due to colonialism or international markets—with strategies of withdrawal, flight, and migration, are now ostracized as illiberal and, in the worst case, as anti-liberal.

The critique of integration, though, does not call for a renunciation of rights, but rather distinguishes between the demand for rights and the process of "translating" demands through the logic of the state: the "police." Wherever migrants have demanded social and political rights, bringing the nation-state and its social contradictions into disarray, the imperative for integration has served both the symbolic as well as the material reconstitution of the dominant order—which not only requires migrants to be subaltern, but also seeks to obliterate the emancipatory moment of empowerment. The purpose of criticizing the rhetoric of integration and its concern with lifestyle and culture cannot simply seek to *rehabilitate* the everyday practices of migrants that are not integrated into state apparatuses for being a response to global inequality; rather, the critique must also *turn those practices into the point of departure* for another form of citizenship. Notions of citizenship should not be confined to civil rights institutions, but should allow the countless practices that force its reformulation through collective appropriation to challenge and transgress the limited boundaries of the concept. Many of the social conflicts initiated by migrants are, after all, not about becoming citizens, but about insisting that they are citizens already.

4. Victims and Perpetrators

Even if one rejects the traditional conception of political subjectivity (as was done with the notion of the autonomy of migration), the division of migrant subjectivity into victims and perpetrators leaves one question unanswered: how should one relate politically to the actual subjectivity of migrants when it asserts itself as a radical self-victimization, seemingly contrary to the thesis of autonomy? Is it enough to expose the political structures that enable such a form of subjectivity, or is another unexplored form of agency concealed behind the facade of powerlessness? The concept of autonomy, like the notion of agency, suggests—and this has often been criticized—a connection to the traditional idea of political subjectivity as an expression of power differentials and instrumentalist rationality. In contrast to this, one could present an understanding of the political as a flight from majoritarian conditions. This would involve working with all those forces that want (in whatever way) to extract

themselves from the ordering and imposition of power and domination by means of encounters and collaborations. This would involve an historical investigation of the extent to which migration and racism have placed new questions on the political agenda, and how the struggles of migration—as well as the struggles of the colonized—have transformed the European Left, even if it does not always want to admit it.

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Kanak Attak, Volksbühne, Berlin, 2001.
]

5. Post-Hybridity

When, in our paper, we criticized the phantasma of "freely accessible identity positions," it was directed at a concept of hybridity claiming to foreclose the identity with which it is coupled. In particular, we argued that radicalized identities are not essential; they are, rather, the modes of processing social contradictions. In order to reject any core essentialist conception of hybridity conceivable only as a potentized or mixed identity, we prioritized the "wager" through which one could access a "temporary departure" from identitarian interpellation. What we implied with the expression "temporary" deserves closer examination. "Hybrid" identities, in large parts of the Western world, are not only less problematic today than they were twenty, thirty, or forty years ago (as only temporary sites of "political deployment," which they remain to a lesser extent today); they have also become a trademark of a reflexive modernity that has taken up the cause of its own heterogeneity and tolerance—and is sometimes prepared to fight for it with bombs and threats. This assumed discrepancy between a liberal, cosmopolitan, and capitalist modernity on the one hand, and a fundamentalist Other that refuses intermixing on the other, is itself a hegemonic gesture that must be rejected. Emancipatory language moves from Left to Right and back again, and finds its application in the governance of populations. In this respect, the current uncertainty in designating the political is connected historically to those movements that have opposed their exclusion and insisted upon their rights; or rather, their representation. Numerous examples demonstrate that the language of rights developed in Black, women's, and migrants' movements, and in the queer movement, have now entered a right-wing, chauvinistic discourse and are used for the sealing of borders. This language has developed into a military-imperial and anti-migration project. For instance, the discourse legitimizing the Iraq War articulated the need to bomb because of a lack of democracy; in the case of Afghanistan, the lack of women's rights, among other things, were used as justification. Anti-racist discourses have begun to enter the policies of migration controls (for instance, in the campaigns of the International Organization for Migration). Arguments against immigration to Europe are decorated with the pretention of tolerance for "cultural difference." Migrants today are no longer attacked in the name of unifying culture and nation, but rather of emancipation and democracy.

6. History

The question of "integration" in the writing of history is also at stake here. The simple recognition of the reality that we live in a Europe of immigration opens a space and simultaneously provokes the question: how can a migrant population, or migration, become an aspect of both national as well as European historiography? Thus, a trend that significantly alters the categories of collective being in the world: the debates around the transformations in our understanding of belonging often lead to bitter, identity-based conflicts over demands made on the past in order to make claims about the present. "Who belongs to the nation?"; or, with reference to Etienne Balibar's well known book, are "We, the People of Europe?"[1] Is it surprising that these questions appear at a moment when there is more uncertainty than ever with regard to both what remains of nations, as well as what Europe is to become?

Migration has contributed to the Europeanization of the continent. For this reason, in our "Ten Theses," we demanded an alternative understanding of history. The struggles of migration are themselves constitutive of the transformation of history. Migration is implicated in different struggles. It compels the reorganization of institutions, cultures, languages, ideological frameworks, and so forth, the transformation of their design, the modification of their objectives, a variation in their arguments, a change in their objects. Migration exists only within these conflicts, out of which arise new historical conjunctures, along with new regimes of migration, new ideological constructions of race, new concepts of citizenship, and so on. These historical conjunctures become compacted in national predicaments; different origins come into contact with one another in today's Europe and develop new configurations. To speak about the movement of migration and its autonomy is not to think of this as separated or even displaced from the social relations of society. Far more, migration exists as concrete practices entangled within relations of power and domination. However, this does not mean that migrants are forever condemned to reproducing these relations in the same way. In this context, thinking materially means giving up the idea that one can define migration as a variable, as dependent, for example, on poverty, methods of production, or coyotes, which obscure the concrete social and political projects pursued by people through migration.

There is a tension between the possibility of inscribing migrants in a national or European history—defined genealogically as well as geographically (and in this sense,

through blood and soil)—and the reality that this "group" of migrants is simultaneously separated in such different ways, by history and geography, from the places and times that they come from. In other words, migration is so complexly composed in space and time that neither the attempt to reduce it to questions of ethnicity and origin, nor to simply duplicate its histories in order to sidestep a determination, can be carried out successfully. It is, then, neither a case of presuming authenticity (based on tradition and rehabilitation), nor one of instrumentalizing authenticity (based on aspects of voluntarism and victimization), both of which would only speak in the name of an imaginary subject—"the migrants."

Moreover, the tension becomes more apparent when we find an opportunity, precisely in the case of migration, which itself embodies the contradiction: we are dealing with the history of a non-unifiable subject; and thus, more that of a movement—the movement of migration. It is an opportunity that must first of all be recognized, that subsumes and revitalizes the contradictions, and can have the effect of countering the heroification and romanticization of migrants. In doing so, we bring closer the historical contingency of subjectivation within this process, and, therefore, the temporality of subjectivity.

7. Resources of Subjectivation

As a result of its location at the limits of social citizenship, migration forms a movement in ways diametrically opposed to those of the classical workers' movement. The resources (of political subjectivity), we argued, are located in the collective forms by which people not only organize their lives and their everyday existences, but also attempt to hold their ground against exclusion and repression. The new underclass of migrant labor, for instance, transforms itself into a "toehold" for migration in a situation in which there are constraints on possibilities for immigration. A transformation is taking place today—particularly in those European countries that experienced intensive immigration since the Second World War—that is of particular importance to this. In conjunction with neoliberalism, the discourse around migration has led to an interlacing of the discourse of culture and the discourse around the social question: poverty and exclusion are, effectively, the product of cultural failure if individuals or entire groups are not able to subject themselves to the imperatives of education, disciplinarity, learning, and flexibility. This interface enables a quasi "rational" exclusion of underperformance or non-participation as *unwillingness* to perform, and allows for those belonging to the majority to identify as a collective of high performers. Thus, once one examines the integration and culture debate from the perspective of interlacing, and observes that this is not only contingent, but articulated and organized by social groups, then it becomes clear that alternative approaches need to connect to a new social movement of migrants. Such a movement must open a twofold possibility: firstly, it must consider the social question anew, and in doing so problematize the economic and political *conditions* of democracy; secondly, it must make it equally possible for both migrants and non-migrants to transform and emancipate themselves from their current ascriptions and identities.

8. No Capitalism without the Control of Mobility

In our "Ten Theses," we argued that, because the legal and social situation in which migrants live and work is particularly exploitable and precarious, many see (mainly illegal) migration as the vanguard of a new, ultra-flexible service-industry proletariat. Such a perspective obscures the history of the territorialization of living labor, since the opposition between a sedentary and a mobile working population is itself a product of social compromises at the level of the nation-state.

The first proletarians in Europe were mobile workers. They were people who had fled the feudal mode of production to work in the cities, and were chased across Europe as vagabonds, crooks, and the poor. Against this mass movement, the political fears of the rulers allied themselves with the economic fears of the guilds.

Seen historically, the "dangerous classes," the "mob" (an expression that, revealingly, derives from the Latin word for movement), everything that one today calls the "working class," stood outside the state. With the integration of these groups and their "nationalization," all characteristics that had been ascribed to them were transferred to the borders of the nation-state. Structurally, this was stabilized through the wage-form and the commodity-form of labor-power, which transformed the labor market into a terrain of struggle: the "dirty competition" of women and children was driven out of the labor market. "Foreigners" also belonged to this category of dirty competition—which is why it is no coincidence that trade unions have historically taken a position against migration. Unless they are able to transform themselves, the trade unions will become the guilds of our time.

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Poster for the event and performance "No Integration" at Volksbühne, Berlin and Schauspielhaus, Frankfurt/Main in April and May 2002.
]

Even if undocumented migration appears to be the only possibility for immigrating to Europe due to a lack of other legal possibilities, the European Union is beginning to deal with the "benefits of migration," for example, with the idea that future immigration should be oriented towards the so-called needs of the labor market. For such a project to take place on the European level, a unified migration policy is obviously essential, which, even if not

implemented as a quasi state-socialist vision, would nevertheless presume a relatively static image of society. The notion of being able to organize circular migration in this respect reflects the flexibility and mobility that labor-power already displays. Europe appears to want to accommodate this tendency, but also bring it under control.

9. Citizenship

Through this organization of migration, civil rights are also differentiated and regulated into different, stratified spaces. This trend has rightly been dubbed apartheid, and it occurs in the context of what is simplistically called globalization, but should be defined more precisely as European postcolonial conditions. The clear distinction between metropole and colony is blurring, and a new spatial dimension emerges, one that is variously described as "differential inclusion" and "exclusion." Through the mobility of labor-power, the transformed function of citizenship, and the creation of transnational spaces, a new segregation is installed, composed of both national as well as international spaces.

This contrasts with other, older racist formulations. Whereas racisms in the period of biologically formulated racism—which still appeared distinct, such as anti-Semitism and colonial racism—could be united theoretically, as if they were rooted in a hierarchical and spatially organized model of different cultures, a linear conception of progress, a privileging of unity over hybridity, and so on, things have recently become more complicated, with differential or neo-racism being formulated on a cultural basis. This is a development that leads to what has been described as a "European apartheid."

In order to address these issues together, critical efforts must be directed towards developing the institutions and practices of citizenship that are not tied to the nation-state, while simultaneously minimizing hierarchies arising through the new differentiation of jurisdictions. In this respect, an opportunity emerges: the demand for rights and justice must move beyond the guarantee of citizenship. Accordingly, classifications of citizenship and statelessness need to be overcome. Aspects of citizenship that are connected to the permeability of borders, and already underlie their deterritorialization, should be considered in terms of the limits within the concept of citizenship itself. In other words, migrants without papers should not only be thought of as objects of exclusion; rather, their appropriation of citizenship (for example, the ability to organize education and accommodation, medical care and work, despite their lack of recognized status) should be understood as challenges and redefinitions of the very limits of our understanding of citizenship. This would render obsolete any successive or progressive issuing of rights over time, over generations of settlement, as some understandings of integration suggest to do.

Moreover, the practices of mobility point towards the reality that citizenship today clearly needs to transcend national borders. When we talk about a democratization of the border, the issue at stake becomes the transversal spaces occupied by those within hierarchical regimes of work and rights. A social and political organization beyond borders also implies an unrelenting effort to understand and translate different languages, and concepts expressed in the struggle for rights. To engage in these processes would be to open the possibility of articulating subjectivity differently in the future—beyond the nation-state.

10. Autonomy

Autonomy emerges in social conflicts in which new forms of cooperation and communication, new forms of life, are constituted. The concept of the autonomy of migration connects to the persistence of migrant movements and the drive towards mobility on the basis of social networks. In the process of migration, migrants divest themselves of existing forms of sociality. However, there is a dialectic to every aspect of the autonomy of migration. For instance, to the extent that capitalism is based on the mobility of labor-power, mobility is the source of exploitation; simultaneously, migration is the symptom of flight *from* relations of exploitation and oppression. Migration is neither free from existing forms of sociality, nor can it be considered purely as an extension. The processes of migration install new forms of sociality. They can lead to certain structures in households, political organization, and economic modes of production that stretch from precarious working conditions to capitalist enterprises. Social networks can construct tightly regulated communities with fixed identities. As such, autonomy and heteronomy are never completely separate—and it is common for autonomy to be introduced into situations that ultimately contribute to its destruction.

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Kanak Attak, Action in Frankfurt/Main, 2002. It shows the slogan of the "Gesellschaft für Legalisierung [Society for Legalisation]" which says "Wir sind unter euch [We are amongst you]".

]

Diverse historical conditions determine the development of migration struggles. Which level of organization—that of the political, of trade-unions, or of everyday life—is characteristic among those who resist racism and stand for an end to repressive migration policies? How developed and established is the understanding of anti-racism in society? How can such traits even be comprehended under the new conditions of global interdependence and established societies experiencing

the effects of immigration? The traces of autonomy that remain in such conflicts—the resources that temporarily become available just before they disappear—must always be reassessed.

X

Translated from the German by Ben Trott

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Manuela Bojadžijev and Serhat Karakayal?, “Autonomie der Migration: 10 Thesen zu einer Methode,” in *TurbulenteRänder: Neue Perspektiven auf Migration an den Grenzen Europas* , ed. For schungsgruppe TRANSIT MIGRATION (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2007), 203–209. See the original text: https://web.archive.org/web/20170719053203/http://v.e-flux.com/j/17/Bojadzijev_Karakayali_10_Thesen.pdf ; the TRANSIT MIGRATION website: http://www.transitmigration.org/ ; and the Kanak Attak website: http://www.kanak-attak.de/ .

Isabell Lorey

Becoming Common: Precarization as Political Constituting

Political-Cultural Queerings

The discourse on precarization that has emerged in the past decade, primarily in Europe, rests on an extremely complex understanding of social insecurity and its productivity. The various strands of this discourse have been brought together again and again in the context of the European precarious movement organized under EuroMayDay.[1] This transnational movement, in existence since the early 2000s, thematizes precarious working and living conditions as the starting point for political struggles and seeks possibilities for political action in neoliberal conditions. What is unusual about this social movement is not only the way in which under its auspices new forms of political struggles are tested and new perspectives on precarization developed; rather—and this is striking in relation to other social movements—it is how it has queered the seemingly disparate fields of the cultural and the political again and again. In the past decade, conversations concerning both the (partly subversive) knowledge of the precarious, and a search for *commons* (in order to constitute the political), has conspicuously taken place more often in art institutions than in social, political, or even academic contexts.

In 2004, for example, the research, exhibition, and event project "Atelier Europa" in the Kunstverein Munich brought theorists and artists together to exchange ideas about precarious living and working conditions and possible resistance to them.[2] The project focused on the increasing number and variety of forms of precarization not only in the field of cultural production, but also in social fields, especially the caregiving and reproduction work still largely assigned to women.[3] The feminist activist group from Madrid, "Precarias a la deriva," provided an important contribution in this respect.[4]

Another example from 2004: on the day before May 1, activists from Indymedia groups from all over Spain met at the invitation of the Barcelona Museum of Contemporary Art (MACBA) to conduct an intensive debate about their media activism practices. On May 1 they not only took part in the EuroMayDay demonstration but also carried the problematization of precarious working conditions back to MACBA. It became possible to articulate a critique of the ambivalent role of art institutions: on the one hand, institutions in the art field were the site of critical discussions of neoliberal transformation processes; on the other, such institutions were important players in the game of cognitive capitalism and increasing precarization tendencies.[5]

As a final example, In January 2005 the international conference "Klartext!" took place in Berlin in the Künstlerhaus Bethanien and the Volksbühne am Rosa-Luxemburg-Platz, devoted to the "Status of the Political in Contemporary Art and Culture."[6] Many of those invited were also activists in the transnational

EuroMayDay network who had met on the day before the conference in Berlin. They brought the current problematizations of precarization into the conference (and were able to have their travel costs reimbursed).

Beyond these examples, theoretical analyses of precarization linked to activist practices (such as in the context of the EuroMayDay network) were increasingly carried out in online journals conjoining art, political theory, and activism, such as *Mute* magazine or *transversal*—many years before precarity became a major theme in institutionalized social science research.[7]

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Normalizing and Steering Differences

Precarization is by no means a phenomenon that first affects social groups imagined to be at the margins before moving into the center to affect the so-called middle class—those who have secured their position within the capitalist production regime, and who are therefore able to fortify and improve their social position. A model of this kind, based on precarious margins and a threatened center, does not do justice to the remodeling and outright dismantling of social security systems in Europe. It is a development that reached the so-called center a long time ago, with the massive reduction of permanent employment contracts and the increase in temporary jobs sometimes calling for a high degree of mobility, with or without minimal social security benefits such as health insurance, paid holidays, or pensions.

In the context of such changes, precarization can be seen as a neoliberal instrument of governance. Neoliberal societies are now governed internally through social insecurity, which means providing the minimum possible social security. Precarization is currently in a process of normalization, taking its cue from administrative strategies that were problematic even before Fordism. Just as the Fordist social welfare state represents a historical exception, so too can precarious working conditions be understood as an anomaly or deviation.[8]

While the art of governing currently consists of introducing a lack of security, normalizing a general condition of precariousness also does not produce any form of equality in the midst of insecurity. For good reason, neoliberal logic wants no reduction, no end to inequality, because it necessarily toys with hierarchical differences and governs on the basis of them. This administrative logic no longer focuses on regulating fixed differences in identity, but regulates the "absolute poverty" that could prevent individuals from being competitive.[9] If we understand precarization in this sense as the normalization and steering of differences in the midst of insecurity, then it becomes pointless to construct specialized groups with critical emancipatory intentions around notions of precarity, as divisions into "luxury precarity" and "impoverished precarity" ultimately only reproduce neoliberal dynamics of competitiveness between different degrees of precarization.

If precarization has become a governmental instrument of normalization surpassing specific groups and classes, then social and political battles themselves should not assume differential separations and hierarchies. Rather, those who wage such battles should look specifically for what they have in common in the midst of normalization: a desire to make use of the productivity of precarious living and working conditions to change these modes of governing, a means of working together to refuse and elude them.

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Debates over New Political Practices

So as not to further isolate the manifold precariat, in the past decade critical discourses and resistant practices in the context of precarization have repeatedly concentrated on what the precarious in have in common. This kind of search for commonality begins from differences and does not end in uniformity; rather, it is accompanied by permanent debates about what counts as the common.

The theoretical reflections arrayed against precarization derive a great deal of inspiration from poststructuralist and Post-Operaist thinking, indicative of a search for practices outside the realm of traditional politics of representation. These politics, in which representation is primarily understood as a stand-in, are not only evident in parliamentary democracies, but also inform leftist political notions of a collective subject that should be able to articulate demands (representationally) with one voice, as is typical of political practices. Yet when it is a matter of searching for the common in the various forms of precarization, for possibilities of coming together to form alliances through difference, then identitary, subject-oriented politics are obviously not suitable for their hindering of what is common in difference.[10]

In addition, particularly among leftists, one has to be reminded that expressions of solidarity with the mostly migrant "others" not only leave one's "own" position unquestioned, but also victimize the "poor others" and deny them their own capacity for political action. Within the framework of EuroMayDay, rather than sealing off identity categories between precarious creatives on the one hand and the excluded precarious workers on the other (the white "lower class," migrants, or illegalized persons), alliances between class and status were forged

to bring together precarious cultural producers, knowledge workers, migrant organizations, initiatives of the unemployed, organizations of illegalized persons, and also unions. Thus the subject of repeated debates concerned how modes of refiguring the subject—and thus identitary logics—could be deconstructed to find a new language of politics capable of widening the field of political possibilities.

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Productivity that Cannot Be Completely Economicized

There is an important presupposition for both a political and a theoretical perspective of the common: the new figure of work based on communication, knowledge, creativity, and affect is by no means productive only for a new phase of capitalist accumulation.[11] The economization of the social, the confluence of work and life, the demands to involve the whole person in immaterial and affective work—in other words, the capitalization of modes of subjectification—are not total, comprehensive, or wholly determined. There are always surpluses, possibilities for articulation, and potentialities of resistance. Modes of subjectification are not completely absorbed into the normative state, or into economic interpellations of flexibility, mobility, and affective and creative labor. In insecure, flexibilized, and discontinuous working and living conditions, subjectifications arise that do not wholly correspond to a neoliberal logic of exploitation, which also resist and refuse.

> Precarization thus symbolizes a contested field: a field in which the attempt to start a new cycle of exploitation also meets desires and subjective behaviors which express the refusal of the old, so-called fordist regime of labor and the search for another, better, we can even say flexible life.[12]

The processes of precarization are a contested social terrain on which the struggles of the workers and wishes for other forms of living and working are articulated. But these processes are not only productive in the sense of economic exploitation. In post-Fordist precarious working conditions, new forms of living and new social relationships are constantly developed and reinvented, and processes of precarization are also productive in this sense.[13]

The value produced by forms of work primarily based in communication and affect, on exchange with others, cannot be entirely measured, as these activities transgress the terms required by Fordist industrial labor.[14] What is unforeseen, contingent, and also precarious, emerges at many moments in the process of precarization, and an inherent aspect of this precarization is the capacity for refusal, and hence precarization is a process of recomposing work and life, of sociality, which thus cannot be—not immediately, not so quickly, and perhaps not even at all—economicized. In these re-compositions, interruptions occur in the process of normalizing precarity, that is, in the continuity of exploitability. In this sense, the assemblage of meanings associated with precarization in the discussion during EuroMayDay does not need to have a negative connotation, because it also carries the potential for common refusals, the potential for exodus and reconstitution.[15]

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The Knowledge of the Precarious and the Practice of Queering

Productive interruptions—the folding of the precarious into the potentiality of constituting the common—cannot simply be stated theoretically, of course, but must instead be found and invented in social and political confrontations. What was needed in the early 2000s (and is still needed today) was knowledge about both different forms of precarization and the practices of refusal and subversion newly emerging in them. Many militant investigations were carried out—for instance in cultural and artistic contexts (such as that of kpD[16]) or in various social contexts (such as by Precarias a la Deriva)—in order to bring together the different strands of knowledge amongaamon the precarious. The practice of militant research, including that pursued as co-research, ties into the worker (self)surveys as conducted primarily in the 1970s in conjunction with Italian *Operaismo*. Conditions of domination and exploitation were to be investigated by those most affected (that is, by the experts themselves, with their specific knowledge of subversive practices), and made articulable. These kinds of mutual surveys by workers are, according to Marta Malo from Precarias a la Deriva, "the basis for a political intervention."[17] The practice of militant research seeks to initiate interest, emancipation, debates, social struggles, and to amplify movements searching for better ways of living and working. "The underground, and frequently invisible, trajectory of everyday life uneasiness and insubordinations"[18] is to be explored, so that the capacity, the *potentia* of the precarious can assemble a constituent power.[19]

The precarious have no common identity, only common experiences. Precarization, according to kpD, can be understood beyond just the economic dimension as a manifold experience emerging from

> a non-functioning identitary ascription/appeal and its associated disambiguations, which nevertheless materialize in subjectification conditions in certain ways. . . . Various professional, status-related, gendered, sexual and ethnicizing positions, which are socially very contradictory, frequently have to be taken at the same time or one after another.[20]

Precarization refers to the very laborious practice of *queering* multiple positions and appeals at the same time and one after another.[21] Taken this way, precarization also indicates the impossibility of disambiguation, the impossibility of an identitary standstill. Here precarization also means the experience of dealing with simultaneous multiplicities, with the heterogeneity of ascriptions and interpellations. Different singularities are not constituted through individuality, through inseparability, but rather through that which they share with others, what they take part in, to what extent, and how they *become common* with others, how they become a constituent power.

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A Process of Constituting Instead of an Ontological Constitution of the Common

To be able to imagine this becoming-common as political agency, rather than regard the concept of the common as a social ontological constitution (as Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri most recently suggested again in *Commonwealth*[22]), I would like to focus on another concept from Negri that has meanwhile dropped out of sight somewhat, namely the concept of *constituent power*.[23] In making demands for political and social rights, it can certainly be necessary to (strategically) refer to an ontologically grounded common, the common that strives for equality, for equal opportunities in the midst of difference. But to be able to act together with others at all, this common has to mean something other than a basic ontological category. Because this "common" is something that must first emerge, that has first to be put together, that does not yet exist. There is no community that emerges here, no association or opportunity for disambiguation, but rather a constituency in the process of fleeing from notions of community.

This kind of constituting is to be understood like a mosaic, as a joining together of many single, already existing pieces, singularities, allowing something new to emerge in the manner of the arrangement.[24] It is not the arrangement itself that is innovative, but rather the confrontations that arise in the different compositions. The development of a constituent power is not without conflict, and is therefore political in the fundamental sense. The fundamental aspect is not the common, and thus not the consensus, but rather the conflict.

Conflicts and confrontations, however, are not the sole basis for the common. Confrontations—in the sense of taking apart and taking sides behind different fronts—are an expression of refusals and resistances, on the basis of which a constituent power is first able to develop. Without conflicts, without social struggles, constituent power, which is needed to set a process of constituting in motion, remains a set of merely latent, singular potentialities.

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Precariousness and Precarity

With this background in mind, let us return to the topic of precarization and link the discussion with some relevant ideas from Judith Butler. She has suggested an ontological concept of precariousness, of existential vulnerability, which can be productively considered together with Hardt and Negri's ontological concept of the common.[25] In conclusion, it becomes clear that the ontological common of precariousness is not sufficient to develop a political understanding of precarity.

Butler conceives the general precariousness of life, the vulnerability of the body, not simply as a threat or a danger, from which protection is absolutely needed. Precariousness distinguishes that which makes up life in general—human as well as non-human. Butler formulates an ontology that can only be understood as embedded in social and political conditions. Vulnerability becomes an extension of birth, because initial survival already depends on social networks, on sociality and labor.[26]

To say that life is precarious is thus to point out that it does not exist independently and autonomously, that it cannot be grasped with any identities derived from this. Instead, life requires social support and political and economic conditions that enable it to continue, in order for that life to be liveable. An "ontology of individualism" is not capable of recognizing the precariousness of life.[27] According to Butler, a social ontology of precariousness calls exactly this individualism into question. "We are . . . social beings from the start, dependent on what is outside ourselves, on others, on institutions, and on sustained and sustainable environments, and so are, in this sense, precarious."[28]

The conditions that enable life are, at the same time, exactly those that make it precarious. For this reason, as Butler argues, there must be a focus on the political decisions and social practices under which some lives are protected and others not. Butler calls the social and material insecurity that arises from these kinds of

decisions and practices *precarity*.

This precarity can be understood as a functional effect of the political and legal regulations that are expected to provide protection from general precariousness. Precarity arises from certain structures of domination that have been legitimized in hegemonic Western political thinking since Thomas Hobbes as protection from precariousness, and are at the same time based on the precarity of all who are constructed as other and alien. Precarity as a functional effect of specific security systems is not limited to a national political phenomenon, but extends to a global scale.[29] Referencing to Achille Mbembe, Butler states that *precarity*

> is at once a material and a perceptual issue, since those whose lives are not "regarded" as potentially grievable, and hence valuable, are made to bear the burden of starvation, underemployment, legal disenfranchisement, and differential exposure to violence and death.[30]

Precarity—or, in my terms, precarization—as an effect of specific conditions of domination means, on the one hand, that this is not the ontological concept of precariousness, but rather a political concept (as Butler makes clear). Yet, on the other, precarity is therefore not to be understood as determinate but, on the contrary (although Butler does not make this sufficiently clear) as decidedly productive: in its productivity as an instrument of governance and a condition of economic exploitation, and also as a productive, always incalculable, and potentially empowering subjectification.[31]

Even though she does not imagine the political agency of singularities in the context of precarity, Butler supplies an extremely important argument with regard to how precariousness and precarity are interwoven: the fact that precarity is expanding instead of contracting means—and this is Butler's political focus—that the generally shared vulnerability of life—precariousness—is not recognized, and cannot therefore function as a starting point for politics. For this reason, Butler calls especially on leftist politics to recognize (common) shared precariousness and to orient normative obligations of equality and universal rights toward this.[32] Unlike ontological precariousness, political precarity crosses all categories of identity and cannot be contained within them.

The European movements of the precarious and their associated theoretical discourses have been able to identify commonalities through precarization—unreasonable demands as well as opportunities—and have left identity politics behind. Even if it now appears as though at least the EuroMayDay movement's time has passed, it is important to remember it not only as context from which new forms of the political emerged, but also in which important mosaic patterns were composed, setting in motion a process of common political empowerment. Even if these compositions dissolve again, their experiences and knowledge will remain. Even if the movement appears to be losing its force today, it is not to be mourned. To me it seems much more interesting to find the processes of constituting continue to generate further interruptions and unforeseeable breaks elsewhere.

X

Translated from the German by Aileen Derieg.

All images by Marion von Osten.

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1
Since 2001 EuroMayDay parades with up to 150,000 participants have taken place in over twenty European cities on the traditional International Workers' Day, May 1, to call attention to the precarization of living and working conditions. The activists come from the most diverse social positions. The parades, however, are only one activity among many organized by the network over the course of the year, including surveys and publications. EuroMayDay involves new forms of organizing and communication about different modes of precarization and collective knowledge production. See also http://www.euromayday.org/ ; issues of *transversal* , eipcp's multilingual web journal, including "Precariat" (July 2004), https://transversal.at/transversal/0704 , and "Militant Research" (April 2006), https://transversal.at/transversal/0406/toret-sguiglia/en?hl=militant%20research ; *Mute* magazine's "Precarious Reader" (November 2005), http://metamute.org/en/Precarious-Reader ; Gerald Raunig, *A Thousand Machines: A Concise Philosophy of the Machine as a Social Movement* , trans. Aileen Derieg (Los Angeles and New York: Semiotext(e), 2010).

2
Initiated by Marion von Osten and Angela McRobbie; see https://web.archive.org/web/20110620004144/http://www.ateliereuropa.com/index.php .

3
Particularly influential have been the practices and discourses of the Intermittents du Spectacle in France. See Global Project / Coordination des Intermittents et Précaires d'Ile de France, "Spectacle Inside the State and Out: Social Rights and the Appropriation of Public Spaces; The Battles of the French Intermittents" (March 2004), trans. Aileen Derieg, *transversal*, "Precariat," http://eipcp.net/transversal/0704/intermittents/en ; Antonella Corsani and Maurizio Lazzarato, *Intermittents et Précaires* (Paris: Editions Amsterdam, 2008).

4
See Precarias a la Deriva, "Adrift Through the Circuits of Feminized Precarious Work" (April 2004), *transversal* , "Precariat," https://www.jstor.org/stable/1395909 .

5
See Raunig, *A Thousand Machines* .

6
Organized by Marina Sorbello and Antje Weitzel, see http://klartext.uqbar-ev.de/ . See also "Another Relationality (second part): On a Cure in Times Divest of Poetry/ On Poetry in Incurable Times," organized by Marcelo Expósito and Jorge Ribalta in cooperation with the eipcp at MACBA in Barcelona (March 17–18, 2006), http://marceloexposito.net/pdf/exposito_otrarelacionalidad_en.pdf ; "WORK TO DO! Self-organisation in Precarious Working Conditions: An Exhibition Project in 3 Chapters," organized by Sønke Gau and Katharina Schlieben, Shedhalle Zürich (2007/2008). In the context of education see for example Universidad Nómada in Spain, http://www.universidadnomada.net/ ; Radical Education Collective in Ljubljana, https://web.archive.org/web/20131016010108/http://radical.temp.si/ ; Chto Delat, http://www.chtodelat.org/, and Street University, http://www.streetuniver.narod.ru/index_e.htm , in Saint Petersburg; Free/Slow University of Warsaw, https://web.archive.org/web/20101106210702/http://www.wuw2009.pl/wuw.php?lang=eng ; Edu-Factory, https://web.archive.org/web/20100605012338/https://www.edu-factory.org/edu15/ .

7
See note 1.

8
See Mitropoulos, Angela, "Precari-Us?" (March 2005), *transversal* , "Precariat," http://eipcp.net/transversal/0704/mitropoulos/en ; Brett Neilson and Ned Rossiter, "Precarity as a Political Concept, or, Fordism as Exception, *Theory, Culture & Society* 25, no. 7–8 (2008): 51–72.

9
Maurizio Lazzarato, *Le gouvernement des inégalités: Critique de l'insécurité néolibérale* (Paris: Editions Amsterdam, 2008).

10
See also Antonio Negri, "Logic and Theory of Inquiry: Militant Praxis as Subject and as Episteme" (April 2003), trans. Nate Holdren and Arianna Bove, transversal, "Militant Research," http://eipcp.net/transversal/0406/negri/en .

11
See Maurizio Lazzarato, "Immaterial Labor," in Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics, ed. Michael Hardt and Paolo Virno (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 133–147; Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, Empire (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000). The terms "immaterial" or "affective" labor have been repeatedly criticized especially from the feminist side, because they describe labor once again from the perspective of capitalist accumulation and insufficiently reflect on non-work, care-work, the production of the social, and so forth. (See the dossier on the exhibition "Atelier Europa," a supplement to Drucksache Kunstvereins München, no. 4 (2004); see also http://www.ateliereuropa.com/ ; Precarias a la Deriva, "Adrift Through the Circuits of Feminized Precarious Work"; George Caffentzis and Silvia Federici, "Notes on the Edu-factory and Cognitive Capitalism" (May 2007), transversal, "Knowledge Production and Its Discontents," http://eipcp.net/transversal/0809/caffentzisfederici/en .

12
Frassanito-Network, "Precarious, Precarization, Precariat? Impacts, Traps and Challenges of a Complex Term and its Relationship to Migration," January 5, 2007, http://precariousunderstanding.blogsome.com/2007/01/05/precarious-precarization-precariat/#more-44 .

13
See Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Commonwealth* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009).

14
Ibid.

15
On exodus and constituting, see Paolo Virno, "Virtuosity and Revolution" (1994), trans. Ed Emory (2003), http://www.makeworlds.org/node/34 ; Isabell Lorey, "Attempt to Think the Plebeian: Exodus and Constituting as Critique," trans. Aileen Derieg, in *Art and Contemporary Critical Practice: Reinventing Institutional Critique* , ed. Gerald Raunig and Gene Ray (London: BPR Publishers, 2009), 131–140 (also available at http://eipcp.net/transversal/0808/lorey/en); Isabell Lorey, "Critique and Category: On the Restriction of Political Practice through Recent Theorems of Intersectionality, Interdependence and Critical Whiteness Studies" (October 2008) trans. Mary O'Neill, *tranversal* , "Critique," http://eipcp.net/transversal/0806/lorey/en .

16
"kpD" is the abbreviation for the feminist research and activist group "small postfordist drama" (kleines postfordistisches Drama) based in Berlin. kpD are Brigitta Kuster, Katja Reichard, Marion von Osten, and the author.

17
Marta Malo de Molina, "Common Notions, Part 1: Workers-inquiry, Co-research, Consciousness-raising" (April 2004), *transversal*, "Militant Research," https://transversal.at/transversal/0406/malo-de-molina/en .

18
Malo de Molina, "Common Notions."

19
See Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, *The Labor of Dionysus: A Critique of the State-Form* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994); Antonio Negri, *Insurgencies: Constituent Power and the Modern State* , trans. Maurizia Boscagli (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

20
kpD, "Precarization of Cultural Producers and the Missing 'Good Life' " (June 2005), trans. Aileen Derieg, *transversal*, "Militant Research," http://eipcp.net/transversal/0406/kpd/en .

21
See also Renate Lorenz and Brigitta Kuster, *Sexuell arbeiten: Eine queere Perspektive auf Arbeit und prekäres Leben* (Berlin: B_books, 2007).

22
See Hardt and Negri, *Commonwealth* ; see also Negri, "Logic and Theory of Inquiry."

23
See note 19.

24
From the Latin word *constituo*; see also Gerald Raunig, "Instituent Practices, No. 2: Institutional Critique, Constituent Power, and the Persistence of Instituting," trans. Aileen Derieg, in *Art and Contemporary Critical Practice: Reinventing Institutional Critique* , ed. Gerald Raunig and Gene Ray (London: BPR Publishers, 2009), 173–186, 176.

25
Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The*

Powers of Mourning and Violence (London and New York: Verso, 2004); see also Isabell Lorey, "Prekarisierung als Verunsicherung und Entsetzen: Immunisierung, Normalisierung und neue Furcht erregende Subjektivierungsweisen," in *Prekarisierung zwischen Anomie und Normalisierung? Geschlechtertheoretische Bestimmungsversuche* , ed. Alexandra Manske and Katharina Pühl (Münster: Westfaelisches Dampfboot, 2010), 48–81.

26
Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* (London and New York: Verso, 2009), 1–32. Butler's ideas refer not only to the existential significance of reproductive work; precariousness also underlines the radical replaceability of every life.

27
Butler, *Frames of War*, 19.

28
Ibid., 23.

29
See Isabell Lorey, *Figuren des Immunen: Elemente einer politischen Theorie* (Zürich and Berlin, 2010).

30
Butler, *Frames of War*, 25.

31
Elsewhere I have called this manifold productivity "governmental precarization" (Lorey, "Prekarisierung als Verunsicherung und Entsetzen").

32
See Butler, *Frames of War*, 28–29.

Judith Hopf

Contrat entre les hommes et l'ordinateur

In search of the post-capitalist self, I would like to contribute a short text I wrote and presented as a performance for the "Kopie Theater," an event curated by Ian White as part of the 60th Berlin International Film Festival. It is an attempt to inform our understanding of "declarations of independence," necessary in light of the possible new relationships to be had with the intelligent apparatuses and image-making machines we are invited to use for "free" to communicate. I refer to Hannah Arendt's vita activa *and to Olympe de Gouges' concept of a "Contrat social de l'Homme et de la Femme" from 1789.*[1]

Preamble

I.

An urgent situation has arisen through the evolution of my body and spirit in relation to the use of instruments—specifically of the electronic data-processing machine—which compels me, in the full tradition of earlier revolutions, to socially revive the philosophy of emancipation.

II.

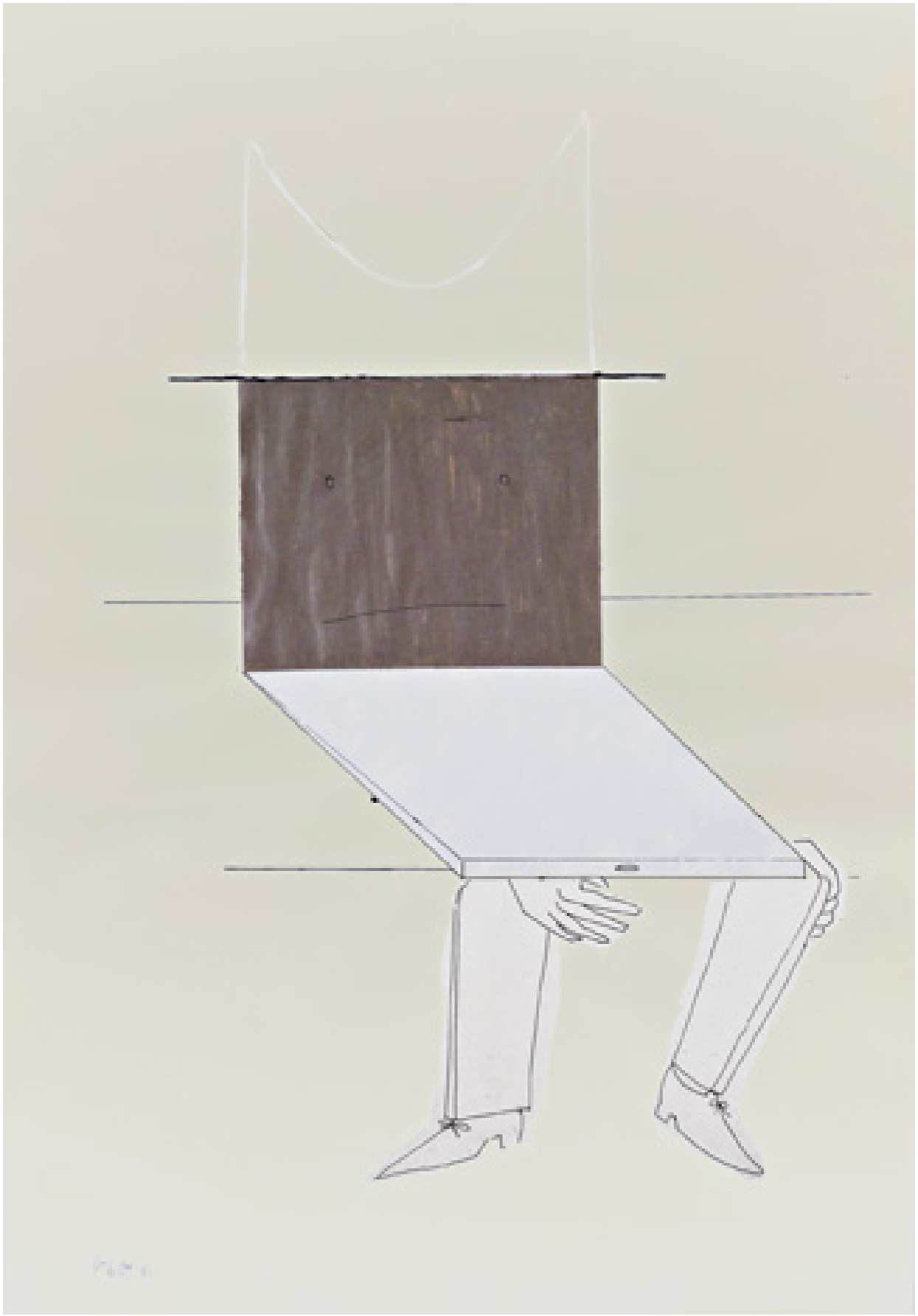
It is certainly true that my position entails a question of a political nature, and thus cannot be ceded to modern experts—neither to professional scientists, the touch-screen specialists, the Web designers, nor the professional politicians. No, the question that manifests itself in my body and spirit, the question that thrusts me forward to courageously take action is one that fully and completely affects the freedom and totality of our social future!

III.

It has now become apparent that the human assets of perception and production no longer have anything to do with one another.

IV.

As a result of this, we are capable of producing more than we perceive and indeed more than we are capable of perceiving.



V.

In this manner, we have become slaves—not of our own machines, as one generally tends to believe, but rather of our assets of perception. We are at the mercy of each and every new instrument.

VI.

At the mercy of each and every new instrument, we are capable of producing something—no matter how strange the instrument's appearance, no matter what murderous language it speaks, no matter which mysterious ways we are furthermore compelled to touch it.

VII.

As it is no longer possible to retreat from this repressive situation, since it now obtains throughout our collective body, let us now rise for the declaration of a vow:

Contrat entre les hommes et l'ordinateur

Herewith, as of now and in the present, let it be recorded that no instrument and also no electronic data-processing machine shall in the future obstruct humanity from completing or being able to complete, in freedom, in thought, and unassisted, the things it does and the relationships it creates. May the following apply:

WE DON'T KNOW ANYTHING
YOU DON'T KNOW ANYTHING

I DON'T KNOW ANYTHING

ABOUT LOVE

BUT

WE ARE NOTHING

OHO

YOU ARE NOTHING

OHO

I AM NOTHING

OHO

WITHOUT LOVE

X

Artist and author **Judith Hopf** works in the media of video/film, drawing, performance, and installation. In her work, she investigates seemingly obvious communication forms and analyzes methods of political and artistic mediation. She has participated in numerous international solo and group exhibitions. From 1996 to 1998 she organized the event series “Supersalons” at bbooks in Berlin. Since 1997 she has continually taken part in collective video projects. From 1997 to 2003 several video clips were created for A-Clip, a project whose basic idea consists of using the attention of the spectator in a darkened movie theater for the placement of subjective political and artistic statements which take on, satirize, or interrupt the advertising aesthetic. From 2003 to 2005 she was a part of the video group Team Ping Pong. From 2001 to 2005 Judith Hopf was guest lecturer at the Merz Academy Stuttgart. From 2003 to 2005 she was guest professor of sculpture and video art at the Kunsthochschule, Berlin, Weissensee. Currently she is professor for Fine Arts at the Städelschule Frankfurt. She lives and works in Berlin.

1
Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University Press of Chicago, 1958), 7–17; Olympe de Gouges, *L'Esprit françois, ou Problème à résoudre sur le labyrinthe des divers complots* (Paris: Chez la veuve Duchesne, 1792), 12.

Fahim Amir, Eva Egermann, Marion von Osten, and Peter Spillman

What Shall We Do...?

What follows is a multigenerational conversation between the philosopher Fahim Amir, the artist Eva Egermann, and the artists and curators Peter Spillmann and Marion von Osten, about the varieties of antagonism currently shaping the production of knowledge.

Scarcity and Integration

Marion von Osten: I would like to begin our conversation with a hypothesis: the production of knowledge has entered a phase defined by certain tensions, leading to a variety of conflicts we face in our work in the art academy as well as, and more importantly, in our intellectual and cultural work. On the one had, we can observe a rise in the significance of certified expert knowledge bearing academic institutions' seal of approval—this process is evident in the European debates over BAs/MAs/PhDs, Clusters of Excellence, and Collaborative Research Centers. This structure of training and research, with its increasingly hierarchic organization, is in part being introduced in European art schools as well. On the other hand, knowledge produced and passed on outside schools and institutions has become more and more important over the past fifty years, as have experts who are not academics. The practices of everyday life and popular culture have emerged with greater prominence, as has the knowledge produced by social movements, and some of their spokespeople have become part of the curricula. Among other consequences, has been an emergence of critical methodologies that reflect on Eurocentric epistemology, introduce a multiple-actor approach, conjure up the death of the author, embrace the vernacular, et cetera. What should also be mentioned in this context is the attention paid within institutions to what is called "artistic research" and the call for transdisciplinary work. Yet extra-institutional knowledge is also an essential part of contemporary cultural and artistic production.

Peter Spillmann: It is not so much we, as the producers of knowledge or culture, who are at the center of the antagonisms you describe, but the educational institution. We can move fairly well in both extra-institutional and institutional contexts. For the university and other institutions of higher education, by contrast, the rapidly rising importance of extra-institutional knowledge implies to my mind that their role as authorities over the legitimacy of knowledge has become questionable. I think the ongoing reforms and efforts to create new systems of certification are also an institutional—as well as political—strategy to counteract the increasing dissolution of the boundaries of knowledge, to shore up the power to legitimate knowledge and define education; and

certifications, as a technique of control and discipline, obviously play a central role in this process.

Eva Egermann: The American situation already illustrates the conflicts this creates for the individual. Many universities have publicly accessible programs, which is to say, a wide public audience is invited to attend seminars and lectures. But official enrollment at these universities, which enables a student to receive a diploma, to become a university graduate: that is something very few can afford. The recent tuition hikes at American universities, most prominently in the University of California system, have led to protests and occupations at UC Santa Cruz and seven other campuses in California.

[figure partialpage

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Chair Strike installation at the Academy of fine Arts Vienna, PC-Lab, in the framework of *Strike, she said*, by GirlsOnHorses (Auer, Egermann, Straganz, Wieger).

]

PS: I think we need to distinguish between political or institutional strategies and the consequences they have for those whom they affect. Creating scarcity is the central principle of the new institutional policy. This includes intensified efforts to condition and select, through for instance modularized curricula and multiple-graded degrees, as well as the social enforcement of certain minimum standards candidates are expected to meet in order to get a job. Economic interests play a role as well, aiming on the one hand to create a scarcity of public education so that the remainder can be turned over to a lucrative educational market, and on the other hand to offload as much research and development spending as possible onto the public sector. This not only leads to financial shortages, it also narrows the margins for those whose interests have nothing to do with product development. That the public institutions would quickly embrace this new educational order was ultimately foreseeable. But why, given these increasingly tenuous conditions, the great majority of teachers and students would still place their faith in the universities and the degrees they confer, let alone redouble their faith in them—that, I think, is one central question.

Fahim Amir: University diplomas are meant to represent objective and standardized certificates of competence—and yet at this very juncture, we can observe that the exercise of power becomes increasingly personalized and informal; this "neo-feudalist spirit" is manifest in the growing number of autocratic bodies that are even less transparent and subject to even less democratic control than in the past.

EE: The staff and budget cuts that lead to diminishing access to universities as well as to reduced resources, possibilities, and space at these institutions, also increasingly render the lives of all those who work there highly precarious. In spite of the distinction between "students," "teachers," and "staff," most of these people are affected by precarization to some degree and urgently need new forms of organization.

FA: One far-reaching problem at the universities is that academics are mostly occupied with administrative work and teaching, when these are at the same time the least prestigious academic functions and contribute the least to their careers. Another line of conflict concerns the problems surrounding property in, and the accessibility of, knowledge; for example, a large part of publicly funded research takes place outside the universities, where the production of knowledge can be organized in more autonomous structures, yet the results will ultimately be the property of the commissioning party—the state or agency paying for the project.

PS: There are two different dynamic processes in play here: on the one hand, there are the efforts undertaken to make a university "excellent." This is where marketing or personnel politics comes in. The reinvention of the educational institution in the world of business has a lot to do with public relations, with presenting a flawless image and constructing a perfect narrative of success, professionalism, and contemporary relevance. On the other hand, it takes familiarity with a field to recognize relevant knowledge and context-specific current practices of the exchange of knowledge are. This involves competencies similar to those required in cultural production—and yet the "chief executive officers" of educational institutions generally do not possess these competencies themselves. Despite all the talk about innovation in the institutions, there is virtually no serious debate about what adequate conditions for a contemporary culture of knowledge would look like.

MvO: What can be observed, however, is a changed self-conception on the part of the state. Economistic discourse appears to be taking place on the supranational level, too, in EU directives, for example. At the same time, neoliberal interpellations notwithstanding, this is about an expansion and not a reduction of the bureaucratic apparatus in the educational institutions—only this apparatus now operates within the requisite private-public constellations. I think it is perhaps better understood as a different way of formalizing and discursivizing the relationship between the state and private enterprise.

PS: That is a central point, I agree. To put it strongly, we might even say that the field of education has in recent years become the central stage on which a state that has undergone neoliberal reforms can produce an especially conspicuous mise-en-scène of its newly optimized functionality, a production that even allows it to compensate for the loss of authority in other areas, such as communications or healthcare.

MvO: We must understand all of this against the backdrop of a post-Fordist transformation that encompasses all of society. Not only are qualifications certified by schools and universities considered marketable skills—framed as "competencies"—but qualifications acquired outside the school system are also increasingly considered according to the same terms. Post-Fordism has raised the requirements by which knowledge is considered necessary for productive performance on the job, and the knowledge I have acquired at an educational institution, a university, or a school, is no longer enough. Social skills and the ability to work in a team, for example, are necessary qualifications I may bring to the job without formal "training." So the primary aim behind the new gradation of degrees is to create the shortest and most efficient possible path for the majority through the curricula—an intentional contraction. The new reforms do not in fact make the course of studies as such the central value: studies, like research, must first and foremost be applied. Today's internship, and the university of applied sciences too, illustrate this path toward a professional training more and more geared towards job requirements—but this training can only partly satisfy the needs of an increasingly flexible labor market, or the composition of biopolitical labor, as Negri and Hardt call it. That makes it difficult for the humanities to legitimize themselves, and the same goes for art schools. This process is key to the central conflicts, but also to possible alternative outcomes, because one could begin to derive potentials at this point as well.

EE: It might be interesting in this context to come back to the distinction marked by the concepts of "Herrschaftswissen" (knowledge that serves the exercise of authority) and "herrschaftskritisches Wissen" (knowledge that enables a critique of authority). The former would be the sort of knowledge that serves to reproduce and consolidate hegemonic conditions. The latter, by contrast, would be a knowledge of the prevailing conditions and the powers that control them, as well as an awareness of one's own complicity with these conditions and the social struggles against them: an emancipatory knowledge of resistant experiences in history and in the present that is rooted in social struggles and movements. Today, we reencounter this extra-institutional knowledge in postgraduate and master's programs such as gender, cultural, and postcolonial studies.

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Squatting Teacher banner at the Mass Demonstration for Free Education in Vienna, 28th Oct. 2009.

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FA: To my mind, it is important and at the same time difficult to shield my politics from the conceptual trends in academia; against the hype forming in strange ways around authoritative subjects that are then, for a certain period of time, brought up at almost every panel discussion. The creation of such hype involves an inscrutable interplay between a whole number of actors, and there are large asymmetries regarding their charisma and their impact factor. In the Marxist tradition there is the phrase, the "revolutionary Party as the university of the working class," which once promised a different interrelation between theory and praxis, between democracy and knowledge, between cognitive capacity and ability in battle; an autonomous production of knowledge independent of the academic construction of theory is indispensable, it seems to me, for any praxis that envisions a fundamental transformation of the social order—and "autonomous," it is important to note, means anything but cut-off or isolated from the larger context. The fact that activists in subcultural, cultural-leftist, or autonomist contexts pay so much attention to academic theory as a source of buzzwords always strikes me as a problem just as much as does the tiresome exegesis of the classics in Marxological contexts.

MvO: Creating a permanent place for feminist or postcolonial knowledge in the institutions was an important struggle. The bigger problem today is that this knowledge becomes an additional qualification sold for a fee or used in the education market as a competitive advantage.

PS: Ambitious universities' marketing departments operate according a logic by which they can envision the creation of a highly promising niche degree out of any social discourse whatsoever, just as long as the niche has a certain degree of intensity. But we must consider first and foremost how this knowledge circulates in different social and intercultural constellations, how it keeps growing and which new perspectives and emancipatory movements it enables. Right now, that is certainly not something that is happening within the framework of, say, postcolonial studies.

FA: The most important factor enabling the domestication in the university of radical knowledge produced by social movements can be found in the everyday function of the university as a bureaucratic monster: the need to organize classrooms, meetings of administrative bodies, power struggles within the university, the administration of exams, et cetera. All that exhausts people, and between these obligations, they often don't even know anymore what they came to the university to do, or they simply no longer have the strength to do it. Critical reflections on the institutionalization of the women's movement noticed this effect immediately after the first women's studies programs were established. Tearing down the connections between subjects participating in a struggle within the university and those outside it is a step that further enables integration into the "business as usual" at the university. But the link between commercial value and anti-capitalism within capitalist socialization does not strike me as something fundamentally new—the

exchange value, after all, is the primary deciding factor in capitalism.

PS: I don't think that the university can ever become "ours"! The idea of the university as such, as an institution, with its humanist-bourgeois-liberal tradition—something the choice of Bologna for the ominous meeting of the ministers of education was patently aimed to bring into symbolic play—embodies the Eurocentric culture of the institution. Attempts to open the university to other actors or practices of knowledge—Marion mentioned this at the very beginning of our conversation—lead at best to the formation of new critical theory or the growing differentiation of new disciplines and methods. And what Fahim is talking about is the core of the very conflict we get involved in—an ultimately fruitless one—every time we try to change the institutions.

FA: During the battles at the universities in northern Italy in the late 1970s, people developed the idea of the "counter-university"—which is to say, of fighting within the university for causes that are antagonistic to the constitution of the university and of the social order tied to it. Another aim was to intervene in one's own subjectivation and to turn the exploitative or symbiotic relationship between university employees and the university in the direction of an emancipatory parasitism.

MvO: Around the same time, Ivan Illich pointed out that the desire for democratization through education, which promises to free people of their class backgrounds, has the paradoxical effect of introducing a new hierarchy. It means that social mobility is the de facto privilege of those who submit to the sanctioned certifications; all other necessary knowledge that could be acquired in everyday life or at the workplace remains without social recognition, leaving the division of labor and the class hierarchy unchallenged.

PS: If you mean recognition in the academic context, then I agree. But there were and are innumerable opportunities outside the university to experience social advancement—the child of the contractor who makes millions in real estate, the guest worker who becomes a restaurant entrepreneur, et cetera. What is interesting is that the greatest barriers are currently being erected precisely against social advancement from the margins, against that which is self-made, is built on improvisation and situational knowledge. Nowadays, a dishwasher will have a hard time becoming a millionaire without an MBA.

MvO: We should note here that the academy of arts does still leave a certain amount of leeway, leeway we need to defend. Nowhere else can people without academic degrees still be appointed professors. And if matters keep moving in the direction they are, that will soon be a thing of the past.

PS: Another reason I went to study at a free art school instead of a university was that I never quite understood how studying at a university really works. No one in my family had gone to a university, and so it wasn't something I just picked up along the way. I didn't know what mattered most, how I was supposed to find my way through a university's offerings, what would be the best thing to do. Knowing what would be important requires that you already have defined interests—or have been introduced to a specific milieu. Acquiring knowledge at a university already presupposes a great deal of knowledge or habitualized experience.

MvO: Or people didn't manage to complete their studies because they were tripped up by the inscrutable syllabi, or, at the academy of art, by the professors' self-mythologizing and their sexism. There was a lack of "herrschaftskritisches Wissen." Poststructuralist theories were an incredibly important instrument in helping to understand what all of this meant beyond the personal level. But when I was a student in the 1980s, this did not take place either at the university or at the academy of art—it wasn't soft rock.

EE: On the other hand, there are also opportunities and productive situations at the universities, situations in which people can experience studying as a form that enables individual action, a space that enables them to reflect on the social structures within which they study. Artistic strategies then in turn offer a possibility to intervene in these conflicts, to create spaces or counterpublics. During the occupations of the universities in Austria and the international protest movement of the fall and winter of 2009–10, we saw an intense realization of this possibility: the university as a place of contentious debate, of rebellion and insurrection. These occupations not only succeeded in unleashing a broad debate over educational policies, but also enabled the re-politicization of many areas and uncontrolled spaces. This intensity and eruption created absurd situations of teaching and learning and alternative practices of knowledge; a community of teachers and students, we might say, united by a defined goal: to subvert the structures of the university. The participating groups—Salong (Munich), Academy of Refusal (Vienna), Interflugs (Berlin), and 10th Floor (London)—describe this collective learning process as occurring in the midst of an eruption, as something that was able to shatter established structures of power. Squatting turned the rigid, cool, neoclassical auditorium into a site of negotiations. Solidarity and collective euphoria created the energy required for an unforeseeable amount of work that needed to be done.

Immanence or Exodus

MvO: So intra-institutional and extra-institutional knowledge can not be conceived as being quite so distinct anymore. Their relationship is not dialectical but

rather one of immanence. And yet it doesn't seem easy to describe the quality of difference in the knowledge production we engender in our collective work. Instead, we tend to exhaust ourselves in contention with the institutions. As someone born in the early 1960s, I am a member of a generation of autodidacts, the so-called brilliant dilettantes. Doing-it-yourself returned to prominence in the 1990s, when people taught themselves software, graphic design, how to make music, video, and texts, how to write reviews. Not that any of this is unusual in the art context. But what was really at stake was that we would not accept the traditional division of labor in the art context any more than anywhere else, and that we would take the relations of production into our own hands. The possibility of doing that in a collective was a way to escape the can, the eternal "stand and alone."

EE: A few years ago, I worked with others within the framework of the Manoa Free University. Together we organized study circles, but also projects, publications, parties, and exhibitions. The MFU provided a sort of structure for collaboration, a shared space for the political and artistic production of knowledge, and the ability to reference a defined collective context. After the first round of neoliberal reforms subjecting Austria's universities to an economic logic—including GATS (the General Agreement on Trade in Services), the introduction of the law on universities in 2002, and the abolition of student codetermination, something I experienced in fairly drastic ways because I was at the time an active member of the ÖH (Austrian Students' Association, the general organization representing students at Austrian universities)—it seemed more necessary than ever to create autonomous structures, or to form self-organized structures outside the university, instead of helping to implement the processes of economization and being at the mercy of the prevailing conditions. And similar structures were being founded everywhere at the time. An autonomous, extra-institutional, or "different" praxis of knowledge of the sort you describe was an important aspiration for us. By now, the perspectives within extra-institutional cultural contexts have also shifted, I think, especially when a project is not decidedly political. Not least importantly, it has become clear that such initiatives are no less part of a system of art defined by an economy of reputation. For example, a young artist recently told me that she wanted to found a self-organized "off-space" because, she said, curators appreciated when someone's biography included "experience in self-organization." So I guess it is not a given that a different knowledge-praxis of the sort we are discussing would have to take place outside the university; perhaps it is simply a matter of fundamentally different criteria.

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It is not about the biscuits, it is about the whole bakery..., Action media spectacle. Occupied Academy of fine Arts Vienna, 1st Nov. 2009.

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FA: Exactly—and that, it is important to note, is not the same: most off-spaces hardly strike me as "extra-institutional"; they seem "small-scale institutional" instead. Most of them do not at all break with the prevailing aesthetic, social, and organizational procedures—but problematizing these procedures are an indispensable part of being such a space in the first place. So this is not about some sort of radical purity on the part of subjects, but about how they interrelate. That is something we—half a dozen very different people with backgrounds in art, culture, and theory—tried to implement in partly experimental, partly directed ways when we founded the performance bar Schnapsloch four years ago. It was important to us that we operate this space without the support of financial backers (on whom we otherwise depend), that we put the focus of aesthetic production on the fashioning of specific socialities, cultivating perspectives that problematized our relations to reception, participation, and curatorial work. We will close the space down this summer because we don't want to become subculture administrators: when there is no avenue of defense left, it still strikes me as better to do what people did with several social centers in Italy—they smashed the windows of their own social spaces rather than allow them to be yuppified.

PS: On the other hand, there is no form of action in the production or communication of knowledge that is not embedded in social structures and shaped by relationships, between people who are friends, meet on neutral terms, or do not like one another at all. And this is true of all contexts equally. Even in a highly formalized academic context, all knowledge-communication processes are a permanent emotional roller-coaster ride; encouragement, support, preferential treatment, competition, interference, et cetera. The same holds for any other independent and self-determined context. But there people can more radically think through—and sometimes live—the social intensity tied to a shared cause and interest, whereas the institution tends to emphasize bureaucratic administration even of the social aspect, and often fosters its use for strategic purposes.

FA: I agree—there is an atmosphere of competition, envy, focus on status, and thinking in hierarchies, in combination with the wish to be part of a trend, that is characteristic of the academy, but also of artistic and cultural production. This atmosphere is also the reason why I have time and again preferred self-organized contexts, which, though they are not immune to these issues, offer other possible ways of dealing with them.

PS: Among my personal acquaintance, I know about a dozen people who, after twenty or more years of innovative project-related work in a wide variety of fields—from exhibitions and participative projects to the creation of entire curricula—now receive rejections in

response to applications because they are “overqualified.” They are told, “You have already implemented so many demanding projects, we don’t think we can offer you enough!” Or, on the other hand, they are rejected because they don’t have a degree—“Unfortunately, a BA or MA is an absolute requirement for working with us!” These people are now forced to look seriously into getting some degree or other for 20,000 Euros. That is a perversion and a gigantic scandal. The minimum demand in light of such absurd developments should be that the first degree, at whatever age, be free.

MvO: People need knowledge for different reasons. Sometimes you just need experience and to exchange views. The projects I am involved in are more about initiating cognitive processes and less about knowing theory and having the right quotes ready. They are about gaining insight, about perceiving in new ways and making something public or communal by exhibiting, publishing, et cetera. This can happen by way of a variety of practices—a fact that is often effaced from the institutionalized debate. I have arrived at important insights through design or manual processes, or because I failed at something. And the most important thing is to be able to move among different kinds of knowledge, build social relations, open spaces, make a different subjectivation possible, and so forth. All that is part of the sphere of action.

EE: The goals should be cognitive processes and critical engagement and not the accumulation of knowledge as a form of dead capital. The idea of an official knowledge often corresponds to thinking in disciplines. University curricula are designed to introduce students to the methodologies and habits of specific disciplines, rather than provide skills with practical applicability. That is where an artistic or creative praxis that serves as a cognitive process, in the way you have just described, is different. Moreover, the field of art—as a more or less autonomous sphere—can itself serve as a site for analysis and renegotiation between different interpretations and positions, for the possibility of experimental, interventive, and activist artistic praxis and research, if we want to describe it in these terms. That is the sort of praxis I would be interested in, and it is precisely not about objectifying, generalizing, standardizing, or quantifying a certain kind of universal knowledge.

[figure 371009131739aae30064a78af09637dd.jpg Simone Hain, Christiane Post, Karin Rebbert, Katja Reichard, Marion von Osten, Peter Spillmann, Axel John Wieder, *Insert 3* 6th Werkleitz Biennal, Volkspark Halle a.S., 2004. Replica of Vladimir Tatlin's stage set for the production of "Sangesi" by Velimir Chlebnikow, Petrograd 1923. On the back of the stage slide projections various autonomous theater and agiprop groups : "Blue Collars", worker’s theater group from Moscow, Russia; "Rote Schmiede", 1920s agitprop group from Halle a.S., Germany; "Neue Sachlichkeit" mask ball at the Burg Giebichenstein Halle a.S., Germany, 1925; "Brigade Feuerstein", 1980s popular GDR song theater group from Hoyerswerda, Germany, 1923.
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PS: The way we as artists and cultural producers engage theory, too, tends to resemble a form of interference. We have read some things and been told about others or picked them up in discussions. Combining these with our own projects or with questions directly related to our actions produces new ideas, books, spaces, images, and projects. It was never about having read everything. In reality, things work in much more playful and fragmentary ways. What is central for us is that we identify with the issues and projects, that we stand behind them, are responsible for them, perhaps even have significant doubts about them, but that we are in any case willing to commit ourselves to them.

MvO: These practices have been under siege by the ongoing neoliberal educational interpellations for more than ten years. In the mid-1990s, I could still write with a very light hand about different forms of knowledge-production and collectivity of the sort developed, say, in exhibition projects. Now that has become difficult, since everyone’s working lives are tied up with institutions in which a number of antagonistic relationships also take shape.

PS: But that demonstrates even more clearly that all knowledge is situational or situated, that it comes into being in very specific social contexts and networks, in places where we are active, where we communicate, think, produce, and act, in the domains of activity through which we move. It is very difficult to translate these things into bureaucratized structures or curricula. At the same time, we should note that the universities themselves have also never produced anything but situational knowledge, which is to say, that they are specific with regard to their social context, their actions, and their social habits.

MvO: But in contrast to other contexts, this exclusive specific context has time and again been able to define how knowledge ought to be produced and which knowledge is relevant.

PS: Exactly! And that is also the source of the one-sided preference given to certain forms of knowledge. There are, in contexts defined by projects, very different forms of experience or references that would warrant greater reflection and study. For example, a certain sort of music has played a role, or certain works of art; we encountered all sorts of experts, on various levels; certain spaces and sites influenced the development of a project or became a central point of departure for new ideas and insights, et cetera. When the complex constellation of experiences, observations, and events that make up a specific everyday practice interacts in this way with theory on an ongoing basis, we will notice significant differences from the

academic communication of knowledge, also as regards the results. There would certainly be more to it in the end than text production.

Constitute and Unite

MvO: If we place the focus on the contemporary praxis of the producers of culture and knowledge instead of on the educational institution, we arrive at different results. If it is recognized that knowledge has been and is being produced everywhere, that emancipatory knowledge is engendered outside the university or the academies, that cognitive processes of central importance are contained in manual activities as well, and not just in intellectual achievements, then that matches the idea of interpenetration, of immanent knowledge, and at once entails a different conception of praxis, as well as production. What emerges is a different understanding of the communal and the public and the erosion of the division between manual and intellectual production. Which is to say, we can recognize practices that counteract the institutional scarcity we talked about earlier, that are also points of reference for a postcapitalist politics.

PS: At their core, these the are central ideas of the emancipatory movements of the 1960s. Looking back at my school days, I have to say that these were also the ideas that provided me with strong arguments against all sorts of authorities in the family and the school, as well as against the social interpellations that pushed me to train for a respectable profession. No question: elementary schools, paperbacks, street fairs, and adventure playgrounds were all strategies of dissemination, of participation and self-empowerment. I find it interesting now to recognize that, under different social conditions, there are again possible ways to pick up where these movements left off, not only in theory but also in concrete action.

EE: Just as you have described it, we are experiencing an accelerating shift in the configuration of capitalist conditions. After the transformations of the past decades—from the postwar Fordism shaped by Social Democracy and Keynesianism to a neoliberal mode of government driven by financial markets—cracks are becoming apparent in today's neoliberalism, and not just since the financial crisis of 2008; which is to say, its social hegemony is crumbling. Whereas alternatives have in the past appeared highly unlikely, changes in the social, political, and cultural conditions have now become more conceivable. In her introduction, Marion proposes a general change of perspective, inquiring about a postcapitalist politics and praxis and more specifically about where such a politics and praxis are already taking place today. I think that is a very interesting approach. So where can we find a praxis of this sort, or the development of a sense of such postcapitalist possibility, in the praxis of knowledge and the artistic contexts we have discussed? Art that "operates in the domain of the political" would not be the least important space of contingency in which a political, social, and cultural imaginary, as well as new postidentitarian subjectivities, could take form. I have often wondered how the intensity of politicization, collectivity, debates, and counterpublics in various projects can be harnessed to create something sustainable in the long term that would in turn effect more concrete changes. But these changes are taking place; for what we do does something to us. A situated and postcapitalist praxis of knowledge is a process of transformation that proceeds step by step and changes the individuals in turn. Such a praxis is in motion and serves the abolition of putative boundaries—be it in the emergence of a communist society within the capitalist one, i.e., in the progressive accumulation of the communal from the bottom up, as proposed by Hardt and Negri in *Commonwealth*; or in the conception of new communisms.

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Simone Hain, Christiane Post, Karin Rebbert, Katja Reichard, Marion von Osten, Peter Spillmann, Axel John Wieder, *Insert 2*, 6th Werkleitz Biennal, Volkspark Halle a.S., 2004. Unrealized model of Laszlo Moholy-Nagy's Raum der Gegenwart which he designed 1930 for Alexander Dorner and the Provinzialmuseum Hannover. In the context of the 6th Werkleitz Biennal it functioned as a display for material about strategies of participatory knowledge production and distribution.

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PS: I would propose that we conceive not only knowledge production but also learning itself as context-specific and situational, and think of it as much more separate from institutional structures. Quite patently, there are individual ways to proceed that respond to different initial situations, interests, and sets of problems: professional training, projects, starting a business, forming a band, traveling, internships, university studies, founding an institute, taking some time off, et cetera. The counter model against wasting resources on elite universities might be a generous "education allowance" in addition to a guaranteed basic income. Everyone would be entitled to it, at any age, and it would be deposited into their account as soon as they knew what to do with it.

MvO: The call for an unconditional basic income is of absolutely central importance. Only when my material conditions are secured am I able to do something that does not need to be paid for, that does not have a price and can be shared without having to become property. Without a different material and structural basis for our labor relations and living conditions, all fantasies of knowledge as a common good will remain farcical—they would amount to nothing more than yet another innovative

variant of zombie neoliberalism and remain shaped by our dependency on the institutions of modernity.

FA: I would agree, as long as this basic income is in principle a global, which is to say, transnational, entitlement and covers the margin of subsistence beyond a reasonable degree; only then can we prevent the transformation of this demand into the rotten compromise of a national-chauvinist flat rate whose primary purpose would ultimately be to undo the Fordist tangle of social transfer payments. That this demand, easy to understand and generally desirable though it is, will not become global reality—it would undermine the international division of labor and the compulsion to sell one's labor for the enrichment of others, and ultimately lead to the abolition of capitalism—would be a worldly answer to Philippe Van Parijs's question, "Real Freedom for All: What (If Anything) Can Justify Capitalism?" The question of providing material security for learning processes aside, it seems important to me to emphasize the physical and affective quality of the difference that separates book knowledge from knowledge based on personal experience. A learning experience takes place in social struggles that is accompanied by a considerable production of affect and knowledge. That, to my mind, was one of the most important achievements of the protest movement of 2009–10: not that specific demands were met, but rather that the active subjects related in different ways to themselves as well as to others, on both sides of the barricades, and continually displaced these barricades. Within the protest movement, questions such as how knowledge-production within and outside the university works were subjects of continuous discussion in working groups and workshops. One result of these discussions among many was the creation of the initiative for a Critical and Solidary University.[1] Other issues that came up were a so-called "Augustine Academy" (a structure conceived in collaboration with homeless people), and the understandable desire to bring together students, teachers, and researchers in artistic and scientific fields.

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Simone Hain, Christiane Post, Karin Rebbert, Katja Reichard, Marion von Osten, Peter Spillmann, Axel John Wieder: *Insert 1* 6th Werkleitz Biennal, Volkspark Halle a.S., 2004. Reconstruction of Alexander Rodtschenko's interior design for a worker's club, originally realized for the Russian pavilion at the World Fair, Paris 1925. During the Biennial Insert 1 was displayed at the "Halle School of Common Property".

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EE: Besides the unconditional call for a global basic income and social infrastructure (e.g., education) for everyone, then, there are also short-term demands that have emerged from our concrete and immediate context since the education protests during the winter of 2009–10. There is the demand that the spaces and infrastructures now controlled by student self-determination, such as the squatted auditoriums in Vienna and elsewhere, spaces where participants can exercise a postcapitalist praxis of knowledge, be retained and expanded. Study-ins as well as expanded open and interdisciplinary communities of teaching and learning, a more comprehensive self-organization of the precarized knowledge workers at the universities, support for leftist university networks and magazines, and the development of alternative avenues of access to the universities, and so forth—by now, such spaces are once again under threat of being forcibly cleared. An applied knowledge-production of this sort is a process that aims to abolish the current state of affairs, with its artificial scarcity.

MvO: That inevitably implies redistribution! A redistribution of resources, money, and spaces, that is to say, of the instruments for a different praxis, is necessary. I would primarily champion the idea of small steps instead of an all-for-all perspective. A start would be to conceive new trans-institutional structures in our work lives. That would be to take the situation with which we began—knowledge is being produced everywhere and by many actors, not just academics or artists—a lot more seriously. To my mind, this also means that we call the existing binary and hierarchical opposition between intra-institutional and extra-institutional knowledge-production into question, in the existing public institutions and in our self-organized production.

PS: The demand for different conceptions of education—to the extent that we need to raise this demand at all—cannot be directed at the schools and universities alone. These institutions would have to gradually become sideshows—or better: become the places where, perhaps not unlike the internet, people can continually exchange and comment on the wealth of insights, experiences, and productions generated in all sorts of contexts.

MvO: So one central demand would be that everyone who needs emancipatory practical or theoretical knowledge has to get access to it, and not just those who have a qualifying high school diploma and wealthy parents. Which is the current situation. The working-men's-club movement and the adult education center are just two examples that stand athwart the whole nonsense about Clusters of Excellence and elite universities. Creating different desires, desires for radically democratic practices and structures: that is something for which the cultural field would be a suitable place, because it lends itself to the articulation of wishes located at the center of social change. And I think that is roughly the conclusion at which we arrive when we debate "educational turns" and such. By contrast, little has happened in a structural sense, or by way of an "everyone is an expert" movement. So the small circles practicing alternative knowledge-production remain elite structures, if we do not engage in constituting

inclusive conditions and openings for diverse actors and actions.

PS: To the extent that there is no way to do this without formalized structures backed by the state, one alternative to learning in institutions that might be interesting is a kind of mentoring program that would appeal to a great variety of people, both as teachers and as students. Such a program might do more to render the distinction between praxis and theory obsolete, or rather, make it a matter of context-specific needs.

MvO: Describing the city or even society as "our university" in order to render visible that the most diverse actors and cultures of knowledge interact and cooperate here might be a potential point of departure, allowing us to reflect much more on the contemporary composition of knowledge and culture and to operate in the actual relations of production.

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Materials of "Halle School of Common Property" at "Common Property - Allgemeingut," 6th Werkleitz Biennale Halle, 2004.

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PS: In any case, it is unacceptable that the institutions, no matter whether museums or universities, use our reputations and our knowledge—which we have worked for years to create in projects we have invented ourselves, in free and often massively underfinanced projects—to bolster their profiles by, say, employing us for a few years; that they do not nearly offer us the conditions we would need to continue our work with comparable intensity; or that they ultimately deny that we have the qualifications we actually have. At the same time, it is also becoming clear that the thoroughly rationalized enterprises of the "cultural" and "educational industries," designed to produce excellence in the most efficient way, have lost the capacity for anything but administration and marketing, and are thus becoming ever more dependent on precarized cultural producers and knowledge workers. This is exactly the point at which we need new organizations of our own that exert influence to ensure that, for example, the "reputational benefit" the institutions increasingly extract for their own internal expansion flows back into our projects and networks. For instance, we must form pools through which institutions can access our knowledge, our experience or reputation, but only receive it on loan and on our conditions; through which a share of all honorariums, project grants, royalties, and revenues flows into a communal fund that will provide independent financing for our research and our projects and, if need be, our livelihoods. So not another debate over "copyrights" or "intellectual property"—these are the strategies of the factory owners in the "creative industries." Instead, toward greater solidarity, communal soup kitchens, and culture clubs. Knowledge producers of all disciplines, unite!

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Translated from the German by Gerrit Jackson.

Fahim Amir is a Viennese theoretician and cultural producer with Afghan origins. Recently (2006/2007) he worked as dramatic adviser of spiel:platz at the dietheater Vienna. Here and elsewhere he realized artistic, theoretical, and post-disciplinary projects on self-organization and critique of society in contemporary artistic and cultural productions. He was guest professor in the class for post-conceptual arts practices at the Academy of Fine Arts (2005/2006). During this time, he worked on post-operaistic approaches, theories of governmentality, post- and neo-marxism. He is involved in various collaborative practices in the field of art, theory, and culture.

Eva Egermann is an artist based in Vienna. She is interested in aesthetic, theoretical and political practices that are aimed at disrupting normative regimes, and forms between artistic formats, social spatialization, and experimental text production. She has been working in various media and collectives, as in the framework of the Manoa Free University (**http://www.manoafreeuniversity.org**), the group GirlsOnHorses, within the magazine *MALMOE* (**www.malmoe.org**), or other individual collaborations. She is currently Assistant Professor at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna. Together with Anna Pritz she edited the two Publications *School Works* and *Class Works* in 2009 about pedagogical, artistic, and research practice. Together with Elke Krasny she is organizing the exhibition project "2 or 3 things we've learned, Intersections of Art, Pedagogy and Protest" that opens in September 2010 at the IG Bildende Kunst Gallery (**www.igbildendekunst.at**) in Vienna.

Marion von Osten works with curatorial, artistic and theoretical approaches that converge through the medium of exhibitions, installations, video and text productions, lecture performances, conferences, and film programs. Her main research interests concern the working conditions of cultural production in post-colonial societies, technologies of the self, and the governance of mobility. She is a founding member of Labor k3000, kpD (kleines post-fordistisches Drama), and the Center for Post-Colonial Knowledge and Culture, Berlin.

Peter Spillmann is an artist, researcher, and curator. He is a founding member of the media art collective Labor

k3000 Zurich and the Center for Post-Colonial Knowledge and Culture, Berlin. Since 2006 he has been lecturer at the University of Applied Science and Arts, Lucerne. Among his latest projects are: “This-was-tomorrow.net” (2008-2010, Haus der Kulturen der Welt Berlin/ MACBA Barcelona / Museum Sztuki Wasaw), “Der Park” (2007, Kunstraum Lakeside Klagenfurt and MigMap), “Governing Migration” (2004-6), and “Projekt Migration” (Kölnischer Kunstverein).

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The *Kritische und Solidarische Universität* , or KriSU; see http://krisu.noblogs.org/ .

Sebastian Lütgert

Down and Out in All the Wrong Places (Berlin 2010)

I. Auguststraße

When I was asked to write about "Berlin in the nineties," the quest for the "postcapitalist self," and the idea of "queering the economy," my gut idea was to contribute a text titled "How We Fucked It All Up." But I soon realized that in this particular context, the term "we" was rather problematic, and might have further confused a discussion that seemed to me quite conceptually precarious already. This context is not just the highly heterogeneous mesh of critical initiatives in and around art and politics as they existed in Berlin around 1995 (whose highest virtue, in retrospect, may have been their fierce mutual ignorance), but also the Berlin Biennale of 2010, and the fuzzy sense of place, time, and bedfellowship it seems to generate among its participants and audiences. So I decided to bet on the first-person singular with the hope that this person is not so deeply invested in the history that is being rewritten here.

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II. Kronenstraße

I moved to Berlin in early 1994. Even though friends who came earlier, whether in 1979 or 1991, would have argued that everything was over by then, Ariane Müller, who moved in one year later, recently reminded me that it was still a period in which one would never leave the city for more then ten days, since so much was happening that it would have been impossible to catch up on any of it. And I realized that this was an accurate description, not just a shared illusion, since not only did I recall having the exact same impression, but I also knew that I didn't know her back then, and was doing entirely unrelated things in completely different fields. I only realized much later that I had been surrounded by artists the whole time, but had simply mistaken them for people running bars, since, after all, that's what most of them were doing. It didn't take long to develop a precise and irreversible sense of what a club should be like. The only door policy was finding the door, audiences were mostly domestic and regular, the producer/consumer hierarchy had been flattened to the difference in height between a bar and a bar stool, a popular misreading of Deleuze and Guattari had led to the abolishment of all stages, and while one would rarely enter a conversation that didn't go somewhere consequential, there was hardly any business to be done, since what was being sought and offered in these places was transparency, much more than distinction.

III. Mauerstraße

I've thought about this configuration a great deal recently, when thinking about cities in Southern and Western Asia, the few artist collectives there, the even more unlikely

non-elitist and self-organized ones, the rare attempts at creating spaces just for themselves, the instant international recognition they get from curators, the predictable way in which the first biennial usually tears them apart, the irreversible centrifugal energy when they partition (typically along the lines of class, caste, gender, or passport) into frequent and not-so-frequent flyers, and how fortunate, in contrast, the situation had been in Berlin in the nineties, when a few people got a bit of time, and space, to just find out and repeat and refine what they were doing, on their own terms. (As Godard said about the Nouvelle Vague: We were just three or four people who spoke with each other, but that was enough to make a difference, to give us a lead of about half a year, and this lead we would always retain.) Not only were there no curators, there wasn't even any press yet. Word had it that pop music and youth culture were dead, but the German feuilletons had so far been unsuccessful in locating their corpses. Those were the days, and the crackers at Universal weren't even playing yet.

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IV. Unter den Linden

Like many West Germans, I had moved to Berlin to "go to university," which didn't mean to go to university much, and I never went back after the student strike of 1997–98, when my fellow students turned from ghosts into zombies, proudly mobilizing what they thought were their memories of past revolts, while all they had in mind was to demand more efficiency from the collapsing educational bureaucracies. This was at a time when Pisa and Bologna were just cities in Italy. I spent half a semester trying to write a text that would top "On the Poverty of Student Life," and then, since getting anything larger than an MP3 online was still not practical, went on to produce a three-hour VHS version of "The Society of the Spectacle," in full ignorance of the original film. While, in retrospect, the remake included a number of close matches, and maybe even the occasional improvement, I don't feel much nostalgia for the futile exercises of the pre-Napster era. The internet was slowly getting better (even though everyone was busy lamenting the sellout to the dot-coms), Nettime had become the most splendid academic ad-hoc network on the face of the planet, and with regards to local brick-and-mortar institutions, there were still enough bars, clubs, and storefronts that no university would have had the means to compete with them.

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V. Zionskirchstraße

In the mid-nineties, I moved from Schöneberg to Prenzlauer Berg to Mitte, and the streets on which fifteen years later Germany's most admired moms would form Europe's most famous pram jams were still grey and deserted. The typical occupancy of a residential house consisted of alcoholics on the bottom floor, students up to the third, and old couples on the fourth, eagerly awaiting their displacement to suburban housing blocks with functioning elevators. The general mood was decidedly pre-capitalist, and it was a widely held belief that what Berlin was experiencing was not gentrification, but gentrification envy. When the first Charlottenburgers set foot in the eastern districts, and Prenzlauer Berg's very first young mother was spotted navigating a stroller filled with fresh vegetables around the holes in the pavement, their appearance was regarded as a curiosity, even though it was clear that they were harbingers of the future, and that in the long run, the dead-end logic of nostalgia would take over. What most young West Germans remember about old East Berlin are endless winters, coal heaters, toilets on the stairs, phone booths on the street corner, and supermarkets filled with nothing but beer, and still today, one can occasionally see them standing on their rooftop terraces, assuming a pose in which they resemble their grandfathers reminiscing about World War II, pointing at the surrounding neighborhoods, and proclaiming: This was all ours!

VI. Sebastianstraße

The continuous demand for authentic accounts from post-Wall Berlin tends to obscure the fact that "Berlin in the nineties" forms part of a larger cyclical development, and that its appellation performs a specific function within that cycle. There is also "Berlin in the eighties" and "Berlin in the seventies," or, to be more precise, a progression, or regression, that moves from Charlottenburg to Kreuzberg to Mitte, with Schöneberg and Friedrichshain as transitions. And if we zoom in closer, we can make out a variety of different camps as they move towards, and past, their very own mythical ending points (the commodification of heroin, the death of Klaus-Jürgen Rattay, the fall of the Wall, the eviction from Mainzer Straße, the 1995 Venice Biennale). When evoking memories of Mitte in the nineties, one should be careful not to reconstruct as a continuation, evolution, or refinement of the eighties in Kreuzberg what was for many, not just on a symbolic level, their erasure. Nor should it be conveniently ignored that while the inhabitants of Kreuzberg had succeeded in creating resilient critical infrastructure and sustainable autonomous economies, the population of Mitte almost completely failed at that, despite some rather ambitious attempts. One might try to argue that the highway intersection that would have been Kreuzberg in 1980, just like the high-rise ghetto that would have been Friedrichshain in 1990, never made much sense

economically, while turning Mitte into a shopping mall by 2010 did. But this argument doesn't take into account that the perceived economic potential of specific instances of city redevelopment is often a direct result of the means that are brought forward against them. Even the much-lamented "strategy" of recuperation through co-optation is a messier process than most of its critics believe, as it will usually be initiated as a very last resort, and may face stronger resistance among other recuperating forces than from their opponents.

VII. Oranienplatz

If the quest for less capitalism, or at least fewer capitalist subjectivities, means not just to make forward-looking statements, but also to catalogue what has been done, to make a map and a graph of intensities, then I'm actually pretty certain—though I have to derive my estimate from a relatively small number of data points that are mostly just short and distorted blips of third-hand knowledge acquired from very untrustworthy sources—that with regards to the art of not being governed that much, Berlin peaked between 1980 and 1982. Even though it has to be acknowledged that a mostly deserted inner-city district came into view ten years later behind the fallen Wall, where it was practically impossible to establish ownership of property. After all, the Police were driving around in Ladas, and the first impression among early explorers of this district must have been of not being governed at all. This was less of an art, though, and more of a gift, and turned out to share a couple of blind spots with the surrounding frenzy of German reunification concerning the redistribution of property. Once the "Jewish Community" of Berlin had been reconstructed as a few blocks of kosher but judenfrei Disneyland, and West Berlin's anti-squatter police had established a rudimentary understanding of their rules of engagement, most property disputes could be settled consensually, among equals. Even though this process sometimes took a bit longer than initially expected.

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VIII. Chausseestraße

In 1997, one could make out a general consensus (among those who had moved to East Berlin in the previous five years) that the party was about to be over. Potsdamer Platz was going up, the federal government was coming in, and both Hamburg and Cologne had given up their resistance, surrendered to their fate, and were relocating their critical infrastructure to Berlin. (Only Frankfurters came without a sense of defeat. To figure out why is left as an exercise for the reader.) But while the city stood in awe, anticipating the heavily promoted "rebirth of a metropolis," the new millennium announced itself with the burst of the dot-com bubble and the collapse of the New Economy, tightly followed by the disintegration of the old economy, the banking scandal, the city's indefinite bankruptcy and its hasty rebranding as "poor but sexy" (which may have been the closest to "post-capitalist" and "queer" that the city's popular self-perception could have ever become). But while the prospect of yet another decade of "interim use" of empty office buildings, this time equipped with state-of-the-art facilities, sent waves of joy throughout the cultural sector, the rules of the game were slowly beginning to change. Just as it needed a Social Democrat/Green federal government to dismantle the German welfare state, it took a Social Democrat/Socialist city senate to finally abolish the planned economy that, since World War II, had been practiced in both halves of the city. As the long-bankrupt city sold off massive amounts of formerly affordable housing to soon-to-be-bankrupt pension funds, the economically backward parts of the population began to realize that they were actors in a market too (even though in that market a pension plan had become, essentially, a bet on losing one's own home). And ironically, by officially marketing its poverty as sexiness, Berlin had tapped a gold mine. The recent explosion of low-end tourism may in fact be the first market-driven boom cycle that any Berliner alive today has ever witnessed.

IX. Saatwinkler Damm

Today's situation has been analyzed with varying depths of field, but its basic parameters should be evident not only to long-time residents, but to the most casual observers. While half of the Western European middle class under age 35 seems to be roaming the streets of Berlin, busy figuring out if they are on holiday or staying, renting or buying, joining the creative industries or just spending money (establishing social norms and cultural habits in which I find processes of "queering" and their very opposite increasingly difficult to distinguish), most of the people I would want to be in a continuous conversation with only have a rather discontinuous presence in the city, since the infamous Berlin Economy has made them take on jobs or teaching positions in the exact same places on the European periphery from which the exodus to Berlin is originating. And of course, I haven't been around here that much either, and have caught myself more than once, lately, walking home at night after a long absence, thinking for a moment how convenient it is that my hotel is in such a central location. Still, friends who come to Berlin from faraway places keep on insisting that anything cultural here still attracts the best audiences in the world, and, in fact, it can be astounding to return to a city where one may still occasionally encounter, at 2 a.m. and in the most unlikely locations, hundreds of people with enough time on their hands to be discussing art or politics, without necessarily having any personal investment in either.

X. Rosa-Luxemburg-Straße

After sixteen years in Berlin, I have no job, tax number, welfare benefits, pension plan, health insurance, credit card, savings, or functioning mailbox. Some of it happened by choice, some more by accident, and while it wouldn't be too hard to lay out a postcapitalist politics in which most of these missing achievements would appear as the fortunate and desirable results of a set of precisely defined strategies, I'm still aware of the fact that whenever an item on the list becomes critical, it typically presents itself as the individual disaster that is capitalism, rather than the collective crisis that would get anyone beyond it. This may be due to the fact that most of the relations I maintain, and the networks I participate in, would have to be described as either "private" or "professional," and not as "political," however politicized this semi-public privacy or half-amateurish professionalism may appear to its respective protagonists. I'm relatively sure that this is a common problem, and that the root cause of most people's existential panic when they reflect on their own biographies is that they have zero friends with whom they would have entered binding agreements to abolish the capitalist mode of production. Yet in a very practical sense, being relatively unattached to the state and its organs, while still being thrown cultural funding in varying quantities and irregular intervals, makes one surprisingly mobile. This can be dismissed as another essential requirement of our post-Fordist age, but comes, at least for holders of European passports, with the privilege of being offered some occasions to temporarily decenter one's most general perception of things. The most hopeless aspect of European politics is the point of view (not the political orientation, but the perspective on the world) of its protagonists.

XI. Kottbusser Tor

Over the past few years, I have partially outsourced myself to Bombay, which is not necessarily the most welcoming city in the world, and may have seen better times, but through its sheer density still manages to provide its inhabitants with a faint sense of the beauty that can arise from collectivity (even if through its negative aspects, the brutality and corruption that usually arise). Having seen different flavors of misery, I think one should be very reluctant to claim, or make arguments based on the assumption, that things are always more miserable elsewhere. German welfare, aptly named after a corrupt union leader (Peter Hartz), comes with drinking water, a separate pipe for the toilet, and a thoroughly perfected form of sensory deprivation that the majority of the eight million slum dwellers of Bombay would not want to endure for very long. A dense social fabric creates its specific needs and habits, and they tend to be extremely hard to break, so that even in Bombay—one of the most rapidly changing cities in the world, whose permanent destruction is carried out with breathtaking efficiency—the relocation of the poor to the periphery is expected to take much longer than in Berlin, despite memories of individual rights and collective struggles, and a long history of fuckups and delays in implementing capitalism. At the same time, one should be just as reluctant to claim or build one's politics on some fictitious common ground among the multitudes of the disenfranchised and unmodernizable, since beyond their fanatic devotion to their respective national sports, they may only converge over their deep resentment of everything foreign, glamorous, or just remotely cosmopolitan.

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XII. Kastanienallee

Since, for many Europeans, Dubai, Delhi, or Shanghai have replaced New York or Los Angeles as the primary destinations of their educational journeys, some of them have come to acknowledge that while what they are confronted with in these places no longer looks like the capitalism they used to know, the entirely different set of differences it produces seems to render their notions of "post-capitalist selves" all the more precarious. Even if they have given up on the idea of "selves," and are on the quest for post-capitalist others, they might be looking for them in all the wrong places. As a friend from Bombay once warned me:

> You're here because you're subculture. Otherwise, you wouldn't have come. And I'm talking to you because I'm high culture. If I weren't, we wouldn't have met. Now we can team up and try to find some subculture here, but if we find it, which we most certainly won't, we'd probably both wish that we hadn't.

Personally, I have a growing suspicion that what we commonly call post-capitalism is still as capitalist as post-socialism is socialist or post-colonialism colonialist (the latter should be instantly evident to anyone who has ever been on the receiving end of the "international collaborations" or "intercultural exchanges" that governments, NGOs, and philanthropists have devised for the "developing nations"), and may be just a more endangered, inconsistent, radicalized, and efficient form of capitalism (to call it "queer capitalism" might still be too polemical).

XIII. Sophienstraße

I have never used the word "queer" much, having disregarded it as a fashion phenomenon, for being most

popular among the straight and the square. Just like some people choose to live on the edge of a slum, even though they could afford a better place, which may seem strange until one realizes that they are going through a phase of investment, that their straightness has to pass through something queer in order to come out even straighter. (This edge of the slum, and who would ever try to see more than the edge, is also where the slum looks most miserable.) If "queer," as a verb, simply refers to various practices of "ontological reframing," the acknowledgement of individual constitutions that can no longer be captured by identity, and collective processes that escape the dominant mode of production, then I may be able to relate to it. But when "queer," as a verb, comes in the form of an imperative, it seems to call for a more refined perception of difference rather than for improvements in its production, and the former appears to often be coupled with the secret or outspoken desire to relegate the latter to a determinedly nondeterministic universe of hives, flocks, swarms, and molecules (this may well be another fashion phenomenon). But that's not where I live, or would ever want to, and I would insist, when making these maps and timelines of what escapes, upon a minimum of causality and historicity. I am where I am by choice, not necessarily mine, but maybe the choice of a few songwriters who forty years ago wrote a couple of songs that twenty years ago I spent a few months listening to, in combination with one or two books that made me read fifty more. I have always found the concept of "points of no return" much more appropriate than the idea of "queering," and even though I see that it has specific disadvantages (the lone heroism of punctuation, the imminent danger of getting lost), the commitment to irreversibility that it entails not only makes it less susceptible to commodification or silent corruption, but also, and more importantly, provides a somewhat meaningful and stable definition of "post." Which could be useful, just as it dawns upon us that the most advanced form of capitalism may be the one that is the most tightly interlaced with the fluctuating pathways of allegedly post-capitalist selves.

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XIV. Nollendorfplatz

It must be noted that not too many of the above-mentioned points of no return would have offered themselves up without the secret cultural dominance of the minoritarian Left in the eighties, and the autonomous infrastructure it had at its disposal. It was always evident, even in the most conservative surroundings, that the most attractive others were to be found, or to be seduced, by moving to the most radical position on the Left. And while most infrastructure has been lost since then, and most secret knowledge, or cultural agency, has long dissolved into the mainstream, the basic logic of seduction through radical anti-capitalism turned out to be astonishingly resilient. And it was probably the strongest asset of the radical minorities (after all, one doesn't fall out of love with capitalism through movies, books, and music alone), and the one that would always allow it to keep the majoritarian, organized, traditionally "political" Left at a distance. In the course of the last twenty years, though, it has become obvious that we're looking at a transient phenomenon that was part of a rather specific historical configuration (the "age of youth," postwar capitalism's production of an overeducated but underemployed generation with disposable income and a refined interest in cultural products and social relations that promised to transcend their own commodity form), and cannot be generalized across time and space.

XV. Brunnenstraße

The question of infrastructure that allows for escape, and of institutions that provide the requisite seductive qualities, still remains. Since radical political movements, and what they maintain as their "culture," have lost their momentum, many hopes seem to rest on the arts. At the same time I can sense, among many of my non-artist friends, a well-established hatred of the arts, profound enough to remain relatively constant through the recent cycles of boom and bust. There may be various reasons for this. Maybe the last thing in art history they took notice of were the Situationists, and they're stuck with an unqueered Hegelian notion of the arts and their abolishment, such that their continuation must be majorly irritating. Or they might perceive contemporary art as just another hostile business, the sister sector of real estate and mass tourism, at the forefront of "global cultural asset management," which wouldn't be all that wrong. If it turned out to be mere resentment of its escapist tendencies, the mildly decadent reality of international flights, free dinners, and surplus value created out of thin air, then we might have a problem. What I personally resent, as it marks an irreversible political shift, much like the fall of the Wall, is the transition from music to art as the core cultural coordinate system of German society. Music, as Leitkultur, was democratic. The arts are feudal. If you dropped out of school in a provincial town, you still had access to the system of music. The system of the arts doesn't even grant access to the majority of Berlin art students. And while the rapidly changing macroeconomic conditions make it increasingly attractive to seek refuge among the entourage of kings, collectors, and gallerists, rather than to depend on the state, or its abolishment, it's even obvious to most of its secret admirers that feudalism doesn't scale very well.

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XVI. Invalidenstraße

Within its limited scope, though, the system of the arts has, over the last decade, provided a series of openings through which it was able to not only attract a large number of selves, but also successfully absorb extensive slices of neighboring fields, most notably in the former educational sector. And while, thankfully, you still don't need a PhD to participate in a biennial, the fact that the first biennials are getting into the business of granting PhDs has to be read as a glaring symptom of crisis. Most generally, a system that accelerates its rate of expansion and absorption to a point where its entire functioning becomes dominated by, and dependent on, the imperative to radically open, will self-destruct rather promptly. In this context, it is relatively unsurprising that, among my artist friends, there seems to be an increasing pressure to produce less art and undertake more curatorial activities. Since what makes the figure of the curator so attractive (as a role model, it has long surpassed the figure of the artist in desirability) is the fact that while the work of the artist, as much as it has been reduced to communication (the establishment and maintenance of a continuous presence on Gmail and Skype), still has to include the occasional production of art, the work of the curator promises to consist of nothing but communication. And this widespread desire to produce less and network more can't be so easily dismissed as a matter of ideological confusion, since the crisis it articulates, not just in the arts, is an actual and material one.

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XVII. Gendarmenmarkt

The macroeconomic and macropolitical developments of the last two or three years are hard to ignore, and call for a major re-evaluation of the microeconomic and micropolitical strategies and practices that we understand as "postcapitalist" or "queer." We are beginning to realize that we may actually see the end of capitalism as we knew it, not just at its peripheries, but also at its core, and not just in our lifetime, but likely in the coming decade. But just as it is conveniently claimed that the current financial system is "beyond anyone's understanding," there is a lack of descriptive or predictive concepts for the political formations that will emerge. As capital in its most recent stage—as a global pyramid scheme of debt and bailouts that is deemed "too big to fail"—is in the process of reducing the political sovereignty of most nation-states to merely ceremonial functions, the political reassessment (if not ontological reframing) taking place in the "developed world" offers a view to a future that looks much more post-democratic than it looks post-capitalist. With regards to the art of not being governed that much, the declining influence of national governments and democratic institutions, and the increasing difficulty they encounter in justifying their existence, may appear beneficial. Yet it seems more than likely that the impending collapse of a number of global systems and networks is going to thoroughly and lastingly stratify the queer or post-capitalist subjectivities as we knew them, since hardly any of them have ever ceased to be middle class, however precarious their material existence may have become. As capitalism manages to still provide a minimum of welfare and mobility to some of its participants, they remain invested in the delay, rather than the acceleration, of its decline. Most of the subjectivities in question still see the world from Europe, after all.

XVIII. Kantstraße

One might still ask what's to be done. If you can't subvert an empire whose population draws no immediate benefit from any redistribution of wealth other than the one that is currently taking place, you may still be able to crack the fortress that shields its inhabitants from a shift in population growth that will inevitably shake the fundaments of their lives. (Europeans tend to condemn their borders in solidarity with non-European migrants, but in the long run, this relationship will reverse. Those outside the fortress will have the privilege of forgiveness. Those inside won't.) If you are a citizen of the Schengen subcontinent, you can do two things, both of which involve making use of the one biopolitical weapon you have been equipped with: your passport. Either get married so that someone else can get in, even if it's just for a temporary change of perspective; or quit and desert your compatriots, as their biological clocks keep ticking in fearful but eager anticipation of the detonation of the demographic bomb. Collective suicide is not an option. Still, if you set out to be done with Europe, there is an imminent danger that you will remain caught within the schizophrenic logic of a post-capitalist self, and doomed to relive the farce of European subjectivity, its quest for an exit, as yet another Greek tragedy. What you might need most urgently, in order to complement the anti-Oedipus, would be the anti-Midas, since wherever you're going to end up, you won't want to forever remain a member of the classes that turn everything they touch into shopping districts.

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XIX. Rosenthaler Platz

And finally, since Guy Debord ("The Sick Planet," 1971) and the Club of Rome ("The Limits of Growth," 1972) published their reports on the final frontier of the market economy, we know that we are living in a stage of capitalism that produces, above all, a rapidly accelerating ecological disaster of planetary scope, which threatens to preempt any meaningful notion of "post-capitalism" by making it synonymous with global apocalypse. It will be

crucial to reclaim the question of ecology from the post-conservative, post-colonial movements that have monopolized it for the last thirty years and turned it into a matter of "having borrowed the planet from our children," as it became popular among the children of the capitalist elite whose prospects of future profits capitalism had begun to undermine. The question of ecology is, essentially, the question of pollution and waste, and almost all aspects of today's pollution of the environment and waste of its resources are the direct result of the most fundamental type of waste that the capitalist mode of production produces, which is the waste of time. Not only does the waste of time pollute the environment, it also produces the forms of subjectivation that are required to inhabit a world of waste as one's natural habitat. Cars don't primarily pollute by producing carbon dioxide, but by producing streets, and separation. Fatal diseases don't just spread with the pollution of water, but with its commodification. Most emissions remain harmless until they can be traded on a global market. And so on, the list of basic banalities that must remain complete mysteries is long and gets longer, as long as the dominant ideology of "ecological consciousness" means to vigilantly defend some inconvenient truths, be it the greenhouse effect or the survival of the fittest, while conveniently remaining in denial of capitalism.

XX. Platz der Vereinten Nationen

When I had the immense privilege of watching Europe from the outside as it disappeared under a volcanic cloud—an "ash signal" from one of the first post-capitalist microstates in the region, a people who chose to be relegated to the status of subsistence fishers rather than sell out to the failing financial institutions of the European Union, which were then scrambling to protect their investments in the failing airlines (I heard that the streets of Berlin were almost deserted, while the sky over the city was clear for the first time)—I couldn't help but smile. What had become conceivable again was the planet, as something other than the globe of the capitalist market, the toxic remainder of capitalist production, or the domesticated natural reserve of capitalist ecology. There's more to climate change than global warming, fear of frequent flying, or the fear among most Europeans that their impending failure to sell another hundred million oh-so-eco-friendly cars to China will immediately result in a hundred million drowning or starving Bangladeshis. None of whom, of course, they have ever met or spoken to—whether out of political principle or as a simple matter of politeness—in order to discover the possibility that they could be doing just fine, just like all the other imaginary others of the capitalist self, and that the climate might just as well change in their favor.

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Section of the wall turned into a billboard, photo: Dennis Papazian, Berlin, 1990.

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X

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Antke Engel

Desire for/within Economic Transformation

With *The End of Capitalism (As We Knew It)* (1996), J. K. Gibson-Graham won the hearts of many socialist, post-socialist, and queer-feminist readers.[1] The book's main argument is that new possibilities for economic transformation will arise once we no longer understand capitalism as a monolithic entity or as covering the whole range of existing economic practices. The argument is taken up again in the more recent book *A Postcapitalist Politics*: "As we begin to conceptualize contingent relationships where invariant logics once reigned, the economy loses its character as an asocial body in lawful motion and instead becomes a space of recognition and negotiation."[2] Gibson-Graham work systematically to establish the conditions for thinking through economy by other means, for developing *other* economies. In order to do so they combine a Foucauldian approach that focuses on self-technologies as a means of reproducing and/or transforming power relations and modes of governance, with "a counter-hegemonic project of constructing 'other' economies."[3]

Three elements are decisive for what they call "a politics of possibilities"; the three elements are thoroughly intertwined, and yet each may also become a point of entry for far-reaching, even global processes of transformation. First of all, they propose developing new forms of thinking, and, accordingly, a new economic language. They present this as working on the level of the political imaginary to invent a language of economic difference:

> A capitalocentric discourse condenses economic difference, fusing the variety of noncapitalist economic activities into a unity in which meaning is anchored to capitalist identity. Our language politics is aimed at fostering conditions under which images and enactments of economic diversity . . . might stop circulating around capitalism, stop being evaluated with respect to capitalism, and stop being seen as deviant or exotic or excentric—departures from the norm.[4]

Second, Gibson-Graham articulate "self-cultivation" as a means of encouraging forms of subjectivity that would be open to trying new economic practices: "If we want other worlds and other economies, how do we make ourselves a condition of possibility for their emergence?"[5] Consequently, the third element is "the collaborative pursuit of economic experimentation."[6]

This combination of anticipatory imagination, language politics, and everyday practices incites a means of imagining and enacting a postcapitalist politics. It constitutes space for a heterogeneity of economic practices, which do not take the logic of capital and maximizing profit for granted, and does not present them

as inescapable. Collective practices, community economy, and the lately popular notion of the commons are central to Gibson-Graham's reflections on—and social experiences of—developing economic alternatives. Yet they conspicuously insist on aiming for socioeconomic and political practices that resist an ideal of sameness or homogeneity. Instead, they understand community as a form of Jean-Luc Nancy's "being-in-common":

> In constructing a discourse and practice of the community economy, what if we were to resist the pull of the *sameness* or *commonness* of economic being and instead focus on a notion of economic *being-in-common*? That is, rather than thinking in terms of the common properties of an ideal economic organization or an ideal community economy, we might think of the being-in-common of economic subjects and of all possible and potential economic forms.[7]

Practices of being-in-common create space for difference, for a potentially conflictual heterogeneity defined by complex interdependencies. A notion of the social, which encounters freedom in relationality, is theoretically indebted to Louis Althusser's concept of overdetermination. Explaining the use of this concept in detail in *The End of Capitalism*, Gibson-Graham explain that building an understanding of society on the thesis of overdetermination means that everything is seen as effected and effecting—any cause must necessarily also be an effect at the same time. The authors underline that this leads to a complex dynamic in which power relations cannot be isolated from one another, with no all-encompassing "truth" with which to effectively distinguish them. Any image of society depends on the perspective one takes, and the perspective one takes influences what one sees. Thus, academic as well as political practice, research, socioeconomic experimentation, or cultural and artistic work gain from a historically contextualized analysis that does not pretend to discover a single truth or present a universal solution.[8]

Overdetermination is a tool for extending models of centralized power—whether an economistic view on capitalism or an androcentric view on patriarchy. Accordingly, for Gibson-Graham the project of diverse economies is always already and inherently intertwined with working, reworking, and transforming multiple relations of power and domination, including racist, sexist, and heteronormative regimes. Furthermore, they even insist that, "successful political innovation . . . requires an entirely new relation to power. It will need to escape power, go beyond it, obliterate it, transform it."[9] Although they refer explicitly to Michel Foucault, they somehow undermine his all-encompassing notion of power by reactivating the notion of liberation. Via theories of hegemony, a Marxist heritage finds its way into their thinking. Here they refer to Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, who insist that power relations are not simply given, but only exist when being politically articulated and consensually agreed upon by a wide range of people.[10] Thus the unchallenged monopoly of capitalism only exists as long as people agree to take its supposedly inescapable power for granted. However, to counter the phantasmatic whole of capitalism does not necessarily mean to present a singular alternative, but to engage in ongoing struggles over recognition and resources, over truth defined by contingency:

> If politics is a process of transformation instituted by taking decisions on an ultimately undecidable terrain, a politics of possibility rests on an enlarged space of decision and a vision that the world is not governed by some abstract commanding force or global sovereignty. This does not preclude sedimentations of practice that have an aura of durability and the look of "structures," or routinized rhythms that have an appearance of reliability and the feel of "reproductive dynamics." It is, rather, to question the claims of truth and universality that accompany any ontological rigidity and to render these claims projects for empirical investigation and theoretical re-visioning. Our practice of thinking widens the scope of possibility by opening up each observed relationship to examination for its contingencies and each theoretical analysis for its inherent vulnerability and act of commitment.[11]

The Desire for Queering Capitalism

Giving up on notions of universality, truth, and rigid identities is sometimes referred to as a practice of "queering," connected to the notion of desire. However, queering and desire are never explicitly linked. Queer theory is presented as a politics of language and a technique of rereading rather than of taking part in the "process of 'resubjectivation'—the mobilization and transformation of desires, the cultivation of capacities, and the making of new identifications."[12] "Queering" comes up in the context of "reading for difference rather than dominance," a practice that Gibson-Graham present as a tool "to queer economy."[13] Desire, however, appears as a promising force in all three fields of practice previously mentioned: it enables imagining things otherwise, as well as "economic experimentation" and the engagement in "new technologies of the self."[14] Yet even though the concept of desire continuously escorts the reader through the text, and is central to Gibson-Graham's understanding of transformative processes, the concept remains surprisingly vague and under-theorized. Thus the question of how queering and desire converge remains an open one. Does desire automatically produce queerness

Jakob Lena Knebl, Tools, 2009, photo:heidi harsieber; copyright: artist.

or processes of queering? Should we consider some special kind of queer desire and, if so, would such a desire also then queer economy? Or would Gibson-Graham suggest that the queering of desire and the queering of economy are mutually constitutive and mutually dependent?

It is hard to argue that desire is queer in and of itself, that there is something ontologically queer in desire. Much critique has been developed from queer-feminist perspectives showing how phallocentric and heteronormative desires contribute to installing hierarchies and inequalities, even grounding violent practices—a critique elaborated upon in detail by Gibson-Graham when they deconstruct the image of capitalist economy as an impenetrable body.[15] I would therefore insist that there is no queering of economy without a queering of desire. What I would like to explore in the following concerns whether some kind of queering of desire has already taken place or is at work implicitly in Gibson-Graham's approach. This will allow me to ask a second question: what is the role of desire in constituting new forms of community, society, and global social relations that function according to a logic of being-in-common rather than commonness per se?

Alekos Hofstetter, Slump, 2002. Gouache on paper mounted on wood, 80 x 103 cm.

I ask these questions against the backdrop of queer theory in general, and in particular of having co-organized a conference on economy and sexuality. Heteronormativity and desire are categories central to queer theory. The former provides an analytical tool used to explain how heterosexuality and the rigid binary distinction of gender become naturalized and reproduced as social norms. As such, they regulate subjectivities, social relationships, and institutions, and install hierarchies.[16] The latter, desire, provides for re-articulations of heteronormativity, opening up an anticipatory and transformative dimension. Feminist and queer approaches to desire not only challenge the heterosexual norm and the premise of binary gender difference, but also point to the sociopolitical productivity of desire.[17] Against this backdrop, "Desiring Just Economies / Just Economies of Desire," an international conference to be held in Berlin in June 2010, seeks to explore how desire not only sustains current economies, but also carries the potential for inciting new forms of understanding and "doing" economy.[18] The organizers propose to focus on the notion of desire as a tool to explore the sexual dimension of economy as much as the economic dimension of sexuality. To what extent can the pursuit of economic and sexual justice be made to coincide when economy is queered by desire? J. K. Gibson-Graham are major sources and inspirations for this conference, which is, as is this article, an attempt to connect with their project of thinking against "the view that anything new would not work."[19]

For Gibson-Graham, the concept of desire is not sexualized. Although they analyze how sexual imagery and imagination organize economic discourse and practice, desire is invoked mainly with more general connotations of wishing, longing, or striving. It is sometimes associated with pleasure, libidinal investment, or seduction, but more often manifests as a desire for "noncapitalism" or a desire to be part of a community economy.[20] What particularly interests me about their concept of desire concerns its—paradoxical—presentation as a primarily conservative force that keeps people in their place and impedes the emergence of daring new forms of being or acting, while simultaneously also carrying the potential of inciting "an interest in unpredictability, contingency, experimentation, or even an attachment to the limit of understanding and the possibilities of escape."[21] This paradox—when played out as a productive tension—holds the promise of linking Foucault's insights into desire as a product of historical power/knowledge with a Deleuzoguattarian understanding of desire as movement and becoming.[22] As such, I would argue that desire allows the envisioning and enacting of a "politics of possibility" while acknowledging the normative or violent conditions of the present. However, this openness to paradox is sometimes countered by another tendency, of installing a clear-cut distinction between repression and liberation, one that leads to a promise of liberating desire from being "stalemated in a fixation."[23] I find this rather problematic, however, because it suggests a space where neither power relations nor conflict nor violence need to be dealt with.

It therefore seems most important to emphasize those moments in Gibson-Graham that underline the necessity of dealing with and socially organizing "negotiation, struggle, uncertainty, ambivalence, disappointment" rather than solely focusing on "friendliness, trust, conviviality, and companionable connection."[24] Even as I introduce this insistence on thinking of transformation as

René Magritte, Par un belle fin dapres midi, 1964, gouache on paper, 36x54.5 cm.

a power struggle—although a pleasurable one—I would still like to point out the promising potential of Gibson-Graham's proposal of understanding desire and economy as inherently intertwined and mutually constitutive. It is this conceptual move that connects the politics of language, the politics of the subject, and the politics of collective action, allowing for new political imaginaries to develop practical effects:

> A language of economic difference has the potential to offer new subject positions and prompt novel identifications, multiplying economic energies and desires. But the realization of this potential is by no means automatic. Capitalism is not just an economic signifier that can be displaced through deconstruction and the proliferation of signs. Rather, it is where the libidinal investment is.[25]

If capitalism is the place of libidinal investment, then it is obvious that political challenges to capitalism likewise need to work on libidinal investment and search for new forms of identification and desire—and this is exactly what Gibson-Graham are doing when they call for resubjectivation, devoting a full chapter to "Cultivating subjects for a community economy."

Cultivating the Postcapitalist Self

With their project of cultivating a postcapitalist self ready to live togetherness as interdependency rather than commonality, while still acknowledging the ethics of connection, Gibson-Graham rely on a Lacanian version of psychoanalysis and its critique of the autonomous, rational subject. For Gibson-Graham the "Lacanian subject of lack" defined by the impossibility of identity guarantees an empty structural space that invites "a politics of becoming" or "the possibility of politics itself."[26] However, Lacan's (masculinized) subject of lack is nevertheless hopelessly caught in a longing for identity and a fantasy of coherence, therefore projecting an unfixed and incomplete identity onto femininity. Although for Gibson-Graham this inspires the powerful gesture of naming the subject of politics "she," they are unfortunately also limited by a Lacanian notion of desire, defined by its

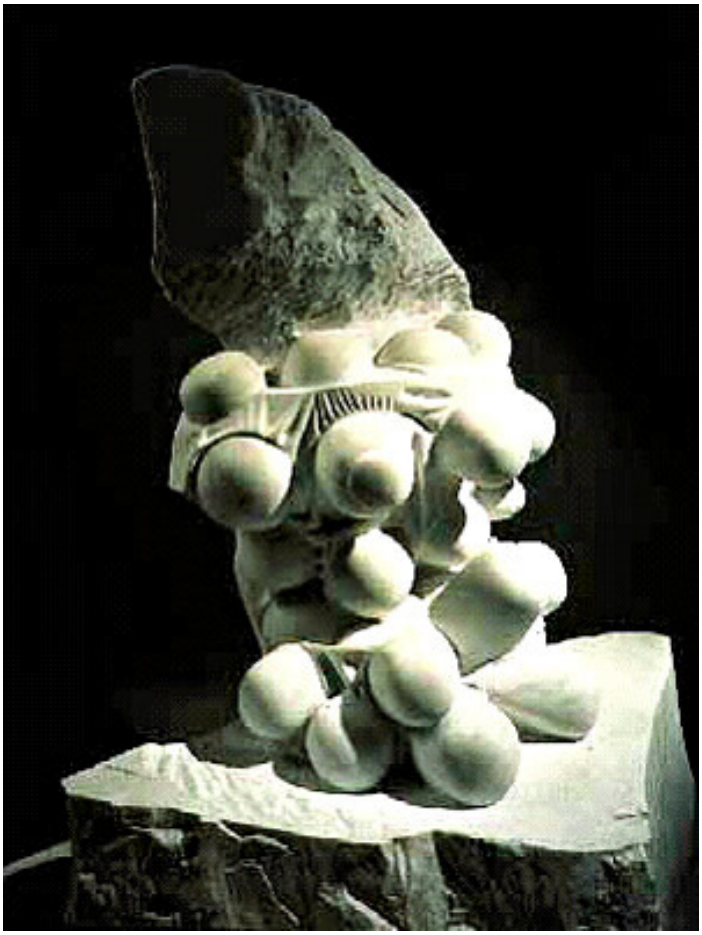
covering up of lack, and for that matter constituting complementary gender identifications. While Gibson-Graham do not reflect upon the latter, the former brings them to assign a significant role to that of the analyst:

> From a Lacanian perspective, the role of the analyst is to interpret the analysand's project of shoring up her fantasies, which lock her into fixed structures of desire and identity. An interruption by the analyst can provoke the analysand's curiosity and begin the exploration that unravels fantasy and reveals it for what it is.[27]

While I am quite sympathetic to the idea of working with the potential of curiosity and explorative practices, I remain skeptical with regard to the authoritative or pedagogical power relation introduced through the figure of the analyst. Would we like to install this as the exemplary relationship for transforming subjectivity? Would we like to build our understanding of society on this kind of relationship? These are vital questions, since Gibson-Graham indeed see the role of the analyst in their own position in "action research processes" that aim at inciting communal economy building. What in the beginning of the book sounds like a refreshing means of doing politics becomes suspect when presented in the hierarchical context of a research setting in which social scientists activate the deprived inhabitants of a de-industrialized region and stimulate them to overcome their resistance to change: "Our repertory of tactics might include seducing, cajoling, enrolling, enticing, inviting."[28] As in advertising, desire is seen as an individual longing for phantasmatic fulfillment capable of seducing people into doing what one wishes.

Insofar as the process avoids suppression and rather encourages the individuals' curiosity, capacities, and activity, it can be understood as a form of late modern Foucauldian governmentality—a way of linking subjectivation and rule in such a way that people submit out of free will. The role Antonio Gramsci envisioned for the "organic intellectual" is similar, as educating the people to become active contributors to a counter-hegemonic struggle aiming for new hegemonic consensus. And this brings us to the crux of the matter: does Gibson-Graham's project of diverse economies and non-normative subjectivities, while providing space for heterogeneity and contingency, legitimize "seducing" people into their well-being? Precisely what form of redistribution secures the joy of the "pastor" who finds the non-believers, the resistant ones, finally "enlightened" by submitting to the truth of communal being-in-common?[29] >

I see two problems here in Gibson-Graham's attempts to



Louise Bourgeois, Blind Man's Buff, 1984, marble.

cultivate subjects of communal economies. One is that they lose sight of their declared aim to think in terms of complex interdependencies, which would necessarily demand analyzing the politics of subjects as not only constitutive of new economic relations, but also of existing late modern, neoliberal discourses and power relations that promote self-responsibility, team-building, and independence from state support. The focus of attention falls on the development of a self that is engaged in community enterprises, is poor-but-happy, and functions as a self-activated, positive thinking being who forsakes global perspectives of social justice or the damnation of capitalism, but creates alternative economies posing no threat to profit-oriented structures. However, the absence of doubt with regard to whether this self fits all too well into the creation of a divided world of non-profit survival and capitalocentric rule, remains questionable.

The other problem that results from stabilizing established power relations lies in a delight over difference that neglects the difference of conflict, contradiction, competition, privilege, or antagonistic political views or interests. Energies for building community economies are understood to be fruitful when there is "no militant advocacy, no talk of struggle against a despised

capitalism."[30] Furthermore, conflicts internal to being-in-common, but which jeopardize togetherness, are presented as a result of the "psychic difficulties of relinquishing established economic identities," which can be overcome once a new perspective is achieved whereby one is open "to the humanity of others, to the possibility of being other than she was, to participating with those most different from herself (in her own antagonistic worldview) in constructing a community economy."[31]

Both problems, I would like to argue, are due to an unresolved and excessively harmonious relation between identification and desire. Here it would be interesting to turn to Judith Butler's latest consideration of desire. In *Undoing Gender* (2004), she presents a re-reading of Lacan in which she insists that desire is not "the desire of the Other"—as Lacan suggests to undermine the illusion of the self-contained subject—but rather constituting "the Other of the Other" that becomes relevant in desiring relation.[32] One has to take into account that the Other is shifting between the social or concrete Other, my fantasy of the Other, and the Other as an "ek-static self" who is not in control of her/himself, occupying all these positions simultaneously, yet never fully. Accordingly, identification finds multiple entrance points, and desire and identification may combine in various, even contradictory ways. This clearly subverts a heteronormative understanding that considers desire and identification to be mutually exclusive—I am not to desire who I identify with, and I am not to identify with who I desire. Whereas Butler's notion of desire thoroughly complicates processes of identification, which can no longer rely on clearly defined positions of subject and object, Gibson-Graham's process of cultivating a postcapitalist self in the end reconciles identification and desire. Even though they insist on the impossibility of fixing identity, their aim is to develop desires for community economies embodied by subjects who identify as being connected to others. Interdependency is not always taken as granted, but is the result of an arduous process, which captures and contains the Other of the Other in the very act of providing space for it. For Gibson-Graham the point is not to incite a never-ending process of dynamic tensions between identification and desire, desires prompting or subverting identifications, identifications inciting or stabilizing desires; rather, there is only one of these directions present and valued: that is, desires effecting identifications with communal economies.

Gibson-Graham's argument carries a built-in opposition between the discursive constitution of the subject and its limits, namely its embodied affectivity, showing itself by the fact that "the body has a 'mind' of its own, that there might be resistance to new identities, attachments to old ones, unconscious refusals to change, fears of symbolization."[33] They present this as a distinction between the "emptiness of the subject" and the "fullness of embodiment." Yet why would the emptiness of the subject "that is the ultimate ground for our ability to change" stand in opposition to the "fullness beyond the level of conscious feeling and thought"? My impression is that the search for transformative potentials is too much directed towards the unconscious, habitual, sensational, embodied dimensions of a new postcapitalist self. Transformative perspectives are bound to the idea of emancipating the subject from the ego, rather than starting from a self that is "from the start, given over to the other" and the social relations developing from there.[34] Queer theory proposes to understand desire as not solely a category of subjectivity, of sexual practices or intimate relations, but as productive in and of the social—which includes macropolitical processes and institutions.[35] It problematizes the understanding of desire as lack, because it produces the (phantasmatic) object that promises satisfaction as well as the subject longing to appropriate and control the object.[36] Instead of seeing desire as something inherent to a *subject* and directed towards an *object*, it is conceptualized as a process or movement, productive in the sense that it constitutes and designs social relationships and relations. In this sense Elspeth Probyn suggests to understand desire as moving through images on the surface of the social—drawing connections and forming assemblages, either according to well-known patterns of identity, difference, and their hierarchized power relations, or through images that confuse or disrupt established normalities and invoke surprising assemblages. Referring to Deleuze and Guattari's consideration of desire and power, she distinguishes between de-territorializing and re-territorializing processes. Yet, while she presents desire as a deterritorializing force, she also agrees with Foucault, who sees desire as constituted by sociohistorical power relations, and thus as potentially compliant with reterritorializations.[37]

Since Probyn acknowledges desire's inherent ambiguity, her notion of it seems to fit well with Gibson-Graham's double vision of desire as a conservative as well as a transformative force:

> At any point in the history-making process, an individual is caught up in two places, experiencing the dissatisfactions and disappointments of what they know and habitually desire and the satisfactions and surprises of what is new, but hard to fully recognize and want.[38]

Yet taking into account Probyn's proposal to understand desire as a social-surface energy also invites the question of how this ambiguity or paradoxical tension can structure socioeconomic or, for that matter, sociosexual surfaces, and which images function as "means of transportation" in these processes.[39] This would indeed go well alongside Gibson-Graham's language politics and search for a new political imaginary. Rather than being captured by the

need to translate such ambiguity into a story of liberation and progress, Gibson-Graham would gain space for collective practices moving in images that disrupt harmonious linkages of identification and desire. According to Probyn, desire may provide me with belonging—yet not because it comes from somewhere, but because it is going somewhere. This is also what Teresa de Lauretis invokes when she speaks of desire taking place in fantasy scenarios, where each of the protagonists is simultaneously subject, object, and beholder of the scene. In De Lauretis' account, it is not only desire that turns social, but also fantasy. Far from being an individualized psychic capacity, fantasy is made up of historically shaped, publicly available, and biographically gained imagery—effecting identification as plausibly as repulsion, alienation, or self-alienation.[40]

Drawing on this corpus of queer-feminist theory, it is possible to extend Gibson-Graham's politics of the making and remaking of an imaginary in a way that also revises their Lacanian understanding of fantasy. In correlation with their notion of desire, they define fantasy as "the mode of integration of the subject into the symbolic order and the anchor of identification."[41] Here fantasy remains bound to "wholeness" and functions as a "conservative" force submitting the subject to the symbolic order, and as such counteracts curiosity, experimentation, and desubjectivation. If we consider instead how Teresa de Lauretis and Judith Butler—who both refer to Laplanche and Pontalis' considerations of the simultaneous origin of fantasy and sexuality—deploy the subject, fantasy becomes a process of negotiation between public and personal imagery.[42] As such, it is thoroughly intertwined with sociohistorical power relations. Yet it's also a resource in social and often semi-private subcultural practices that allows us to imagine ourselves and others otherwise, not bound to the heteronormative ideals of coherence and complementarity but, maybe, involved in fantasy scenarios, where the desiring encounters of various Others of the Other take place. Fantasies, seen as images drawing connections on social surfaces, are not chimeras but means of collective transformation.

"All this adds up to a willingness to become communal subjects, to accept their incompleteness, interdependence, and connection across differences of age, race, sexuality, body type, financial need, and social status."[43] Gibson-Graham clearly mark this as a "fantasy," a fantasy of "becoming community," a fantasy built upon the promise that differences might no longer constitute conflict, competition, or violence, a fantasy of "a class relationship understood from the reparative perspective of potential and connection, rather than separateness, rip off, and alienation." Yet the question remains whether we might also need fantasies of togetherness and being-in-common defined by competition, conflict, and violence—fantasies of negotiating the precarious thresholds between power, abuse of power, and violence, and the complex overdetermination of structural and symbolic inequalities, and of transformative agency.

X

For Julie Graham, who left much too early.

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1
J. K. Gibson-Graham, *The End of Capitalism (As We Knew It): A Feminist Critique of Political Economy* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1996).

2
J. K. Gibson-Graham, *A Postcapitalist Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), xxx.

3
Ibid., 79.

4
Ibid., 56.

5
Ibid., 7.

6
Ibid., xxiii.

7
Ibid., 85, 86.

8
See Gibson-Graham, *The End of Capitalism* , 27ff.

9
Gibson-Graham, *A Postcapitalist Politics* , 6.

10
Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* , trans. Winston Moore and Paul Cammack (London: Verso, 1985).

11
Gibson-Graham, *A Postcapitalist Politics* , xxxiii.

12
Ibid., xxxvi.

13
Ibid., xxxi, xxxii.

14
Ibid., xxi, xxviii.

15
See Gibson-Graham, *The End of Capitalism* , 120ff.

16
See Samuel Chambers and Terrell Carver, *Judith Butler and Political Theory: Troubling Politics* (London: Routledge, 2008).

17
See Antke Engel, "Traveling Images: Desire as Movement; Desire as Method," in *Out Here: Local and International Perspectives in Queer Studies* , ed. Tomasz Basiuk, Dominika Ferens, and Tomasz Sikora (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2006), 13–24.

18
See http://www.desiring-just-economies.de/ . The conference organizers are Nikita Dhawan, Antke Engel, Christoph Holzhey, and Volker Woltersdorff.

19
Gibson-Graham, *A Postcapitalist Politics* , 3.

20
Ibid., 20, xxxv, 6, xxxvi, 132.

21
Ibid., xxiii, 13, 129, 7.

22
Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972–1977* , ed. Colin Gordon, trans. Colin Gordon et al. (New York: Pantheon, 1980); Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia 1* (1972), trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane (London and New York: Continuum, 2004).

23
Gibson-Graham, *A Postcapitalist Politics* , 13.

24
Ibid., 99 and 6.

25
Ibid., xxxv.

26
Ibid., xxxiii.

27
Ibid., 129.

28
Ibid., 6. For reflection on the action research process see 127ff.

29
Ibid., 154–155.

30
Ibid., 160.

31
Ibid., 138, 155.

32
See Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 131–151.

33
This and the following quotations: Gibson-Graham, *A Postcapitalist Politics* , 128.

34
Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2006), 31.

35
See Teresa de Lauretis, *The Practice of Love: Lesbian Sexuality and Perverse Desire* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), and Elspeth Probyn, *Outside Belongings* (New York: Routledge, 1996).

36
See Elizabeth Grosz, "Refiguring Lesbian Desire," in *The Lesbian Postmodern* , ed. Laura Doan (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 67–84.

37
See notes 35 and 17.

38
See Gibson-Graham, *A Postcapitalist Politics* , 162.

39
I undertook such a project in Antke Engel, *Bilder von Sexualität und Ökonomie* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2009), where I read artistic and media imagery of gender ambiguities and dissident sexualities, examining how queer and neoliberal cultural politics intersect.

40
See Teresa de Lauretis, *The Practice of Love* , xix.

41
Gibson-Graham, *A Postcapitalist Politics* , 129.

42
Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, "Fantasy and the Origins of Sexuality," in *Formations of Fantasy* , ed. Victor Burgin, James Donald, and Cora Kaplan (London: Methuen, 1986), 5–34.

43
This quote and the following: Gibson-Graham, *A Postcapitalist Politics* , 16.