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PhD

Title: **Crossbenching**

Subtitle: Towards a proactive mode of participation as a Critical
                   Spatial Practice

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Declaration

I, Markus Miessen, declare that this dissertation is the result of my own work and includes nothing, which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except as declared in the text. Information derived from the published and unpublished work of others has been acknowledged in the text and a list of references is given in the bibliography.

It is not substantially the same as any that I have submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for a degree or other qualification at Goldsmiths College or any other University or similar institution.

Markus Miessen, Berlin, May 2017

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Abstract

Welcome to Harmonistan!

Over the last two decades, the term "participation" has become increasingly overused. When everyone has been turned into a participant, the often uncritical, innocent, and romantic use of the term has become frightening. Supported by a repeatedly nostalgic veneer of worthiness, phony solidarity, and political correctness, "participation" has become the default of protagonists withdrawing from responsibility. Similar to the notion of an independent politician dissociated from a specific party, this research work encourages the role of the "crossbench practitioner," an "uninterested outsider" and "uncalled participator" who is not limited by existing protocols, and who enters the arena with nothing but creative intellect and the will to generate change.

As a practiced-based research and working methodology, a publishing and exhibition regime was established in order to constantly test ideas and concepts against reality, while installing a continuous feedback loop.

Arguing for an urgent inversion of participation—a model beyond modes of consensus—the work candidly reflects on the limits and traps of its real motivations, instead of reading participation as the charitable saviour of political struggle. Rather than breading the next generation of consensual facilitators and mediators, this work argues for conflict as an enabling, instead of disabling, force. "Crossbenching" calls for a format of conflictual participation—no longer a process by which others are invited "in," but a means of acting *without mandate*, as *uninvited irritant*: a forced entry into fields of knowledge that arguably benefit from exterior thinking.

Sometimes, democracy has to be avoided at all costs.

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A Methodological Framework

Given the increasing complexity of spatial practices within and around the context of contemporary architectural (academic) reality, the question of practice-based research has become all the more important. How can one's material—i.e. physical—practice be informed by theoretical knowledge? This thesis aims to utilize one's practice vis-à-vis one's body of (accumulating/ed) theoretical knowledge in order to generate a piece of work, which supersedes these two distinct and often hermetically isolated formats. It suggests to develop out of them a hybrid, which understands itself as a typology of work, which is no longer either/or, but with/and: "crossbenching" as an embedded form of critical spatial practice. It designates a first-person-singular mode of acting independently, with a conscience. Performing as a pro-active individual without political mandate, who retains an autonomy of thought, proposition, and production, it entails that in a given context one neither belongs to nor aligns with a specific party or set of stakeholders, but can openly act without having to respond to a pre-supposed set of protocols or consensual arrangements. Crossbenching aims to open up a fresh debate, not as a theory, but a way of acting politically.

How should you—as the reader—look at this piece of work?

In front of you is a series of documents: one is the thick architectural/curatorial work you hold in your hand. It functions as a guide to my work, an open and continually accumulating framework. Further, you will find a series of publications that I consider part of the practice-based component of my PhD. Altogether, they constitute the body of work that is my PhD dissertation. Rather than attempting to theorize a particular mode of existing architectural practice, it is my aim to generate, through this work, a condition; one that addresses not only the condition of the present, but the conditioning of our present. This work operates in a productive and projective, albeit binary, mode: a scenario in which two forces are constantly observing, measuring, and responding to one another, and hence, informing the very next action.

I want to talk about critical spatial practice not by illustrating, abstracting, or isolating a "problem"—as architects tend to do—but by framing a problematic: at which point can one participate in the world and still realize, critically, that this is what one is doing? Through my work I am attempting to demonstrate the fact that Critical Spatial Practice, which has become a well-established term, is about outlining such a problematic and consequently devising a framework for crucial and productive decision-making.

By questioning a romantic form of participation—understood as a weak form of surrogate politics—I am seeking to challenge the way in which modes of participation are misused in order to secure preexisting relationships of power. In these surrogate politics, the concept of participation is most often assumed to be a democratic consultation, already defined within a vertical decision-making process. As a result, it simply transfers to those who have to deal with the decisions made. Such dynamics can be witnessed in state politics, where these processes act as a means to immobilize and sedate the general public through bureaucratic participation. I examine the application of this approach, investigating the question of consensus within the New Labour context in the UK and the Dutch Polder Model.

It is important to state and understand that my work does neither constitute a historic nor critical account of the development of participatory practices. This has never been the objective of my work. Rather than an object of (art) history, in the context of what I am trying to come to terms with, "participation" is primarily understood as a politically operative term in need of repair. In my work, the concept of participation touches on the often-intertwined relationship of the disciplines that it touches upon: art, architecture, and politics.

Over the past decade, I have developed a practice of challenging the parameters of "participation", most notably through "The Nightmare of Participation" (Sternberg Press, 2010), a set of accompanying publications – which I have handed in as part of this dissertation – as well as my practice as an architect in several geographies and political contexts. Through this work, I

have defined and constructed a unique point of view on what it means to work together and individually. In studying participation, I have observed the dangers of consensus, whereby the unfocused canvasing of opinion becomes a shield against taking responsibility or stating a clear direction.

In my work, I have come to argue for a new form of participation, one in which architects and designers might take on a proactive, responsible and auto-controlled role. I am proposing an intervention in the political process through a technique that I have coined "crossbenching": engaging people, who enter the scene from outside existing protocols, and who prioritize change over mediated consensus. The term "crossbencher" – which is 'borrowed' from the British designation for an independent or minor party member in Parliament, named for their location on benches between and perpendicular to the government and opposition benches – is being introduced as an operative term. Transforming the noun to a verb makes the term active, while retaining its spatial and physical connotations as a site in a charged political arena. I thus advocate for a productive harnessing of conflict and outside opinion.

Participation should indeed be understood not only as a potentially nauseating strategic tool of restraint, which – at the same time is both promoted and understood as a form of emancipation. This particular state has most recently been identified and performed in an intriguing setting, a floating state, which addresses questions of power and powerlessness, where "bodies are contorted beyond recognition, forming an indistinct, carnal mass."[1] In Anne Imhof's Golden Lion winning 2017 contribution to the Venice Biennale, the "(…) performers' bodies are reduced to bare life."[2] It ultimately leads to the question of "(...) how does power act when it splits away from subjects and turns them into objects?"[3] As curator Susanne Pfeffer points out, "the contemporary biopolitical body is no longer a one-dimensional surface on which power, the law, control, and punishment are inscribed. Rather, it is a dense interior, a site for both life and political control exerted by means of exchange and communication mechanisms."[4]

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[1] Pfeffer, Susanne (ed.), FAUST (Anne Imhof), London: Koenig Books, 2017, p.9
[2] ibid.
[3] ibid.
[4] ibid, p.10

In order to illustrate the ramifications of participation, particularly in terms of what it means to practice architecture today, I am using my own projects as examples. Here, I am juxtaposing historically activated forums of participation with an understanding of and proposition toward a first person singular and proactive form of participation as consequential action. As a methodology, it points at the question of how the relationship between an engaged actor and his or her context can be established, and how this can further be read as a means to think about design and design processes.

In using my work as an example of these approaches, I am able to think through the terms that I regularly utilize in my practice. Moreover, I consider such means of reflection as an integral part of what it means to act within the territory of critical spatial practice. Through my work, both theoretical and material, I am illustrating that the mingling of the dichotomy of theory and practice is both useful and productive as it starts to generate a more synergetic work in which different and diverse parts assemble into a particular methodology, a new methodological signature. In this context, my projects strategically obtain a voice; they start to speak in and from this document as an integral point of reference, redefining the role of the critical spatial practitioner today. This overall body of work, including the design- and architectural-scale projects I have worked on, should be understood as a case study of my practice.

In the multitude of different projects presented here, the audiences and the venues might change, but the underlying interest remains the same: how to think of spatial practice as a means to assemble and congregate people in an agonistic forum. This question has a conceptual and strategic dimension as well as a physical one. Approaching spatial practice in this fashion can only be made manifest through the understanding that it requires a mélange of elements, which all play indispensable roles. Considering this, discourse and discursive production act as functional tools rather than uniform or hegemonic rules—apparatuses in motion.

Understanding the above on a less abstract scale, I am observing political realities by investigating and collaborating on projects that deal with one recurring question: how are spaces and social realities influenced and affected by the conditions that I have set up through editorial, curatorial or spatial design projects? The challenge of such an approach is to reintroduce an analysis that revives the question as to whether critical practitioners inhabit a position or mode of influence, as outlined by Keller Easterling in *Enduring Innocence*, where she reflects on automated spaces as political actors.[5] Easterling asks, how can we, today, comment on the complex composite situation that constitutes an apprehension of "space" well beyond conventional architectural practice? How can we exemplify new modes of conceptualizing and critiquing participation in order to produce emergent forms of practice, or indeed praxis, as an interpretation of what one might call a self-reflexive mode of "doing theory"?[6]

My contribution to the field in this regard is a specific model of practice, one that has been tested throughout the research phase of my PhD and which has been documented in the publications, which I have handed in as part of this work. The way in which I understand my role *as author* in this series of edited volumes is that I have continuously built, curated and produced umbrella-frameworks, which allowed me to test certain ideas, assumptions, and concepts against contemporary reality, different practices and disciplines. This way of working enabled me to tease out material, and get people to respond through works, that did not exist before: as a form of production-as-research, it equipped me with a pro-active tool-box, which could then be applied throughout my practice as a reflexive and propositional archive. Rather than an oppositional, this represents a *complementary model* of practice.

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[5]   Keller Easterling, *Enduring Innocence: Global Architecture and its Political Masquerades* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2005).

[6]   This is what Judith Butler, in ""What Is Critique," and Michael Foucault, in *Care of the Self*, call "Critique." See Judith Butler, "What Is Critique: An Essay on Foucault's Virtue," *transversal* (May 2001), http://eipcp.net/transversal/0806/butler/en; Michel Foucault, History of Sexuality, vol. 3, *The Care of the Self*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1986).

In my dissertation, I often switch between using the terms "practice" and "praxis." In this context, the later term denotes practice moves toward understanding itself, reflecting on its own terms and rules of conduct. When I introduce the term "crossbench praxis" in the title of this work, I am referring to a complex inter-relation between theory and practice, which influence and inform each other while self-reflexively trying to carve out an alternative space for collision.

In this work, I am seeking to create a productive schism: an analysis and description of the parts that compose one's practice, how they fuse, and how they form a reciprocal relationship with one's future work. To a certain extent, the following excursus can be understood as an X-ray through my discursive practice; a practice that by default consists of a multitude of species of "things"—some written, some published, some curated, some designed, and some built. Not all of my projects and work employ presentation in the hermetic format of a text with illustrations, or a print portfolio. I am presenting a cross section of my work focusing on the timeframe that I have been enrolled at the Centre for Research Architecture, and the relevant projects that were specifically set up as case studies for my speculative work. Rather than describing or understanding the world from the analytical and deconstructive point of view, my modus and ethos of working rely heavily on the exchange between theoretical investigations and the production of ideas, while constantly testing those against (political) reality. This work is a logbook of this process. It should be understood as a *Theorie der Handlung* (theory of acting) rather than an *Abhandlung der Theorie* (treatise of theory). Only in this way can the work assume an agency of dissensus within the context in which I am operating.[7]

To understand the practical and theoretical context in which I am operating— within architecture, art, writing, teaching, and curating, and what could be more broadly described as the production of space—the texts herein all

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[7]   Dissensus: A difference of opinion. Alternatively, the dissensus or minority opinion is the reaction or objection to the consensus position. This concept was developed and inspired by theorist Jacques Ranciére, and further explored in Chantal Mouffe's concept of agonistic pluralism.

operate under the aegis of redefining the role and motifs of the spatial practitioner. My argument has evolved through differently scaled projects—ranging from editorial and curatorial practice to spatial consulting, design, and architecture—which substantiate my thinking and experiment with the thresholds of participation and collaboration. These have often been self-initiated, but also been commissioned by institutional, private, and governmental patrons. Over time, these situations and projects have engendered their own knowledge and energy into both my writing as well as the projects of the PhD on a broader scale.

Having been engaged with the discourse around participation over the last ten years, I have encountered a series of struggles regarding practices that engage cooperation and collaboration, ranging from collaborative institutional constructs such as the European Kunsthalle to urban scale projects, seemingly collaborative and participatory, fathered by the European Commission. These further illustrate a failure of approach, the romanticization of "participation," and its abuse in political realms in order to achieve secondary and tertiary goals. The work I am presenting mobilizes itself through experiments that attempt to either answer or pose questions on the relevance of different modes of participation today. It could be read as a self-referential machine, an orbit questioning the very terms that I have put up for discussion, and it is this reflexivity that I consider an integral component of an alternative participatory practice.

Over the years, the most difficult tension in my work emerged in an almost classical architectural relationship and struggle, that between the architect and the client: how can one participate and collaborate in a non-complicit or subversive manner when one is often being invited to do just the opposite? And, if so, is it possible to carve out projects beyond the self-initiated that could, within the remit of a commissioned project, allow for a critical and independent authorship? One that is aware of the political context and forcefield of stakeholders, but potentially turning one's practices into a complicit one? It is my hope that my PhD illustrates how my embedded research work in different forms of spatial practice measures different

(possible) action(s), how my actions highlight different possible deployments of agency and, further, how this action can be understood within the framework of a larger project.

The work discussed should be understood as a critical bibliography of my practice and projects: an autocritical archive of a substantially *lived research*, which includes formats such as writings, theoretical investigations, and conversations. In the context of my practice, which in many instances also includes substantial conversations and—put colloquially—talking to people, I will present a selection of "intraviews": a series of conversations that are in dialogue with one another and with my work, set-up and conducted deliberately in order to produce a decentralized web of knowledge, which is floating around the issues that I am investigating. Through intraviews I understand my role as a curator of existing knowledge, editing and sampling this often spontaneous material in order to construct new/other productive clusters of relevant material for my activity around questions of practice. The intraview constitutes an approach that decodes itself as an inherently practice-based (rather research-based) mode of dealing with and building up an archive; a complex assemblage, a collection of a continuously expanding field of practitioners with various backgrounds, who I unite through exchange by creating platforms in which I set up a network of correspondents and interlocutors. By doing this, my work is constantly exposed to a reciprocal feedback process. Over the course of my PhD inquiry, I have produced more than 40 such intraviews, six of which you will find in the appendix to this document. The two most productive conversations in regard to my inquiry turned out to be the long-term conversation with Chantal Mouffe as well as with former German Labour minister Erhard Eppler.

My literature review is comprised of contemporary projects and work made via discussion, thinking on the move, so to speak. This literature review is supported and substantiated by conversations, which are included in the appendix. As this inquiry is at least based partly on current discourses, the projects and their iterations provide ground for further speculation. It is not necessarily evidence-based, but provisional in the sense that it attempts to

tease out the potential for change.

Taking serious the notion and approach of a practice-based programme in order to generate "evidence" essentially through one's own production of "matter", my dissertation presents a conceptual approach, which does not fit neatly into a single methodological paradigm, but instead self-initiated a substantial piece of academic work on a topic of personal urgency – namely defining a clear research question around Participation and Critical Spatial Practice. The answer to this question was only possible to deliver through the construction of a set of works that had to first be produced in order to be interrogated. My practice-based approach was explicitly "designed" in order to question the way in which "evidence" functions within one's argument, particularly questioning what constitutes evidence in regard to the claims that are made.

The role of the author (myself) in this endeavour consisting of single-authored research and writing as well as editorial practice and the production of edited volumes and research projects is one where the traditional role of the architect is being expanded into a field that included curatorship and archaeologies of knowledge as well as the speculative practice of testing ideas against reality. The outcome of this undertaking can be witnessed in this document, namely the change of mode from polemical rhetoric to critical analysis.

Such proactive and often self-generated practice is not only meant to challenge the prevailing architectural discourse and its normativity of conduct, but further challenges my own everyday in regards to how one can practice in a meaningful, resourceful, and sustainable way today. It produces a condition that unpacks certain realities we deal with and how we are to position ourselves within, or in relation to, their context. Within the external environment that influences my daily operations the question remains as to what constitutes my conviction, or, in other words, *what drives my practice*?

Here, driven by the ambition to define a particular methodology of spatial

practices, I am approaching description and circling a method of work, while struggling with the role(s) that one does or does not assume. By expanding the field and territory that already exists I am trying to go beyond an analytical reading or interpretation, to put forward a model for participatory practice, of an alternative fashion, as it were. It is my hope that this document will demonstrate how the sum of these various components amounts to a new form of thinking spatially through given briefs, self-identified problematics, or collaboratively approached issues, and how this thinking and acting has generated an alternative form of critical spatial practice: crossbench and conflictual in approach, and subtended by a new form of interventionary participation.

Critical Spatial Practice

Contemporary spatial practices are colonizing the margins that generic spatial development has left wide open. Never before have protagonists of diverse spatial practices—architects, urbanists, geographers, sociologists, politicians, policy makers, artists, designers, and the like—shown so much interest in social issues. As observers and commentators, they ask questions and articulate their views on topics of sociopolitical currency and relevance. Their reflective observations and analyses often become projective – be it through a set of new or revised protocols, frameworks, or physical interventions. In the following, I will introduce and clarify what I mean by the term "Critical Spatial Practice."

Broadly speaking, the consideration of cultures of space and everyday realities of spatial production digresses from normative architectural and urbanist discourses—it shifts to a more general approach, but, at the same time, one that addresses very specific, embedded creative practices. This provides a platform from which the discourses familiar to architecture and urbanism can be expanded as well as find outlets for the exploration of alternative and bastardized forms of practice. The nature of some of these practices lays bare the potential for collaborative work, which oftentimes blurs the boundaries between seemingly unrelated fields of knowledge. Taking the form of temporary occupation, spatial intervention, the documentation of human rights violations, or a reading of the European Union as a laboratory for reinventing democracy through space, such offensive positions render critical, optimistic, projective, propositional, and hence productive outlooks on the future, effectively removing the myth that it is the architect or urban planner who determine spatial agency.

Architecture as spatial practice has a specificity to space that dates back to ancient times. What was once seen as the preserve of architects—mapping, conceptualizing, making, or manipulating spaces—could arguably be described today as a new "culture of space." Deviating from most architectural production that persistently returns to the architect-as-single-author, a growing

number of practitioners and theorists actively engage and participate in neighboring fields of knowledge. We must acknowledge the possibility and potentialities of an "architecture of knowledge": the production of and active intervention in spatial conditions and situations presents us with a prerequisite for identifying, effecting, and affecting the broader realities of politics through the application of physical and nonphysical structures to change and alter specific settings. While the situational and conditional differences engendered in those practices may appear marginal, they are undeniably concrete in impact.

Within the contemporary intercultural and transdisciplinary discourses of critical spatial practice, a strong resistance toward pure object lust forms the backbone of an increasing amount of projects and current collaborations. They frequently tend to be temporary and informal, contingent and ephemeral in nature, and most often imply a particularly localized and political interest and engagement. They situate themselves in networks of practitioners that, as part of collaborative frameworks, broaden the collective horizon. Where formal politics often work against processes that "balkanize knowledge and […] silence universalistic and dissenting voices,"[8] it is the self-initiated and assumed task of critical spatial practice to deliver precisely this quality in the spatial realm.

Dissolving what was formerly understood as formal or disciplinary boundaries, the specificities of particular cultural contexts inform their applications. The major difference between critical spatial practices and conventional architectural practices is the way relationships between individual and place are spatialized, and, moreover, that geopolitical location and narratives are geared and driven by consequential societal agendas with clearly demarcated and communicable political attitudes, albeit, at times, silently. Artists Tacita Dean and Jeremy Millar, for example, describe this as a state in which place is always political. They conclude that even to keep a place empty—to keep it

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[8]   Paul Hirst, "Education and the Production of New Ideas", in: AA Files 29, London: AA Publications, 1995, pp 44-49; the article is based on a lecture that was the first in a General Studies series on architectural education which too place at the AA (Architectural Association, London) during the Autumn Term 1994.

in its natural state without adding anything—is a political act.[9] Similarly, the act of removing something may be as spatially relevant and political and act as adding something. When combat engineers began mine clearance in Iraq, for example, they prepared the ground for future uses—they injected potentiality. Many artists and thinkers have worked on projects that explore the possibility of provoking change by altering the very parameters, criteria, or variables of spatial production. Such practice does not deliver blueprints for ideological change, but sets itself apart from the modernist project by addressing the intersections of praxes via concrete situations and scenarios while approaching them with customized tools and techniques. This work presents a specificity that cannot be reproduced elsewhere.

Learning from Artistic Practices

Today, there is an appealing blend of practitioners who have backgrounds in art but pursue projects that could be labeled architectural in terms of both scale and referential approach,[10] and a growing number of practitioners with backgrounds in architecture that define their practice through projects whose main agenda is not to "produce" physical space, but to question its becoming. Disappointed by existing practices and shocked by political, economic, and environmental situations, the latter have rejected the traditional image of the architect, or indeed their similarly delineated counterpart within the practice and economy of art. They are no longer willing to dwell on a formal, conceptual approach, particularly in the wake of the financial crisis. Having witnessed the blissful economic boom of the early 1990s and its complete downfall during the turn of the millennium and later in 2008, an optimistic and productive approach seems—for the first time—to engage with the realities of the twenty-first century. Considering alternative mechanisms of change in order to affect existing spatial conditions, practitioners have most recently started to utilize critical inquiry and non-populist modes of participation to fuel ambitious and often self-generated projects. Getting involved in political, social, legal, ephemeral, or educational territories—in order to equip

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[9]   See Tacita Dean and Jeremy Millar, *Place* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2005).
[10]   These are projects that either challenge or add to existing spatial situations and constructions. See, for example, the work of Cyprian Gaillard, amongst others.

themselves with the knowledge that would enable them to pursue human rights research, community involvement, framework and policy design, planning ethics, temporary appropriations of urban structures, or simply by pursuing a means of research and observation that relocates spatial politics on the discursive horizon—they have started to question and alter the way that space is conceived, envisioned, and produced.

The last twenty years have seen a huge increase in terms of the ways, methods, and protocols in which architects and urbanists have attempted to participate in (geo)political spatial conditions, situations, and territories, which previously were not considered to be part of their job descriptions and not officially located on their radar. Simultaneously, increased interest from a plethora of previously clearly delineated fields such as geography, sociology, political philosophy, urban policy, and artistic and curatorial practices has also erupted, which suggests a movement toward a refined understanding of the importance and difficulties of engaging directly in the production of space—in a more holistic way than the practices that were previously being taken for granted.

Understanding the Terms at Play
In investigating what could be and has been referred to as spatial practice, its vocabulary must be described. Already the notion of "practice" is one that relates to many possible interpretations: it sometimes refers to a method of learning, it can be understood as a more theoretical term for human action in society, it can encapsulate experiments, deal with legal protocols, or embody the engagement of conventions and traditions. In contrast to the conventional understanding of architecture-as-practice, more recent iterations of practice also strategically include and value immaterial products, such as research-as-practice.

The term "spatial" is often misunderstood as something very loose, something that simply happens in space. However, within the context of spatial practice, its scope is far more concrete in terms of what it attempts to circumscribe. In this context, "spatial" means not only something that happens physically in

three-dimensional space, but also something that has a certain scale and effect on space, such as a policy or other forms of legal of non-legal frameworks. Something that is spatial always has an underlying structure to it, something that allows it to exist, that governs it formally or informally, a core that produces a setting for a condition and situation.

Spatiality, in this regard, should be understood as a set of relations between humans, "things", and (built) structures – the built environment. It is this relationality embedded in the term "spatial" that makes it political. Hence, political interventions are, by default, interventions in spatiality, that is in relations and force relations rather than what is generally understood as "architecture". This force-field of relations, according to Eyal Weizman, is "not only a neutral, abstract grid (…), but itself a dynamic and elastic territory (…) that is shaped by but also shapes conflict."[11]

The most indeterminate component of the triad term discussed here is "critical," which refers to a particular moment in time in which a person interrogates an existing practice or protocol and consequently maps out how to proactively alter, bastardize, augment, or develop this existing reality further. In order to reach this point of decision-making, one first requires the ability to come to such a decision, gathering information and material in order to form an opinion—studying, evaluating, and understanding the potential decision's repercussions. To decide entails forming conclusive thoughts, even if temporary. Moreover, something that produces its inherent core is not only its potential, but the necessity for judgment. When we are critical, we make a judgment, we decide and determine which route to take. Sometimes such decision-making can be simple, though at times, and most likely so, it can be complex and require long and careful processes of reading a situation, analysis, and dispute. But who validates this criticality? Who is in a position to determine and filter the critical?

The "critical" in Critical Spatial Practice needs to be understood as an

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[11]   Eyal Weizman in: "Introduction: Forensis", Forensic Architecture. *Forensis* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2014), p. 9.

operative concept: "*critical* (…) connotes the vital, the crucial, and the decisive."[12] In this context, architecture and – more precisely – architectural research plays a vital role "as a field of knowledge and as a mode of interpretation, one concerned not only with buildings but rather with an ever-changing set of relations between people and things, mediated by spaces and structures across multiple scales."[13] Moving toward a possible definition of Critical Spatial Practice, one could argue that its central feature is a focus on the playful and culturally discursive potential of the relationship between architecture and related disciplines—first and foremost, art—in order to reinvigorate architectural production with cultural, social, and political criticism. It seeks to establish a productive dialogue with other fields of knowledge by benefiting from the friction that intrinsically exists between them. It gains from complex and steady fertilization processes through intensive collaboration with diverse fields and practices, and vital interaction with its situated context.

Theoretical Forebears

One of the intriguing aspects about Critical Spatial Practice today is that it is a term and field evades prescriptivism, as it resists being clearly outlined or analyzed according to certain parameters of professional or "best practices" that one can easily identify and tick. There is a plethora of approaches that come to mind when considering spatial practice and the practitioners who have informed it since the 1980s—when the notion of everyday practices, the production of space, time codes as complex social and spatial constructions, as well as the exploration of interdisciplinary intersections were investigated by protagonists such as Michel de Certeau, Henri Lefebvre, Helen Liggett, David C. Perry, and Jane Rendell, whose positions and resulting ripples I outline in the coming paragraphs.

In 1980, in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, French scholar Michel de Certeau introduced a seminal theory of the productive activity inherent in everyday practices and its processes, which, as he pointed out, should not be masked

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[12]   Ibid., p. 13.
[13]   Ibid.

"as merely the obscure background of social activity."[14] In the context of a relatively conventional understanding of architecture and urbanism, such a theory caused huge debate, as architects tend to concentrate on imaging, designing, and delivering stable conditions of certainty, while often not considering the social and political consequences of their actions. In the context of such a normative and stable practice, bringing the everyday to the fore threatened a practice based on designing certainty.

While Certeau presented potentially negative implications for traditionalists in the field, in today's context of expanded practices, his interpretation of modes of speaking and language, often considered ancillary within traditional architectural practice, are essential strategic tools in furthering a critical practice. He introduced four characteristics of speech act that, according to his theory, can be found in many other modes of practice: "speaking operates within the field of a linguistic system; it effects an appropriation, or reappropriation, of language by its speaker; it establishes a *present* relative to a time and place; and it posits a *contract with the other* (the interlocutor) in a network of places and relations."[15] The spatiotemporal component in Certeau is seminally important. One could argue that within such a mode of thinking and practice, time codes, as an understanding of the changes and practices that occur and alter reality over time, can be considered more important than spatial codes. Certeau's arguably most important concept in the realm of spatial practices is the distinction that he constructed between notions of "strategies" and "tactics." According to his observation, strategies are intrinsically produced by and located within institutional frameworks, propelled by the reified power structures and environments that they constitute, whereas tactics are employed by individuals who act within the actualities of territorial environments and sociopolitical force fields defined by the aforementioned institutions.[16]

Predating Certeau's major work by only a couple years, French sociologist

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[14]   Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven F. Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), xi.
[15]   Ibid, xiii.
[16]   Ibid., xix.

Henri Lefebvre wrote often about the social relations of and within the processes of spatial production. Lefebvre's formative text, *The Production of Space*, elaborated on everyday life, the social production of space, and the city. It was picked up in Anglo-American discourse in the 1990s, after having been translated into English in 1991 and adopted by critical urban theorists. In it, Lefebvre calls attention to different modes of production of space from natural space, spaces before the political or social has entered, to more complex spatialities, whose meaning, realities, and consequences are socially produced: "*(Social) space is a (social) product*. [...] The space thus produced also serves as a tool of thought and of action; that in addition to being a means of production it is also a means of control, and hence of domination, of power."[17] Lefebvre's argument implies a shift from thinking about "space" in and of itself to rather considering processes of conflictual and political production – albeit in different distinct levels: "The activism built into the Lefebvrian analysis of society is not intended to end the reality of experiences through the touch of a rosy red doctrine, but urges the intellectual and the artist to take the decisive step towards spatial representations. This is shown by insisting on being an actor, acting out the differences in a new synthesis which always is a primary and immediate experience."[18]

In research carried out in the mid-1990s, urban theorists Helen Liggett and David C. Perry explored the potentials of spatial practice in their publication *Spatial Practices: Critical Exploration in Social/Spatial Theory*.[19] The anthology of essays included contributions on topics ranging from geography and urban studies to architecture and political science, illustrating a wide array of critical readings and approaches to "the city," and space more generally. It addressed particular issues through the lens of strategic planning, theories concerned with postmodern capitalist development, and questions of spatial production by elaborating on the politics of space. The editors' key argument

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[17]   See Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, Ltd., 1991), 26.
[18]   Mike Bode and Staffan Schmidt, "Spaces of Conflict", in: Nina Möntmann (ed.), Art and its Institutions – current conflicts, critique and collaborations, London: Black Dog Publishing, 2006, pp. 60-61.
[19]   Helen Liggett and David C. Perry, eds., *Spatial Practices: Critical Exploration in Social/Spatial Theory* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1995).

was that time and space need to be considered together, as a two-fold symbiotic relationship in which theory and practice inform each other:

> The point is to suggest that it is not useful to assume that the time and space of analysis exist as separate modes of operation or to treat them as distinct realms apart from everyday practices. [...] Theory and practice are relational, depending for their continued viability on mutual referral. Theory, then, does not flow above everyday life in a detached way: it comes from some place, and it is the responsibility of analysis to return it there.[20]

Through their reading and the presentation of related thinkers and voices, the editors showcased distinct disciplinary approaches to the spatiality of social formation and how and where those approaches can meet in a discursive space, which allows for alternative outlooks on the "objects" of spatial practice.[21] However, the analysis is limited as a result of adhering to the conventional registers and modes of the architectural discipline. Today, it is no longer viable to think through overarching practices such as spatial practice by attempting to analyze where the different modes of disciplines come into the equation. Although the disciplinary forces are still powerful in terms of an engineered economy of service provision, actual practice has moved beyond those domains. One of the main achievements of critical spatial practice over the last decade is that it has managed to produce a meta-level of collaboration in which "the disciplinary" is no longer regarded as an issue, and professional boundaries have melted into a central promise that unites complex knowledge and its scalar potential. This holds true not only for projects that are read as taking place in the domain of architecture and urbanism, but also artistic practice.

The work of London-based architect and theorist Jane Rendell suggests that spatial practice can explore various interdisciplinary intersections, examining how the theories and practices of one discipline can be used to explore and question another, and, through this process, produce new modes of knowledge. Rendell suggests that in order to develop a "critical practice

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[20]   Ibid., 2.
[21]   Ibid., 3.

architecture must look to art, and move outside the traditional boundaries of its field and into a place between disciplines. As a mode of cultural production that enjoys a greater degree of separation from economic and social concerns, art can offer architecture a chance for critical reflection and action… once outside the gallery, as 'public art', art is better positioned to initiate critical spatial practices that can inform the activity of architectural design and the occupation of buildings."[22] At a 2011 talk at the Künstlerhaus in Vienna, Rendell presented a paper that looked at

> how [she has] been evolving the meaning of the term "critical spatial practice" from [her] earlier understanding of it as a form of urban art/architecture intervention to [her] later writings where it operates as a form of spatialized criticism. Initially [she] argued that the term "critical spatial practice" allows us to describe work that transgresses the limits of art and architecture and engages with both the social and the aesthetic, as well as the interstitial spaces between public and private. The concept of critical spatial practice aimed to draw attention not only to the importance of the critical, but also to the spatial, indicating the interest in exploring the specifically spatial aspects of interdisciplinary processes or practices that operate between art and architecture.[23]

Such a rendering is problematic as it posits Critical Spatial Practice as something to be understood either as physical or that has a certain disciplined aesthetic background, stemming from art and architecture and the collaborative potential of an intervention.[24] This, in terms of popular reception, makes it often sound both unprofessional—since it is not a professionally registered term—but also purely temporary and installation-like in nature, which, depending on the audience, could be perceived as amateur. In an effort to reframe these practices, they should be regarded as part of a

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[22]   Jane Rendell, *Art and Architecture: A Place Between*, London: I. B. Tauris, 2006, p. 191

[23]   Jane Rendell, "From Critical Spatial Practice to Site-Writing" (lecture, k/haus Passagegalerie, Vienna, June 27, 2011).

[24]   See also: Jane Rendell "Introduction: Critical Architecture: Between Criticism and Design", in: Jane Rendell, Jonathan Hill, Murray Fraser and Mark Dorrian, Critical Architecture, London: Routledge, 2007, p. 1ff.

recognizable profession, not one with professional bodies or forms of representation, but one from which certain responsibilities and ethics can be demanded. Although this might, at first, sound contradictory or even naive, as I am arguing toward the transcendence of disciplines and am now calling for a "profession" which would unite such practices, it is important to recognize that despite the a-disciplinary approach I am defending, I strongly believe that this new practice should both influence existing disciplines as well as produce a new body of recognizable work. Most importantly, it must be accountable for certain consequences that it produces. This would entail that one would also rethink the frameworks of production that allow space to operate, and to devise different types of engagement for audiences. It is important to move away from the idea of the spatial practitioner as artist, because the position of the artist often implies a lack of either obligations and demands or repercussions for their actions for which they are answerable to. Critical Spatial Practice consists of the attempts to determine again the relationship between the object and subject, and can be understood as the staging of a reorganized relationship.

Making a Break: situating Critical Spatial Practice

Architecture, in general terms, produces that what the market demands. As the market requires clearly identifiable objects, architecture has historically been centered not only on the production of one-off iconic structures, but, further, on rendering single-authored creative gestures as a form of economy. Although architecture has historically also proven to be able to experiment around critical concerns, the possibility of such critique depends heavily on the role of the client, as the autonomy of the designer/producer is contested by a precisely defined market formula in which the client is the protagonist with the most power of decision.

Critical Spatial Practice is interested in the *condition* of something: to alter the condition(s) that one encounters in the everyday. As opposed to traditional or normative architectural practices, which are mostly concerned with generating new design and physical additions, spatial practice more frequently engages with acts of subtraction and revision: the alteration of conditions, which thus

tweaks the very parameters of its existence. Spatial practice in many ways does not attempt to set itself apart from architecture or urbanism in a necessarily antagonistic way, but simply offers and projects a more complex alternative in terms of its own approaches to a given situation. In this way, it also promotes and proposes a more agonistic form of practice, one that values and nurtures the coexistence of different approaches and beliefs in a common *space*.

This is not to say that architecture, as we know it, should no longer be practiced, but that alternatively, and in addition, different notions of and possibilities within the field should be considered. The kind of approaches that I am trying to come to terms with are those that develop frameworks in which architecture plays a role, but is no longer understood to be the lone and foremost protagonist—rather a player among many others actors and agents. Having said this, critical spatial practice should voice concerns and political commentary through spatialized critique, as Rendall suggests.

Similar notions of an understanding of spatial practice as an alternative to conventional modes and practices of architecture and urbanism can also be found in the research of Nishat Awan, Tatjana Schneider, and Jeremy Till, who coauthored *Spatial Agency: Other Ways of Doing Architecture*,[25] in which they propose "a new way of looking at how buildings and space can be produced." "Moving away from architecture's traditional focus on the look and making of buildings," they frame spatial agency as "a much more expansive field of opportunities in which architects and non-architects can operate."[26] The authors reference—both in their own work and that of others—the seminal English architect Cedric Price, who advocated that projects should begin with the understanding that a building is not necessarily the best solution to a spatial problem. Some of the most intriguing parts of Price's project can be found in a publication that summarizes a long-lasting

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[25]   Nishat Awan, Tatjana Schneider, and Jeremy Till, *Spatial Agency: Other Ways of Doing Architecture* (London: Routledge, 2011).
[26]   Spatial Agency, http://www.spatialagency.net.

conversation between Price and the curator Hans Ulrich Obrist.[27] Price—who realized relatively few buildings, but through his proposals, teaching, and thinking inspired generations of practitioners and exerted enormous influence across many disciplines—intended to foster social cohesion through the implementation of short-term structures that called for collaborative relationships based on individual engagement and agonistic communal action. In this regard, spatial agency attempts to undo the myth of the architect as auteur and replaces it with an understanding of practice—practice based on collaboration.

In the context of spatial practice and an understanding of how more conventional participatory practices—the kind of practices described in the chapter titled "Undoing the Innocence of Participation"—can enter into this, Till, along with Peter Blundell Jones and Doina Petrescu coedited the book *Architecture and Participation*, which questions whether participatory approaches lead to new spatial conditions and spatialities, and attempts to come to terms with the emerging types of what they still refer to as "architectural practices."[28] The editors were interested in investigating the probabilities and potentials of the way that the user has been and can be included in design processes. It delivers a reassertion, rearticulation, and, to a certain extent, excavation of the traditional bottom-up rhetoric of participation that purports an image of inclusion as a round-table discussion. Nevertheless, their nuanced methods of illustrating those participatory approaches to architecture challenge many of the normative values of traditional architecture and in particular issues of authorship, control, aesthetics, and the role of the use.

In this context, Claire Bishop's work – most notably in her book "Artificial Hells – Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship"[29] – poses a very interesting antipole to my approach, as it has been researched and written

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[27]   Hans Ulrich Obrist and Cedric Price, *Conversation Series 21: Cedric Price* (Cologne: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2010).
[28]   Peter Blundell Jones, Doina Petrescu, and Jeremy Till, *Architecture and Participation* (London: Spon Press, 2005).
[29]   Bishop, Claire, Artificial Hells – Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship, London: Verso, 2012.

from the point of view of an art historian. Bishop is dealing with the object of participation as an expanded field of post-studio (social) practices and socially engaged art. Her focus regarding participatory art differs from that of Nicolas Bourriaud's "Relational Aesthetics"[30] in that she is interested in the creative rewards of participation as a politicised working process: "in a world where everyone can air their views to everyone we are faced not with mass empowerment but with an endless stream of egos levelled to banality. Far from being oppositional to spectacle, participation has now entirely merged with it."[31] Although there is arguably a match in terms of a certain frustration of the way in which the object is dealt with, particularly since the mid-90s – and here, Bishop quotes, for example, from an e-mail exchange with artist Thomas Hirschhorn, "I want to work out an alternative to this lazy, lousy 'democratic' and demagogic term 'Participation'. I am not for 'Participative-art', it's so stupid because every old painting makes you more 'participating' than today's 'Participative-art', because first of all real participation is the participation of thinking! Participation is only another word for 'Consumption'!"[32] – the main difference is that her way of analysis stems from the approach of an academic historian, whereas my work situates itself in the realm of the propositional. I primarily consider research-as-practice in the sense of a productive tool, working through the material of contemporary practitioners in order to turn it into something else: "What makes artists free agents, and thereby useful members of any over-regulated society, is precisely that they remain free not to have or express convictions, but instead to roam the unscripted tracts of the world and mind and chance upon things no one was aware of and therefore never thought of 'propagating'."[33]

As previously mentioned in the context of understanding who and what determines the critical, critical spatial practice entails judgment. The setting up of such scaffold and meaning for practice implies that each individual

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[30]   Nicolas Bourriaud. *Relational Aesthetics*. Translated by Simon Pleasance and Fronza Woods (Dijon: Les presses du reel, 2001)

[31]   Bishop, Claire, Artificial Hells – Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship, London: Verso, 2012, p. 277.

[32]   Ibid., Thomas Hirschhorn in an e-mail to Claire Bishop, p. 264

[33]   Anders Kreuger's review on Jonas Staal's "Propagandas" at Laveronica, Modica, "Art-Agenda", May 27, 2016

contributor to a project needs to take a position, which always has consequences. Only when a border—a clearly distinguishable field of operation—is acknowledged can it be broken, transgressed, worked against, or (mis)used. By deliberately producing such agonistic fields of encounter, critical spatial practice nurtures and exploits misunderstandings and a proactive outlook on the value of failure as a starting point of experimentation.

Investigating the field's recent history, there have been countless projects that deal with complex narratives of "the political" within "the spatial," narratives around political congregation, and the question of what constitutes "a" or "the" space for and of politics. Critical Spatial Practice has often been involved in the investigation, imagination, development, and design of such spaces through content-related curatorial questions, and the setting up of speculative scenarios and policies, and their potential physical counterpart. Critical Spatial Practice works in contrast to the certainty with which architects tend to produce, design, and deliver "solutions"; it approaches a subject through questioning its status and how its underlying conditions and protocols can potentially be tackled. Before physical intervention, physicality itself is called into question. The tools, in this context, cannot be predefined or described a priori. Its very default is that there is no default.

Using the productive conflict between consensual versus dissensual modes of practice as a driving force to develop individual projects, Critical Spatial Practice tends to think both through the terms of "curating content" and "staging conflict" in order to develop methodologies and tools that help define socio-spatial frameworks that can be tested against reality—ranging from transient and informal to highly structured and formal. These changes in scale (physical) and intention ([in]formalities) produce fertile grounds for speculation: if physical space (design) does not, at times, matter, what constitutes the elementary components of a spatial condition? Does decision-making take place only within the designed rigidity of the courtroom and parliament, or does it also emerge in the informal corner of the corridor, between meetings, with coffee and a cigarette? And, if so, how can such processes or spaces be addressed through design?

Such practice is often misunderstood—many believe that it simply relates to small-scale architecture and temporal physical constructs. On the contrary, Critical Spatial Practice has to do with the conscious staging of discourse and debate, the realization of zones for agonistic debate. In contrast to an art intervention, it supersedes the often self-referential physical object of the installation by producing political otherness and a driver for change across scales. And while there is no such thing as a singular approach, I would claim that there is a collaboratively developed, authored, and constantly refined approach to a particular set of practices of territorial research and its subsequent translations into new readings, protocols, facts, and, more generally speaking, realities.

Feedback and the Role of Publishing

One prerogative of contemporary production in the arts is precisely to question how critical practices operate. Architecture, as distinct from the arts (though they too are not exempt), is largely determined by market forces. However, the field tends to hold a particular promise since its relationship to spatial domains is inherent to its disciplinary history. Much contemporary production in architecture ignores its indebtedness to history and spatial engagement, and avoids accountability in terms of social and political responsibilities. In this regard, Critical Spatial Practice aims to provide a much-needed injection of a vital, critical discourse to the field. Although critical theory in architectural discourse had attempted to seemingly do just that, the "critical" in critical spatial practice questions the relationship between architecture and the larger social world.

In this questioning, particular lines in inquiry arise: Can social complexity, antagonistic encounter, and critical exchange be designed? What constitutes the productive transitions of physical scales and programmatic (in)formalities when it comes to political encounters? When we stage discourse, when and how does the political emerge? And whose role is it to ensure this?

Critical Spatial Practice should be understood as a means of rethinking one's

codes of conduct. Rather than a form of Maoist *autocritique*, which was understood as a form of forced self-criticism producing written or verbal testimony as to how one was ideologically mistaken, the form of critique at play here is one through which one productively addresses the default practices that one has been taught and is professionally expected to practice in order to foster a discussion amongst not only one's peers, but a wider public. Consequently, the singular and often self-referential approach of architecture is enhanced by a complex field of interests, methods, and lines of attack. These utilize a set of specific tools at various scales in order to approach situations in the most productive manner and later establish critical problematics.

Within Critical Spatial Practice, the question of feedback is crucial. Conflictual exchange with likeminded, and adversarial, practitioners has recently found a solid base in publishing, which has become a central tool to think projects through a common format, allowing for the address of a specific audience, one that contributes to the discursive arena. There are countless books published in the 1990s and early 2000s, which describe the challenges of this new field, which is so difficult to circumscribe. Some of these books—in chronological order—are: Roslyn Deutsche's *Evictions: Art and Spatial Politics*; Jonathan Hill's *The Illegal Architect*; *Everyday Urbanism* by John Case, Margaret Crawford and John Kaliski; Marina Löw's *Raumsoziologie*; *A Civilian Occupation: The Politics of Israeli Architecture* by Rafi Segal and Eyal Weizman; Keller Easterling's *Enduring Innocence: Global Architecture and Its Political Masquerades*; Lucius Burckhardt: *Wer plant die Planung? Architektur, Politik und Mensch* by Jesko Fezer and Martin Schmitz; Paul Hirst's *Space and Power: Politics, War and Architecture*; Bartolomeo Pietromarchi's *The [un]common place: art, public space and urban aesthetics in Europe*; *Did Someone Say Participate, An Atlas of Spatial Practice* by Markus Miessen and Shumon Basar; Nina Möntmann's *Art and Its Institutions: Current Conflicts, Critique and Collaborations*; *City of Collision: Jerusalem and the Principles of Conflict Urbanism* by Philipp Misselwitz and Tim Rieniets; Eyal Weizman's *Hollow Land*; *Networked Cultures* by Peter Mörtenböck and Helge Mooshammer; *Urban Transformation* by Ilka and

Andreas Ruby; *Institution Building: Artists, Curators, Architects in the Struggle for Institutional Space* by Nikolaus Hirsch, Philipp Misselwitz, Markus Miessen, and Matthias Görlich; to name a few. One aspect that all these books have in common is that they seek to highlight the complexity of their respective subjects, and always include a multilayered reading of the practice-based relationships that ultimately work through, unpack, and deliver situations and conditions that manifest across those layers rather than in the conventional understanding of the disciplines engaged.

Architecture has always employed publishing as a testing ground for ideas—and print endeavors often embody the most radical architectural sites of all.[34] The field indeed has a very specific history embedded in the production and dissemination of discursive platforms such as books, magazines, and self-published zines. One aspect of critical spatial practice is that it often occurs and appears at the intersection of publishing as distribution of ideas. Although publishing should not be understood as the product per se, it allows for an ongoing inquiry beyond the market, a discursive interrogation of the normative practices that are at play. In Critical Spatial Practice the act of publishing is one that is heavily related to the development of research as practice, which distinguishes it from the 1970s experiments known as "paper architecture," in which architects who were not granted the possibility to build relocated their practice into the extraterritorial construct of the book. Critical Spatial Practice thinks about space without wanting or needing to necessarily intervene in it physically.

Research as Practice

Consequently, this also means that there has been a shift in the approach, thinking, perception, and processes of decision-making when it comes to collaborative production. The "final product" is no longer paramount in light of the processes produces it. Along the way, new knowledge is produced and new ideas and projects can be developed. Rather than a final "piece" of design, Critical Spatial Practice and its published byproducts present inquiry,

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[34] See Beatriz Colomina and Craig Buckley, *Clip/Stamp/Fold: The Radical Architecture of Little Magazines 196X to 197X* (Barcelona: Actar, 2010).

documented experiment, a discursively argued thesis toward a "spatial condition." This condition may result in a large-scale proposal, a social event, a policy document, an analysis of spatial typologies, critical documentation of an existing situation, or a plethora of other possible formats. Publishing, in this context, can be used as a relevant and appropriate tool to communicate such non-normative approaches and working methodologies, formats that can often not be communicated through an image alone.

Such an approach has a very rich history, which was arguably launched by the introduction of the traveling research studio in architecture schools, such as "Las Vegas Studio," the seminal 1968 course taught by Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown, which culminated in the 1972 publication, *Learning from Las Vegas: The Forgotten Symbolism of Architectural Form*.[35]

In 2006, Suhail Malik delivered a lecture at Roundtable, Centre for Research Architecture at Goldsmiths, London. His talk called attention to the issue of "Research as Practice" and clarified the notion of research as a state of work and production that one would actually not engage if one knew what it was.[36] According to Malik, the research process potentially delivers a set of data that opens up a space to articulate something that has not been articulated previously. What constitutes research? Where exactly does research take place? Such ontological practice as a mode of knowledge production stresses the importance of learning and questioning rather than knowing and presupposing: the notion of research is based on assuming an ontological position and proposition—with the effort and ambition to produce new sets of knowledge. Practice in action can hence be understood as a research methodology; in practice things are being put into the world with little comprehension of what they will become. Practice as a tool of research delivers feedback on one's speculation as to what kind of effect and affect "something" would have on the political and the social. This test-bed practice of speculative scenarios creates productions organized through modes of

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[35]   Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour, *Learning from Las Vegas: The Forgotten Symbolism of Architectural Form* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1972).
[36]   Suhail Malik (Roundtable, Centre for Research Architecture, Goldsmiths, London, November 2, 2006).

research right from the beginning, not intrinsically geared toward a clearly defined product, but instead attempting to cultivate a conflicting practice as a mode of creating an arena of discussion—an epistemology, which accumulates sets of knowledge that produce discursive occasions and provoke reactions. Research, in Malik's sense, is not necessarily to be understood as a means of intervention—i.e., as in architecture where "research" is often misused in a straightforward manner, where it constitutes the first step in a linear process of research-concept-implementation. In this sense, research is no longer simply a means of study and production that essentially relies on knowledge-based results that attempt to frame a problem, rather it functions to define and work around a problematic (a problem generated by previous practices).[37] How can individual practitioners start to describe new territories of knowledge from which to branch off into new fields of practice? What are the alterations to the normative framework of practice and how can those be measured?

Such research, as a mode of producing projects in overlapping fields and territories (combinations that may have yet to be explored), should be understood as an engagement with its own methodology, a writing of its own history—a history of its making—challenging the concept of the necessity of historic lineage. Its methodology suggests that something systemic is going on: producing upon previous works, setting up spatial constructs that speculate on the potential of enabling and disabling forces and structures, which ultimately construct a consequential practice, a practice that carries with it a set of acute consequences, which have to be dealt with, worked around, and negotiated—a move toward spatial dissensus.

Economic Viability?

How can such research practice be sustained economically? The question for spatial practitioners today often revolves around the issue of scaled and alternative economies: how can one develop and establish spatial frameworks in which and through which different economies can start to emerge?

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[37]   Ibid.

Traditionally, in architecture, one is used to the protocol that the entire building budget should be spent on the physical realization of the building. However, this often may not be the most relevant or appropriate decision. Alternative models and frameworks need to be developed in which architecture is considered and understood beyond the physical and visible reality. Where architecture is often stuck in its own normative frameworks of practice, a different territory needs to be envisioned and expanded in which the role model and its possible descriptions are no longer tarnished by the history and protocols of architecture. This is not to say that there should be a territorial distinction between architecture proper and critical spatial practice, but rather that architecture is one of the many practices that need to be considered in such multifaceted, heterogeneous, and complexity-admitting approach to space.

There is something called "architecture" and most readers would agree on what that is: it is physical, it has a presence, and it has a specific inhabitable scale to it. But then, there is something beyond that, which has to do with the economy of operation, the timetables and protocols of everyday life and use, the institutional or domestic reality of people doing their job or spending time in a certain defined and designed space. Many architects spend their budget on the physical shell, the envelope, the visible product that is clearly defined and can be judged aesthetically. What I am interested in here is to explore the possible relationship in which the economy of architecture is also understood as the economy, which does not only cater for the architectural object, but where architecture blends into other less-pronounced territories of practice that have lost sensibilities for program and the realities of production.

There are, for example, institutions that spend huge amounts of their budgets on representative architecture. In these instances, it is often the case that by the time that this representative gesture has been erected—as a symbol of certainty, control, and also power—there is often only little or hardly any budget left to program architecture. It is precisely here that alternatives form of spatial analysis, critique, and practice are most needed. From the point of view of an architect, this should not be a problem, since what one is paid for is

precisely the physical envelope. However, it is this fatal misconception of historic certainty as given, which has built up the slow decline and downfall of the profession of architecture, a profession that has slowly been taken over by developers and businessmen. It is the responsibility of the critical practitioner to question the status quo or the practices that are producing such certainties and economic dead-ends and how those can be altered toward a more productive and open-ended reality.

One of the variables that hence needs to be considered and explored in this context is the interplay between emerging spatial frameworks and their potential to act as representative agents while being deeply embedded in and working toward and alongside the programmatic and content-driven considerations and activities of their hosts.

This—of course—presents a dilemma for the architect: on the one hand, if he or she seeks only immediate economic gain, he or she would push for a larger "physical part" of the building in order to raise the architectural budget and, therefore, his or her own economy. I am interested in the speculation and setting up of scenarios through which other "soft" services could enter and contribute to such project. Within Critical Spatial Practice there should be a productive schizophrenic break: on the one hand, such practice should be understood and described as one which brings with it a seriousness that could be compared to professions like architecture—it should not only act without mandate, but it should also be able and ready to supply for a commissioned demand, if needed. On the other hand, such practice would clearly operate as a content-driven critique of the ego/object-driven nature of the architect and the, at times, absurd simplicity of the architecture-led production of space. One should not overestimate architecture, but one should also not underestimate its power simply through physical presence and visibility. The schizophrenia occurs when one realizes that the combination of several of those components and scales within the process of producing space is in fact highly fertile and productive rather than a hindrance or burden. So, the question is whether one can produce something that would enable and disable at the same time: both professionally, as a fertile schizophrenia of

practice, and spatially, to form it in a particular way, which would be the result of content turning into matter, be this physical or not. In this context, Critical Spatial Practice should assume the role of a heterogeneous agent, one that, rather than fostering or exacerbating either/or scenarios, positions an alternative practice outside of the realm of architecture only to consider it as one of its central elements. Such collaborative, micro-political, and curatorial approaches that consists of the acknowledgement of complexity driven by an ensemble of actors prepares the ground for the realization that the revolutionary aspect of architecture is to be found not in its *form* but in its *processes*. These processes can be called the "construction of the democratic," not as a romantic notion of all-inclusive modes of practice, but a means to envision and construct an agonistic space of politics. This is not to say that one should oppose form to content, but to strengthen content-driven process as the primary force that generates form, be it physical – as in object- or architectural-scale – or otherwise.

One of the key questions in this context is how the role of the spatial practitioner can participate in serious projects and economic frameworks and how this role can produce certain new protocols that can be understood as professional services, which can also be rendered and remunerated as such. This is not to say that it needs a professional body to formally represent or govern such a practice, but there be a sensibility and understanding of critical spatial practice as a part of a larger equation, which articulates and actively engages in the production of space. This also has to do with the species of client that one is working with—if there even is a client. Historically, the role of the client in projects often gets neglected when we speak about architecture. If the client really understands what you are trying to do and is not solely interested the physical representation of architecture as an object, the discourse around the client-producer relationship can become more productive.

There is a fine line and very interesting difference in the way architects are, professionally speaking, treated compared to artists. Architects are very good at—and very much used to—dealing with and reacting to the demands

presented to them. Artists often attempt to reject those demands. It seems that we need to be a little more demanding, in a two-fold relationship: on the one hand we need to be more demanding as practitioners, pushing the visibility and impact of projects to a more professional and internationally recognized levels, and on the other hand, we need more demanding clients, who do not simply ask for an artistic, self-referential, and formal-aesthetic gesture, but a complex and multifaceted professional service that has consequences and assumes responsibility. In terms of cultural economics of power and valuation, the practitioner needs to play a more proactive role in redefining his role as a cultural producer. Today, we are facing a situation in which such practice needs to be highly speculative and in constant state of flux, as opposed to architecture, which always attempts to pose an a priori answer. The question of Critical Spatial Practice is not about whether to disintegrate or dilute the notion of what was previously known as "the disciplinary," but to question the very notion of practice itself. The reason it needs to be understood and practiced autonomously from architecture is that although both are concerned with the production of space, architecture limits itself by the very legal frameworks and professional definitions that it regiments.

Voices from the Outside

Locating several existing works in my discourse, I have used Edward Said's *Representation of the Intellectual* and Eyal Weizman's *Hollow Land* in order to unpack and locate their relevance in regards to what their work has meant and provoked in terms of my thinking.[38]

Evaluating the state of Critical Spatial Practice, the following exercise will illustrate the pertinence of Said and Weizman vis-à-vis my practice. Their thinking has helped me critique my own work as well as to develop Crossbench Praxis as a role model in which outsider involvement and an individual's participation can produce common and fertile ground on which even adversaries can collaborate.

The Uninvited Outsider

In *Representations of the Intellectual*, Said introduces the public role of the intellectual as that of an outsider, as an amateur and disturber of the status quo. In his view, one task of the intellectual is to break down stereotypes and the reductive categories that limit human thought and communication.[39] Said speaks about intellectuals as figures whose public performance can neither be predicted nor reduced into a fixed dogma or party line. He clearly distinguishes between the notion of the intellectual and that of the insider: "Insiders promote special interests, but intellectuals should be the ones to question patriotic nationalism, corporate thinking, and a sense of class, racial or gender privilege."[40] For Said, an ideal intellectual works in exile and on the margins, as an amateur, as the author of a language that tries to speak the truth to power, rather than an expert who provides objective advice for pay.

In the context of my thesis, this notion of what one could call the "uninvited outsider" is key. It puts forward the claim that universality always comes hand in hand with risk. There are no rules. There are "no gods to be worshipped

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[38]   See Edward Said, *Representations of the Intellectual* (New York: Random House, 1996); and Eyal Weizman, *Hollow Land* (London: Verso), 2007.
[39]   Said, *Representations of the Intellectual*, xi.
[40]   Ibid., xiii.

and looked to for unwavering guidance."[41] By questioning the default mode of operation—which is clearly that of the specialist, the insider, the one with an interested agenda—Said writes of intellectuals as those who always speak to an audience, and by doing so, represent themselves to themselves. This mode of practice is based on the idea that one operates according to one's concept of one's own practice, which brings with it the intellectual duty for independence from external pressures. In underlining the role of the outsider, Said exposes the need to, at times, belong to a set and network of social authorities in order to directly effect change. This spirit of productive and targeted opposition, rather than accommodation, is the driving force for critical spatial practice: to understand when to be part of something and when to be outside of it; to strategically align in order to make crucial decisions, which will otherwise be made by others—most likely with a less ethically developed horizon.

Said, however, also illustrates that the role of the outsider is a lonely condition, and that it involves what Foucault calls "a relentless erudition": "There is something fundamentally unsettling about intellectuals who have neither offices to protect nor territory to consolidate and guard."[42] The uninvited outsider is someone who has a background within a particular discipline, but ventures out of his or her milieu and immediate professional context, using a set of soft skills acquired elsewhere, and applying them to found situations and problematics. According to Said, this person as an individual has a specific public role in society that cannot be reduced to a faceless professional. It is precisely the fact that one is operating without one's own professional boundaries that one can start to articulate concerns, views, and attitudes that go beyond the benefit of the individual. While it may seem that there are benefits to professional boundaries, expertise, and specific knowledge, one could argue that specific sets of parasitic knowledge can most generatively, surprisingly, and productively apply to situations precisely when they are not based on disinterested principles. This is something that can emerge when driven by "symbolic personages marked by

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41   Ibid., xiv.
42   Said, *Representations of the Intellectual*, xviii.

[…] unyielding distance to practical concerns,"[43] driven by a consciousness that is skeptical and engaged, and devoted to moral judgment. As the sociologies C. Wright Mills wrote, "The independent artist and intellectual are among the few remaining personalities equipped to resist and to fight the stereotyping and consequent death of genuinely living things. Fresh perception now involves the capacity to continually unmask and to smash the stereotypes of vision and intellect with which modern communications swamp us."[44] The intellectual should be neither understood as a mediator nor a consensus builder, but "someone whose being is staked on a critical sense, a sense of being unwilling to accept easy formulas, or ready-made clichés, or the smooth, ever-so-accommodating confirmations of what the powerful or conventional have to say, and what they do. Not just passively unwillingly, but actively willing to say so in public."[45]

In this context, it is necessary to raise a basic but crucial question: from which position does one speak? There is no truth, only specific situations. There are responses to situations. One's speech or reaction should be modeled by these situations. And the understanding of a certain situation always depends on how it can relate to its scale. It may be the case that a specific situation leads to potential readings of larger bodies and relationships. Once the specifics are dealt with, one usually easily understands actions' larger ramifications. In terms of communicating one's message, it is essential to break away from one's milieu—otherwise, one willingly reduces his or her audience to that of the already existing, most often disciplinary crowd of one's background. The goal is to produce new publics and audiences that would not convene without one's intervention. In the context of the uninvited outsider, Said's "exile" can also be understood as a metaphorical condition, such as migration in other fields of expertise. Or as the saying goes, one cannot be a prophet in one's own country.

Such migration can be understood as a nomadic practice, not one that is

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[43]   Ibid, 7.
[44]   C. Wright Mills, *Power, Politics, and People: The Collected Essays of C. Wright Mills*, ed. Irving Louis Horowitz (New York: Ballantine, 1963), 299.
[45]   Said, *Representations of the Intellectual*, 23.

necessarily driven by territorial shifts, but one that sets a course that is never fully adjusted, "always feeling outside the chatty, familiar world inhabited by natives."[46] According to Said, (self-imposed) exile—as an expression of dissatisfaction—can become not only a style of thought, but also a new, if temporary, habitation. Said further makes a claim for a kind of amateurism, as an "activity that is fueled by care and affection rather than by profit and selfish, narrow specialization."[47] As a result, today's intellectual ought to be an amateur, "someone who considers that to be a thinking and concerned member of a society one is entitled to raise moral issues at the heart of even the most technical and professionalized activity."[48] Instead of simply doing what one is supposed to do, one can inquire about reasons and protocols. Practitioners in exile are individuals who represent not the consensus of the foreign practice, but doubts about it on rational, moral, and political grounds. Questioning long-established agreements, outsiders can represent and work toward a cause, which might otherwise be difficult for those entangled in the power and political relations of said context. What is important to realize here is that Said deliberately emphasizes the need to be in some form of contact and relationship with an audience in order to effect change: "The issue is whether that audience is there to be satisfied, and hence a client to be kept happy, or whether it is there to be challenged, and hence stirred into outright opposition or mobilized into greater democratic participation in the society. But in either case, there is no getting around the intellectual's relationship to them."[49]

What is at stake here is not an activation of dilettantism as the cultivation of quasi-expertise, but a notion of the outsider as a means of breaking out of the tautological box of professional practice. The outsider is not necessarily a polymath or generalist (as in the image and description of the architect as Renaissance man),[50] but someone who can use a general sense of abstraction in order for his or her knowledge to fuel an alternative and

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46   Said, *Representations of the Intellectual*, 53.
47   Ibid., 82.
48   Ibid.
49   Ibid., 83.
50   See Saint, *The Image of the Architect*.

necessary debate, and to decouple existing and deadlocked relationships and practices in a foreign context. In order to become actively productive as an instigator and initiator in the choreography of strategic conflicts, one can appropriate the strength and potential of weak ties. Such an understanding of surplus value through otherness is essentially antithetic to the notion of gnostic knowledge; that is to say, the idea that the specialist is "good" and trustworthy, and that only specialist knowledge should be accepted in a specific and related environment or field of practice. This further entails that one accepts the status quo by not engaging with it if one is not an expert. The outsider does not accept this. To venture out of both expertise and discipline is crucial in order to remain sufficiently analytical toward the specialized knowledge of others. Moreover, it is important that once in exile, one constructs what architect Teddy Cruz calls a "critical proximity"[51]—a space in which the role of the outsider is to tactically enter an institution or other construct in order to understand, shuffle, and mobilize its resources and organizational logic.

This then starts to translate into a discipline without profession, a discipline without a set of prescriptions, but a framework of criticality: a discipline from the outside, a parasitic, impartial, and autonomous form of knowledge production. This is not fueled by accumulation, but by editing and sampling. Or as Jorge Davila argues about Foucault's analytics of power: "to cut is to start something new—knowledge itself is a cut, a moment of rupture, a moment of exception driven by the moment of decision."[52] But like participation, critique itself can also become a form and force of normalization. As I will elaborate regarding the case of Joschka Fischer (in a forthcoming scene), critique can be normalized and absorbed just as rebellion is subsumed. For critical spatial practice to remain productive and unforeseen, one must avoid a situation in which criticality turns into yet another modality of commodification.

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[51]   See interview on *Archinect*, Şevin Yıldız, "With Teddy Cruz on 'Power' and 'Powerlessness,'" November 19, 2009, http://archinect.com/features/article/93919.
[52]   See Jorge Dávila, "Foucault's Interpretive Analytics of Power," *Systemic Practice and Action Research* 6, no. 4 (August 1993).

Critical Spatial Practice as a Mode of Legal Evidence

In Jean-Luc Godard's *Notre Musique*, a diplomat asks a writer: "Do writers know what they are talking about?" "Of course not," the writer replies, "those who act never have the ability to talk or think adequately about what they do."[53]

In early April 2007, US soldiers started building a concrete wall to separate one of Baghdad's Sunni enclaves from surrounding Shia neighborhoods. This wall was and is not an isolated phenomenon. It is part of a genealogy of historic references of power-architectures and their oppositional reverberations, ranging from the Berlin Wall and the Vietcong's Cu Chi tunnel system to the Fence for Life, a security barrier along Israel's borders.

As previously discussed, architects and urban planners have started to understand the importance of their critical role within political, social, and spatial complexities—producing engagements other than those of the "commissioned project." Over the course of the last decade, one can trace an interesting phenomenon: that of the spatial practitioner inhabiting the role of the uninvited outsider, proactively forcing their way into discourses that are usually not understood as the remit of their profession. Operating without mandate, such a role is understood as a mode of participation that is conflictual rather than consensual. This nonphysical violence opens up an operative margin that enables the rethinking of local and indeed global politics.

Eyal Weizman has spent two decades of pioneering research on "military urbanism" within the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. His work has forced a new critique of the occupied territories from the perspective of an urban planner. Part of what he discovered is that the realities on the ground are constructed by a fusion of military generals, urbanists, and intellectuals, the result of which is a form of warfare that is designed to work against the spatialization of a Palestinian state. Weizman's work is an indicator for both a change in

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[53]   Jean-Luc Godard, dir., *Notre Musique* (New York: Wellspring Media, 2004).

contemporary spatial practices as well as in our conception of the politics of space.

Hollow Land, Weizman's most encompassing publication to date, archives his investigation on the political methodologies that allow for a physical transformation of the Israeli-Palestinian landscape. In order to understand the long-term strategies employed by city planners, geographers and cartographers that use settlements and borders to delay the assembly of a Palestinian state, he radically exposes how purpose-built settlements turn into strategic weapons, how soldiers double as architects, and how the Israeli military uses post-structuralist theory as a means of preparing operations. The book explores both the political system behind the conflict as well as the incentives of colonial occupation. From militarized airspace to the natural and built features that function as ammunition with which the conflict is waged, the publication critically unravels Israel's state-sponsored policy of expansion, and how, within the architectural and urban planning professions, extremely sophisticated strategies have been devised in order to turn military thinking into actualized space. Here, space is understood as an embodiment of ideology, a conflictual forcefield of organisations with sometimes opposing intentions, logics of practice and interests at play.

In a conversation with Weizman, he argued that, "geopolitics is a flat discourse. It largely ignores the vertical dimension and tends to look across rather than cut through the landscape."[54] The narratives within Weizman's thesis are always spatial. It defines what he calls the "Politics of Verticality"— the process that fragmented the territory of the West Bank not only in surface but also in volume. With the technologies and infrastructure required for the physical segregation of Israelis and Palestinians along complex volumetric borders, he argues that the most complex geopolitical issue of the Middle East has shifted scales and taken on architectural dimensions. Weizman, together with Alessandro Petti and Sandi Hillal, has also been working, for some time now, on a project called Decolonizing Architecture, which

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[54]   See "A Flat Discourse", in conversation with Eyal Weizman, appendix.

articulates the spatiality of decolonization in the region. Recognizing that Israeli hilltop settlements are applied as instruments of domination, Decolonizing Architecture assumes that a viable approach to the issue of their appropriation is to be found not only in the professional language of architecture and planning, but also in inaugurating what the group introduces as an "arena of speculation," one that incorporates varied cultural and political perspectives through the participation of multiple collaborators.

Hollow Land is spatially most precise in the chapter "Checkpoints: The Split Sovereign and the One-Way Mirror."[55] Here, Weizman elucidates the spatial relationships between what he calls the transparent border and the architectural features of checkpoints. Whatever he interrogates, he tries to understand how architecture becomes operational within the conflict. Whether Weizman discusses the influence of archeology on urban planning, Ariel Sharon's reconceptualization of military defense through the planning and architecture of settlements, or the contemporary discourse and practice of urban warfare, he never speaks from a single point of view. At times, Weizman's writing methodology approaches that of legal documents and witness testimony, which take the form of diverse voices and combine various modes of mapping and drawing.[56] The different material practices he presents become a direct register of politics. While *Hollow Land*, seen from the point of view of an archive, is never bound to one type of text, Weizman avoids the singularity of a particular role: he acts simultaneously as a human rights consultant, spatial practitioner, academic, and curator. The book is a discussion rather than a singular statement, it constitutes the beginning of an open-ended dialogue, the setting-up of a forum: a theory saturated with *things*. What one is confronted with is not architectural theory, but an idea of architecture as an operational tactic.

One of the many important achievements of the book is that it points at an acute reality: the crimes that manifest spatially are in desperate need of

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[55]   See Eyal Weizman, *Hollow Land* (London: Verso), 2007, p. 139.
[56]   Weizman has used this methodology throughout his work, including the exhibitions "Territories" at Kunst-Werke, Berlin, and "Mengele's Skull—The Advent of a Forensic Aesthetics" at Portikus, Frankfurt am Main, among others.

dismantling; not only by politicians or human rights groups, but architects and planners, recognizing the relationship (and their own entanglements) between space and power. Architecture is by nature closely tied to political and economic goals; it serves the establishment, and complies with state and municipal regulations. But architectural practice is often romantically perceived as a creative profession only. Tomorrow's practice should reach for an architecture of spatial standards and frameworks that prevent future scenarios in which architects can commit crimes against humanity. Is there even a need for a Geneva Convention for the built environment, a court of justice to persecute spatial war crimes?

Hollow Land points at the potentials of the autonomous space of production. It exemplifies how discursive theory can be turned into practice, while the space which one is operating from becomes an enabler. Whereas the artistic space, and its autonomy, is usually thought of as a test-ground that only affects a certain audience, Weizman's act supersedes the symbolic. While human rights groups, the Palestinian government, artist collectives and curators are referencing his writing simultaneously, it has become an index of politics.

It points at the need to complexify and carefully differentiate when it comes to a contemporary understanding of "practicing architecture" as it further entails that one needs to understand "practice" as a heterogeneous environment rather than a professional(ised) set of regulated skills. One exceptionally relevant example in this regard is the "Forensic Architecture" research agency founded and directed by Eyal Weizman. In his recent publication "Forensic Architecture"[57], he introduces this particular practice as one that "(…) refers to a production of architectural evidence and to its presentation in juridical and political forums."[58] Forensics, according to Weizman, "turns architecture into an investigative practice, a probative mode for enquiring about the present through its spatial materialization."[59] Instead of understanding architecture as a practice, which is merely concerned with building in the sense of adding

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[57]　　　Weizman, Eyal, Forensic Architecture – Violence at the Threshold of Detectability, New York: Zone Books, 2017
[58]　　　ibid., p.9
[59]　　　ibid., p.11

physical matter into specific locales and situations, Forensic Architecture is concerned with an alternative approach to the subject, which interprets possible meanings of architecture, one being that "buildings can thus become the medium upon which traces of fighting are left and from which incidents can be reconstructed."[60]

In the context of my dissertation, Weizman's work is particularly relevant as it presents a practice that inverts a form of spatial production that lies outside the frame of architectural history. It offers an understanding of the function of space as the illustration of power relations, showing that politics is not a formless process. Whereas Said develops a conceptual foundation, Weizman produces an applied theory—a praxis—which makes it valuable in terms of how it can be used strategically, politically and socially. In the context of my work its relevance emerges specifically through the question and rendering of the role of the public intellectual and, more specifically, the role of the architect in contemporary society. It reveals the political as that which is based on self-propelled engagement—direct, first-person participation as a means and blueprint of critical spatial practice.

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[60] ibid., p.57

Scene 1: What Is at Stake?

Welcome to *Harmonistan*!

The following attempts to outline and question a hypothesis: sometimes, all-inclusive democracy must be avoided. In order to make decisions within any given collaborative structure, network, or institution, conflicts can ultimately only be made productive and turned into practice if someone assumes responsibility. I will argue this by proposing a post-consensual practice, one that is no longer reliant on the normative and ill-defined modes of operating within politically complex and consensus-driven parties or similar constructs, but instead brings to light the necessity to undo the innocence of participation.

We are, at the moment, at a point of transition concerning participation—within politics, the Left, spatial practices, and architecture, the latter being its inherently visible and (economically) most clearly defined product. Participation, both historically and in terms of political agency, is often read through idyllic notions of negotiation, inclusion, and democratic decision-making as majority rule. However, it is precisely this often unquestioned mode of inclusion – used by politicians as a mode of populist, off-the-shelf politics – that does not produce significant results. Here, criticality is supplanted by the majority rule. To counteract that, I suggest a promotion of a conflictual reading of participation as a mode of practice—one that opposes the normative rendering of the democratic facilitator; one that has to assume, at times, conceptual violence, optical friction, and autonomous decision-making in order to produce frameworks for change.

In promoting a post-consensual practice, it is my challenge to move beyond the idea, truism, and cliché that – to generalize – people have good intentions. Conventional models of participation are based on inclusion and assume that inclusion goes hand in hand with the social-democratic protocol that everyone's voice has an equal weight within egalitarian society. Oftentimes, if a political actor or agency institutes a structure or situation featuring a bottom-up mode of inclusion, that actor or agency would be understood as a "do-

gooder"—someone with the interests of the people in mind. As stated in Frank Driescher's contribution on "Gutmenschen" (do-gooders) to the German weekly "Die Zeit"[61], there has been a recently developing issue with people contemptuously commenting on do-gooders. In contrast to Driescher's position, it is important to understand that my argument is not based on an antagonistic relationship regarding integrity, manners, and consideration, but rather trying to clarify that there is a difference between what I call "active" and "passive" forms of participation.

Participation (especially in times of crisis) has been celebrated as the savior from evil—whether in political projects, environmental sustainability related issues, religious groups, sustainable economics and development, neighborhood management, or even workplace wellness. This has been particularly true since the New Labour years in the UK and within the Dutch Polder model. Such idyllic forms of politics need to be questioned.

I will put forward a newly configured conception of participation as a lateral way to enter politics (forcing oneself into existing power relations). I will do so in opposition to a "long march through the institutions,"[62] or a politically motivated model of participation, which proposes to let others contribute to the decision-making process. I am promoting this not out of disbelief in democratic principles, but to produce a fissure between democracy-as-ambiguity, rule, and criticality, and to speculate on productive change.

One could argue that this post-consensual model is opportunistic. It challenges the widespread understanding that majority consensus leads to accuracy and intelligence, while promoting for an active citizenship in which the citizen can become a driving force for change, entering an existing discourse with clear intentions rather than opening it up to involve the majority. Remaining within the arena of the "democratic," I will bastardize participation into a form of violent and nondemocratic practice, an

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[61]   Driescher, Frank, "Meint Ihr Mich?", in: Die Zeit, Ausgabe 21, May 18, 2017
[62]   A phrase often attributed to Antonio Gramsci, however, it originates from the Long March of the Red Army in 1934/35. See Antonio Gramsci, Quintin Hoare, and Geoffrey Nowell Smith, eds., *Sections from the Prison Notebooks* (New York: International Publishers, 1971).

opportunistic model of interventionism, where interference is made possible due to the fact that one is no longer following existing protocols of internalized political power struggle. This model and role is what I call crossbench praxis.

Crossbench praxis is an ongoing project that concentrates on participation as the object of innovation. It attempts to open up a new language and practice, a field of operation. Crossbench praxis presents a work on architectural thinking as method.

Within this framework, I am unleashing and discussing a series of experiments that were conducted between 2005 and 2015. Each of these experiments were directed—in one way or another—toward the undoing of participatory innocence. Some of them were text-based, others were set within the art world, and again others were urban interventions, institutional models, or specific physical architectural projects. The proceeding chapters compose a galactic model, in which planets – as ideas – circulate around an empty void. By the end of this work, this void will be replaced by a model of practice. Crossbench praxis will present and open questions in the form of a constellation: a relational model.[63] In this text, I work to dismantle a hierarchical model of participation.

Positioned within a series of case studies I conducted recently, my "Quadrilogy on Participation", which you have received together with this document, examines existing notions of participatory practice, positioning them as results of various forms of disillusionment: the first, *Did Someone Say Participate? An Atlas of Spatial Practice*, unpacked it; the second, *The Violence of Participation*, kicked it; and the third, *The Nightmare of Participation*, proposed an alternative.[64] The books open up the increasingly prevalent question as to how one can write, as a process, on an ongoing body

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[63]   Not to be misunderstood as a model based on the notion of Relational Aesthetics as introduced by Nicolas Bourriaud. See Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, trans. Simon Pleasance and Fronza Woods (Dijon: Les presses du reel, 2001).
[64]   See Markus Miessen and Shumon Basar, eds., *Did Someone Say Participate? An Atlas of Spatial Practice* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006). Markus Miessen, ed., *The Violence of Participation* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2007); Markus Miessen, *The Nightmare of Participation: Crossbench Praxis as a Mode of Criticality* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2010).

of work through exchange, conversation, and collaboration.

This notion of exchange and feedback as a motor for one's practice was exposed and scrutinized in the fourth publication, *Waking Up from the Nightmare of Participation*, which folds secondary and tertiary commentary and discursive production triggered by my work back into my practice.[65]

In general, my dissertation puts forth a theory of how to participate from outside clearly defined and existing power-structures such as institutions, NGO organizations, companies or political parties rather than inside-out. Where traditionally participation is understood as a bottom-up practice, the one being advocated here sidesteps the democratic invitation process and uninvitedly enters the conversation mid-level, from the side, so to speak.

The setting of this dissertation will be used instrumentally, without necessarily benefiting from the scenario as a prosthetic space or accumulation and digestion of existing knowledge, but from the point of view of an interiority-machine, which brings together and substantiates the practices and projects at hand. This setting allows for a position of constructing critique without resting on academic convention to define practice but vice versa. Instead of studiously unpacking a topic, I will construct a problematic: the traps and potential dead end of participation.

In what follows, I illustrate that each one of the above-mentioned projects is an attempt to investigate a series of questions: How can one propose an alternative practice that engages in spatial projects that deal with social and political realities? What could such polyphonic practice potentially be? What is the mode of relevance of such work, and is it only worthy when deemed to be of "urgent relevance"?

These questions will be explored in the context of a larger project. Apart from reflecting on the quadrilogy of the "participation experiment," I will also present

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[65]   See Nina Valerie Kolowratnik and Markus Miessen, eds., *Waking Up From the Nightmare of Participation* (Utrecht: Expodium, 2011).

a series of projects including Winter School Middle East and the European Kunsthalle,[66] which serve as applied examples where these very questions have been scrutinized and deployed in site-specific contexts. These cases exemplify a mode of practice that supports independent, small-scale institutions, which foster alternatives to both public art institutions and the franchised, regionalized academy. They question the difference between institutionalization and the self-initiated instigation of para-institutional structures. These examples, explored in light of my own experiences as an external consultant, are paired with my experiences as an embedded outsider in formal political settings. More specifically, in a project commissioned by the government of Slovenia during its presidency of the European Council in 2008, East Coast Europe, and a research project and publication commissioned by the Dubai governmental think tank Moutamarat that resulted in the publication *With/Without: Spatial Products, Politics and Practices in the Middle East* in 2007.[67]

The majority of material, research, and knowledge collected in this work are not the result of endless weeks in libraries and archives, but the tangible production of knowledge through practice. One of the motivations that kick-started my work was the apparent lack of material that interrogated the aforementioned questions in the public sphere. To give an example: I have been instrumentalizing the writings of Belgian political theorist Chantal Mouffe as a way to explore concretized forms of specific approaches to the issue of direct engagement, inclusion versus exclusion, and how to become an actor in a field of existing power relations. I therefore decided that such material had to be generated in conversation with Mouffe, rather than rereading her books or reading the works of others who have analyzed her writings. The result was a six-year-long conversation that teased out a series of assumptions and provocations about participation.[68]

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[66] See http://www.winterschoolmiddleeast.org and http://www.eukunsthalle.com.
[67] See Markus Miessen, ed., *East Coast Europe* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2008); Shumon Basar, Antonia Carver, and Markus Miessen, *With/Without: Spatial Products, Practices and Politics in the Middle East* (New York: Bidoun, 2007).
[68] An edited version of this conversation can be found in the appendix.

The intraview format, more generally speaking, allowed me to test some of my hypotheses in a very direct manner, which created a space for spontaneous and immediate responses. This body of knowledge we collectively produced extends, beyond this work, into an archival form. It attempts to set up a web of relationships with respondents, an arsenal and arena drawing on specific knowledge when and (more importantly) where it is needed. In this context, intraviews are understood and presented as bibliography: self-generated dictionaries become bibliographic; architectural projects become bibliography; fieldwork and project-work with institutions becomes bibliography; publications, exhibitions, and editorial works become bibliography.

Scene 2: The *Territory of Action*[69]

What does an alternative architectural practice that engages in social and political realities look like, and how are these realities shaped by "the spatial"? What could a polyphonic spatial practice be? Spatial planning is often considered the management of different forms of conflicts. Cities exist as social and spatial conflict zones, renegotiating their limits through constant transformation. Conflict, in this context, refers primarily to nonviolent forms of friction. To deal with conflicts, critical decision-making must evolve. Such decision-making is often presupposed as a process whose ultimate goal is that of consensus. Opposing the politics of consensus, critical spatial practice should propose to foster micro-political participation in the production of space, and ask the question of how one can contribute to alien fields of knowledge, professions, or discourses from the point of view of "space." Here, one should distinguish between space as a social and material geography and the spatial, which manifests as a participatory agent. Through cyclical— that is impermanent—specialization, the future spatial practitioner could arguably be understood as an outsider who, instead of trying to set-up or sustain common denominators of consensus, enters existing situations or projects by deliberately instigating conflicts between already-delineated fields of knowledge.

When human life is condensed into urban conglomeration, architectural envelopes, or social and/or institutional settings, spatial conflicts arise. Like the original meaning of the Latin word *conflictus* (fight),[70] it represents a clash of interests in regards to spatial usage.

According to curator Hans Ulrich Obrist, there is an ever-increasing need to consider the "breaking of the consensus machine."[71] Taking this notion

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[69]   Term coined by Carlos Villanueva Brandt, who—since 1983—has been teaching Diploma Unit 10 at the Architectural Association in London, focusing on critical spatial practice on an urban scale.

[70]   "The Vulgar Latin word *conflictus* (clash, collision; impact) … derived from the Latin word *confligere* (clash, collide; contend), using the Latin prefix *con-* (together). *My Etymology*, "Etymology of the Latin Word Conflictus," http://www.myetymology.com/latin/conflictus.html.

[71]   Hans Ulrich Obrist, roundtable-discussion at the Architectural Association, London,

seriously, one should attempt to understand and illustrate the importance of critical engagement in diverse fields of knowledge, employing spatial conditions as a means of cultural investigation.

Crossbench praxis presents and discusses today's need for actors operating outside existing networks and clearly defined milieus, leaving behind circles of conventional expertise in an attempt to overlap with other transdisciplinary realities. Instead of aiming for synchronization, such models are based on participation through critical distance and the conscious implementation of zones of conflict. Within such zones existing situations are dismantled in order to strategically isolate components that could be (mis)used to stir friction; in other words, "disabling" becomes a productive tool. Such practices help to understand the effects and affects of soft design-components on political, economic, and social spaces.

Here, the architect's education and modes of strategic identification, abstraction, application, management, and mapping can be used as tactical tools in order to locate and relate to fields of conflict. Rather than producing a recipe, it opens a field of potential departures, projective voices from a critical distance that might allow one to understand what and how an architect can contribute to the questions at hand, tracing some of the above elements in order to create a selective and operational view. What makes an architect's approach to investigating a situation different from the default or normalized approaches of other fields of knowledge?

I have attempted to do this from the perspective of an architect, working in a diverse set of situations. Such a position, almost by default, starts to raise questions about the conditions in which the profession operates. Architectural thinking becomes particularly productive for, and probably most relevant to, the moment that one exits the boundary of the profession. Architectural territories, in my view, are always an individual act based on a moment of rupture at which normative spatial frameworks or protocols are interrogated

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March 10, 2006.

and transcended: a decision to move existing reality forward. At the same time, architecture is a highly collaborative endeavor in which different sets of actors are involved at any given time.

In the chapter titled "Learning from the Market," the particular practice that I refer to as the "uninvited outsider" is contrasted to a classical, market-driven consultancy methodology. This is introduced through a critical reflection on Jamshid Gharajedaghi's systems architecture, one of the contributors to the development of the third generation of systems thinking, where iterative design is at the core of systems methodology.[72] Such moving and acting in a different interior than one's background can be difficult, and the question emerges as to how one gains credibility and legitimacy in order to operate in such extended environment.

Further, I have read my interest in the phenomenon of participation through a series of goggles depending on the respective and diversified angles of observation: in regards to political science, the core relevant arguments of Chantal Mouffe were put in the context of and into conflict with the UK's New Labour as well as the Dutch Polder models. Within the larger remit of late 20th century philosophy, the writings of Edward Said were (mis)used in order to lead a virtual conversation, most specifically with "Representations of the Intellectual"[73]. Concerning spatial practices, the practice of soft thinking in architecture was investigated through the work of architects Keller Easterling's *Enduring Innocence*[74] and Eyal Weizman's *Hollow* Land[75], drawing from texts by filmmaker, media artist, and activist Florian Schneider to open up the field of critical discourse in the realm of collaboration. German politician Joschka Fischer's biography was animated as a case study to illustrate the intricacies of Gramsci's long march through the institutions. Further, there is an example of a large-scale German, state-funded project anticipating what in politically

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[72]   See also Jamshid Gharajedaghi, *Systems Thinking, Managing Chaos and Complexity: A Platform for Designing Business Architecture* (Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann, 1999).

[73]   Edward Said. *Representations of the Intellectual* (New York: Random House, 1996).

[74]   Keller Easterling. *Enduring Innocence: Global Architecture and its Political Masquerades* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005).

[75]   Eyal Weizman. *Hollow Land* (London: Verso, 2007).

correct grant-application terminology would be titled a "participatory project", and how this can be used as a priceless example of why to oppose pseudo-democratic and seemingly 'do-good' frameworks.

This patchwork methodology constitutes neither a historic survey nor a report from the front lines of activism, but a self-generated concoction of diverse structures for my analysis. The way that I activate past projects in order to develop a theory of conflictual participation could be compared to the way in which certain archives are structured; not in the sense of a library, but an animated accumulation of different species of knowledge and formats congregated in a single (physical) container that produces new relationships.

Crossbench praxis raises the question as to where it stands within in the larger discourse, positioning itself in opposition to conventional processes of participation. The aforementioned technique results in a concretized position that distances itself from the existing discourse while stimulating a heated debate, drawing parallels between my personal work to practices of political activism, different spatial practices, artistic forms of production and contemporary writing.

This methodology can run counter to traditional academia, as most of the material that is referenced or mentioned has neither been canonized nor is it available in a public library. But this is precisely the point in producing this work. In its place, I am interested in the conditions of politics, which is ultimately a consideration of things before they exist. It is an *inquiry* rather than *research*; it calls into question existing modes of practice by testing forms and formats of individual engagement against normative role models and scientific proof seeking in regard to existing discourses.

The autocratic model that will be put up for discussion should not be understood as a blueprint for practice, but as a point of departure, which creates a necessary friction to both stir debate and move practice forward. If there was only a single objective of this dissertation, it would be to develop a common territory from which, following Chantal Mouffe, we can start to agree

to disagree: a theory toward how to participate—without squinting at constituencies or voters, but instigating critical change be it physical or conceptual. Widening the scope of practice from a self-referential, inward-looking profession toward a nomadic set of knowledge, there are two arguments, one polemical and the other constructive. These are, at times, developed through concrete situations and projects, which Simon Critchley would call a "situated universality".[76]

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[76]   Simon Critchley, *Infinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment*, Politics of Resistance (London: Verso, 2007), 42.

Scene 3: Learning from the Market

"One initial approach is to conceive the multitude as all those who work under the rule of capital and thus potentially as the class of those who refuse the rule of capital. […] The concept rests, in other words, on the claim that there is no political priority among the forms of labor: all forms of labor are today socially productive, they produce in common, and share too a common potential to resist the domination of capital. Think of it as equal opportunities of resistance."
—Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri[77]

"One should not refer to Hardt and Negri when thinking about economic coherence, they have no idea what they are talking about."
—Joachim Hirsch[78]

"Expansion is the third millennium's entropy, dilute or die."
—Rem Koolhaas[79]

In 2005, Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello published the English translation of *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, which explored and addressed the crisis of anticapitalist critique through an unprecedented analysis of management texts. Based on a similar mode of skepticism, the following chapter attempts to introduce a series of concepts from management theory and business thinking in order to understand and develop an alternative approach to the notion of the outsider and the external agent. In business terms, the concept and practice of the external consultant could be compared and used as a useful—albeit partially problematic—example of what I will later introduce as the "Crossbench Practitioner."

Criticality, from the point of view of the market, tends to merge through the margin, from the outside in, not from within the existing system itself. If a

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[77]   Hardt and Negri, *Multitude*, 106–07.
[78]   Economist Joachim Hirsch in conversation with the author.
[79]   Rem Koolhaas, *Content* (Cologne: Taschen, 2004), 162–71.

company or large institution wants to change parts of their structural organization, they are most likely attempting this not by mobilizing their internal forces (their existing potential), but by inviting an outsider to assess what they are doing—to observe, review, and analyze key processes, and, where needed, to propose critical but useful alternatives. But change is difficult to implement. Moreover, for most actors within a given system, it is difficult for them to understand or predict possible shortcomings of their environment. Culture has historic registers and taboos that act as determining factors for passivity and the way we do things. Take the gospel truth of the monkey experiment, for example: several monkeys are placed in a cage with a banana hanging over a ladder. When any one monkey attempts to climb the ladder, the rest are punished. The monkeys learn to attack any monkey who tries to climb the ladder. Each monkey in turn is replaced with a new monkey, who learns to attack any monkey that tries to climb the ladder, until no monkey has ever seen the original punishment but all have learned this behavior.[80]

Like the new monkeys, with the uninvited outsider, the question is, how does one retrieve the banana without being previously taught or converted by others? A system tends to confirm existing paradigms, but rarely attempts to discover that which is beyond its own imaginable framework. Moreover, the question of what this "productive" alternative really is, is of course case specific. In a company, an external consultant might argue that the board of directors needs to close one section of the company down entirely in order to keep the company healthy. As a result, many employees might lose their jobs. This part of my dissertation is not to judge whether this particular act of an external consultant is ethically sound, but to understand that it tends to be more productive if change is being proposed and delivered from the outside: moving from "context" to "situation." In a conversation with filmmaker Alexander Kluge, sociologist Dirk Baecker points out that "management can only be successful if it temporarily surfaces, with no intention to stay. It needs to abruptly make things visible. […] Management means to seize the

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[80] See *Wikipedia*, s.v. "Hundredth Monkey Effect," http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hundredth-monkey_effect.

opportunity and contingency of a situation, to understand how it functions, and to smuggle into it a means of situational potentiality. […] The manager does not, and will not, know the 'correct' path into the future; the manager simply knows that each situation holds in it a specific potentiality, which exists beyond the reality of those who are working in its immediate context."[81]

In business contexts, there are diverse notions and practices of how this external agent can or should function. The two most pertinent methods to critical spatial practice are the "McKinsey model" and the "Königswieser approach."

McKinsey & Company is a globally operating management consulting firm that focuses on solving issues of concern to senior management. Their consultants, who venture into companies as external experts, practice through a classical analytical approach to contexts and problems: framing, breaking down, and reassembling. The external analysis is based on a catalogue of experience—a knowledge management system—which McKinsey has developed since the late 1930s. McKinsey sends their consultants to work closely with companies. These assignments tend to be short-term and ignore the context in which they are being placed—everything is checked against and fed back into their management system. They cling to long-standing structures of analysis and cognitive authority, an intellectual conservatism that fuels a culture of closed doors, but rarely crossbench and holistic communication. There is great emphasis placed on client confidentiality within the firm, and consultants are forbidden to discuss details of their work with members of other teams. The applied system possesses a huge amount of "approved" knowledge, but leaves little space for what one might call "smart weirdness," and therefore surprising results. One of the major issues that weaken the analytical model is that it is based on both rational thinking and the notion of consensus in regard to earlier work. In other words, the archive acts as a consensual gatekeeper. But every cause may not simply have a singular effect; the classical approach may not necessarily be plausible in

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[81]   Dirk Baecker and Alexander Kluge, *Vom Nutzen ungelöster Probleme* (Berlin: Merve Verlag, 2003), 50.

every context.

In contrast to the McKinsey model, Königswieser & Network, a Vienna-based agency, is best known for what they call "complementary consulting."[82] This method is fundamentally different in that it enters the companies it consults for through long-term involvement, or what one might call an embedded approach. This does not necessarily mean bottom up, but rather that a certain understanding of the everyday processes and the context that one is supposed to act upon is developed over time. Such an alternative, nearly therapeutic method seeks a specificity that allows for a network approach without formulas. Its intuitive rather than analytical set of soft protocols acknowledges the value of failure, nonlinear thinking, and the notion of "learning from." It claims that complex challenges require holistic thinking. Rather than prescribing solutions, it tries to enable them through processes of sustainable change, realizing that one cannot solve problems, but only tweak performance. Instead of strategic planning, such a model promotes processes of structural redesign.

The analytical approach is, in terms of critical redesign, likely to fail, as it tends to base the elements of change on existing structures without asking larger questions. Or, as candidly noted by scientist Arnab Chatterjee during a brainstorming session, "if one asked a McKinsey consultant and a designer to redesign a glass, there would be two fundamentally opposing reactions: the McKinsey consultant would look at the glass and think about a way in which it could physically be redesigned, in other words: aesthetically. The designer would look at the glass and think about it as a vessel for rehydration."[83] This

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[82]   On their website, Königswieser & Network state: "We know that consulting work is particularly beneficial and effective if it combines know-how of both business and systemic processes. But complementary consulting is more than simply the sum of these two parts. For us, complementarity is a constellation that absorbs difference and uses them to complement each other—always with a focus on the individual needs of the client system in question. We integrate hard and soft factors in a very particular way: - We are both representatives of change and advocates of conversation; - We slow things down, without reducing efficiency; - We make use of emotions yet also integrate the hard facts; - We provide both security ad constructive irritation; - We turn the people affected into participants—and also have an effect on the participants." From: www.koenigswieser-international.com (accessed June 19th, 2010)
[83]   Arnab Chatterjee at the fourth international DOM conference, "Creating Desired Futures," May 14–17, 2009, Linz and Mondsee, http://www.domresearchlab.com/content/4th-

of course poses a question as to the boundaries that one sets as well as permits. An iterative design process constantly goes through a series of reframing exercises, whereby the result is very unlikely to be within the original framework. Further, McKinsey-style managers and consultants tend to settle on the framing early in their processes, as they only apply to what exists. Their trap, so to speak, is that they define problems as deviations from the norm—as any system has a natural tendency to retain itself. What designers do differently is that they do not stop with the initial framing; they extend the boundary of the frame.

Now, if design is the context in which those processes can be reoriented toward conversations and productive communication, design should be understood as the reordering of affairs on a meta-scale. Smart design decision-making is always based on dynamic variables; it addresses and interacts with many layers at once. The network itself does not produce anything—what is crucial is the position within the network. To come back to the notion of change, in order for an existing system or network to be vitalized and stimulated into a productive mode, it requires constructive irritation, an outsider. Moreover, in a productive model of interdisciplinary collaboration—referring to real differences between disciplines, not simply within a specific cultural milieu—one has to finally give up one's own position in order for a new knowledge to emerge.

Some of the aforementioned issues were discussed in a think tank and workshop session in Linz and Mondsee, Austria, as part of the fourth international DOM conference in 2009. The conference addressed the relevance of design methodology with respect to complex problem solving. In the context of the conference, design was understood as an iterative to be used to arrive at solutions beyond mere modification or optimization. This perspective is related to the notion of openness in collaborative dialogues and learning in order to create new realities. That is, in order to develop critical models for practice, one needs to foster direct and specific engagement, an

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international-dom-conference-may-14-17-2009-creating-desired-futures.

anti-formulaic approach that does not simply rely on the rereading of existing archived knowledge.[84]

Such performance also breaks with the enlightenment categories of knowledge, namely, with the assumption that truth exists and can be discovered objectively. It will not tell you dictatorially that something is right or wrong, but it gives hints. As opposed to system thinking, such a holistic approach acknowledges that whatever you already know is valuable; one just needs to add another dimension to it.

Recapitulating the last fifteen years in corporate business, regardless of several financial crises, most strategies are still based on the paradigm of growth. But just because X is good, more of X is not necessarily better. As management theorist Jamshid Gharajedaghi said, "A cemetery grows, but does not develop."[85] The process of development is critical. The cemetery phenomenon could also be described as a simplistic reason for the financial crisis: the primary concern has been volume rather than value. In contrast to the notion of growth and volume, development is always directly concerned with content. The primary context for such development and its critical change is a situated and holistic thinking without being directly engaged with the structure that one is attempting to change. In such a framework, it becomes crucial to develop mechanisms to apply knowledge after its invention. Without those, even the most complex set of knowledge is useless. To give an example: the United States is producing more knowledge than all other countries combined, but is not very good at applying it. "[We] live in an age of accelerating change, increasing uncertainty and growing complexity. People are being pushed and pulled by forces that previously did not seem to be part of their environment. They respond by acquiring more information and knowledge, but not understanding."[86] As a business model, this lack of possible application produces a conflict: growth tends to exploit, but not

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[84]   See Michael Shamiyeh, ed., *Creating Desired Futures: How Design Thinking Innovates Business* (Basel: Birkhäuser, 2010).
[85]   Jamshid Gharajedaghi, at "Creating Desired Futures."
[86]   Jamshid Gharajedaghi and Russell L. Ackoff, "Mechanisms, Organisms, and Social Systems," *Strategic Management Journal* 5, no. 31 (July/September 1984): 290.

explore. "The Dow Jones Industrial Average recently marked its 100th anniversary of the original companies listed in 1896, only General Electric had survived to join the celebration."[87] For a company to succeed over the long term, it needs to be able to be both adaptable and alignment, a quality that is sometimes referred to as "ambidexterity." Deriving from Latin, the word means "right on both sides." In business terms, such a model of ambidexterity implies that one is able to oscillate between exploration and exploitation. It further implies that if you only pursue one, even if successfully, you will eventually fail.

If one follows the history of, for example, Apple computers or the Office for Metropolitan Architecture (OMA), one can find a certain buoyant relationship between both adaptability and alignment, between exploration and exploitation. Precisely because Apple has the iPod, which is an all-time bestseller, it allows the company to challenge and extend its own boundaries, investing billions of dollars in research and development. In a similar way, one could argue that OMA has now—after a series of insolvencies—found a way to use certain "stealth" projects as a means to finance the development of content, which before had always been a loss calculation. In a conversation, Rem Koolhaas, the founder of OMA, elaborated on the notion of what he calls "generics" as well as its ramifications in terms of ambidexterity.[88]

In my conversation with Chantal Mouffe[89], Mouffe pays attention to the problems of processes of democratic becoming rather than elaborating in potential and projective approaches or solutions. Mouffe is excellent in outlining the problematic, but has not yet delivered any productive means to move the system forward. This, in fact, points at a general and interesting problem: How can one deal critically with the conditions that one is surrounded by or investigating, but simultaneously turn it into a constructive and propositional discourse? In other words: how can one 'construct' and hence allow for criticality to emerge?

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[87] See Jamshid Gharajedaghi, *Systems Thinking, Managing Chaos and Complexity: A Platform for Designing Business Architecture* (Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann, 1999), 3.
[88] Rem Koolhaas with Markus Miessen, *Bidoun* 8 (October 2006), 41-45.
[89] See conversation with Chantal Mouffe in the appendix.

In a corporate context, what Mouffe is doing would be called "formulating the mess."[90] The mess, in this case, should be understood as the territory of investigation and action, the field of problematics. One formulates the mess in order to convince oneself or others that things have to change. As a method or tool, it creates a common understanding of a problem, or, as Mouffe would frame it, a joint space in which there is an agreement to disagree. For a consultant, it means that one is preparing the groundwork, mapping the realities at hand in order to develop alternatives.

In regard to conflict, in several conversations Mouffe has elaborated on a stimulation of a circumstance in which there is a consensus about the existence of a bilateral conflict, which can – as a result – be dealt with in a productive way. In order to map this mess or field of conflict, it is important to observe and understand the rationale of the system, learn its history, and watch how it performs. Regarding historic evidence, the phenomenon becomes precisely interesting when thinking about failures rather than successes, problems rather than solutions. Learning history from the point of view of mistakes can be highly productive. In Japan, once former CEOs of companies retire, they are "promoted" to elderly boards of experts that act as translators between the companies' past and present, translating old problems to a new generations of employees. Equally, when Karl Marx in "Das Kapital"[91] unfurls the mess in front of the reader, he is more concerned with the problems than to deliver a solution. The primary aim of Das Kapital was not to deliver a blueprint for change, but to create a need for change by formulating the mess in order to convince others that things have to change. Communism from Marx after all, was the logical end-point of capitalism, so in fact it is a prognosis-fiction to some degree. By doing this, Marx created a created a common understanding of problem, which is also, essentially, what Mouffe does, as well as any critical business consultant, who is interested in projective development rather than pure analysis.

90　　See Jamshid Gharajedaghi, S*ystems Thinking, Managing Chaos and Complexity: A Platform for Designing Business Architecture* (Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann, 1999), 100.
91　　Karl Marx und Friedrich Engels, *Das Kapital; Kritik der politischen Ökonomie* (Hamburg: Verlag von Otto Meissner, 1867).

Gharajedaghi described the nature of the "mess" in which we are embedded as an interactive system of problems—its dynamics, dimensions, and the governing principles, which define all social systems are entangled. The mess, in this case, acts as a tool to design structures for the future, to become propositional. It should be formulated autonomously from individuals or groups, and should, imperatively, deal with the weakest link within the system in question. In such a context, the worst situation to be confronted with as an outsider is the combination of unwillingness to take responsibility, scarcity of power, and insecurity.[92]

In order to effect change, one need not "know" the right approach, but must be able to convince others that the approach should be tested. That is, to generate change, one needs to understand rationality from the point of view of the person or system that one is trying to effect; in order to influence stakeholders, one needs to know what these stakeholders are doing, what they are interested in, and what their objectives are. In socially complex situations, rationality simply does not work as people or stakeholders will, in the majority of cases, act in their own interest. The inverse is also one of the most falsely romanticized dynamics of participatory structures, as once a bottom-up structure has been established, not all stakeholders will be equally interested in such a democratic approach. When people come together, most individuals tend to represent themselves. This, of course, makes sense, as collaboration (the more conflictual sibling of cooperation) only works if there is a clearly distinguished opportunity for all involved.

Designing modes of shared authorship and authority assumes that power, like wealth, is something one can share. To be able to "do things" embodies the power to act. To act is to take responsibility, not to assert power over people. Decentralization is the duplication of this power. In order to find common ground, there needs to be a certain autonomy embodied within the decentralized stakeholders. Moreover, these stakeholders need to agree on

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[92]   See Jamshid Gharajedaghi, S*ystems Thinking, Managing Chaos and Complexity: A Platform for Designing Business Architecture* (Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann, 1999), 166.

the basic foundation of the common ground. This common ground generates a centralized understanding of the system while decentralizing its structure. The only way to understand this system is to design it. There is also a danger in the design process of such a system: one of the most crucial points is the precise and careful design of responsibilities. As described earlier, participatory structures can easily be used as a tactic for evasion—to withdraw oneself from responsibility while still being technically in charge. In every system there needs to be a built-in structure of at least partially centralized authority in order for the structure to be productive. There is a harmful romanticism in the depiction of a world made up of channels of democratic self-organization, networks of networks, or movements of movements. As Hardt and Negri describe it: "The genealogy reveals a tendency for resistance and revolutionary organizations not only to be a means to achieve a democratic society but to create internally, within the organizational structure, democratic relationships."[93] Their ongoing effort to theorize the conditions and the form that democracy should take in today's globalized world is an attempt to present democracy without its paradox: inaugurating democracy is always confronted by the inability to abide by its own principles. Inaugurating a new democratic order can only be made legitimate by calling forth the authority that it itself seeks to establish.

To return to the corporate world, the only possibility to involve stakeholders in a process is by including them in the design—this is when they will implement change. Change is also the fundamental problem with what one might call the "participatory project": in order to be included in this process of design, one also needs to be prepared to assume responsibility. For the possibility of design to emerge, the facilitator (in order not to simply replicate the existing system) needs to firstly articulate the state of the current situation in order to prepare the ground for a redesign. Nevertheless, even in the most receptive social scenario, change will always be effected by the fear of change. Therefore, the arena that Mouffe describes, the common ground, so to speak, in which one agrees to disagree is crucial in order to create a common

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[93]   Hardt and Negri, *Multitude*, xvi.

language that allows conflicts to play out and for participants to gain knowledge about the distinct polarities of the system in question.

When one is coming from the outside, it is imperative to work to understand the social complexities of a given system. This is an iterative process. Without understanding the interdependencies of these complexities, a redesign of the system becomes meaningless. Every structure has and produces multiple functions: independent contemporary arts institutions such as the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London, Kunst-Werke in Berlin, or the New Museum in New York, have certain integrated structures and histories that have built up over years. They all have a staff, a board, unionized workers, an education program, patrons, and visitors, among other stakeholders. And every one of these function distinctly. Only once the situation at hand is outlined and all the stakeholders are represented can the design process can start. The process of outlining requires the will to be immersed in the situation. It is equally important to not become entangled in the structural politics—to remain an autonomous outsider.

But designing change takes time. It is important to activate existing conflicts and to insert certain conflicts as productive triggers from the outside. Consensual agreements within the early phases of the design process have to be avoided. In fact, the more room a design, for example the structural redesign of an institution, leaves for future conflicts to be taken to their logical ends, the more successful it will be in the long run. Such design would then embody the potential for those conflicts to always return to a productive mode. Conflicts produce transparency as they illustrate the dissensions and boundaries of a particular situation. Individual stakeholders have a tendency to define problems free of context, relating them to solutions that are already known and in regards to a set of universal constraints such as time, money, and information.[94] Within this register, deviations from *a* or *the* norm tend to be understood as threats. A problem is most likely not an aggregate, but an

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[94]   Fourth international DOM conference, "Creating Desired Futures," May 14–17, 2009, Linz and Mondsee, http://www.domresearchlab.com/content/4th-international-dom-conference-may-14-17-2009-creating-desired-futures.

independent and emergent property.

The outsider tends to bring in a serious interest in the content, and a healthy curiosity as a driving force for testing the performance of a given system, beyond the pseudo-scientific based interest on the data alibi such as statistics, but driven by an intuitive yet deep understanding of a situation. Critical practices and the challenging of conventional structures and truisms can only emerge from the actualities of practice, the extrapolation of feedback loops from the purely critical toward the propositional, the applied recommendation—without falling into the trap of urgency, as urgency only ever leaves time for the immediate.

Spatial practice can be described as the melting pot of physical realities: the legal and cultural frameworks of our world, its political dimensions, philosophical foundations, and our everyday life. Beginning with the micro-scale—while never losing sight of the macro—critical spatial practitioners should utilize their repertoire in order to contextualize the set of problems at hand into their spatial, sociopolitical, and socioeconomic contexts, and propose mechanisms of change that illustrate the local vis-à-vis its macro-scale ramifications. These mechanisms of change can be physical, legal, or social in nature. They are the result of a carefully curated editorial process in which the editorial board simultaneously acts as instigator and irritant toward change: tweaking found variables through the strategic overlap and corrupting of existing knowledge to collaboratively search for and produce new methods of intellectual, structural, and physical production. The editors of such processes must not be averse to risk taking, and have to be detached enough not to fall in love with existing structures or protocols, which may disable their objectivity associated with criticality. It is the outsider's role to plant seeds of change in the system, which the insiders can then grow over time. This, after all, is important, as the design needs to be the result of a process in which it is grown and nurtured by the stakeholders, as they will otherwise not be accepted.

Architects, designers, or artists are motivated by many factors; they are not,

for example, driven by profit alone. Design and the formulation of projective theses are about eliminating choices, editorial and curatorial process, and the risk of the gut instinct, which is fundamentally oppositional to an analytical approach. What can be learnt from this is the clear distinction between the inside and the outside, between field of vectorial forces and intruding external vector. For outsiders, the strength is the fact that they are neither tied in with any of the internal structures nor with the (intra-)politics of the system that they are dealing with.

In the context of architecture and spatial practice, the question remains as to how to use one's toolbox in order to develop a methodology that can be positioned beyond the populist triggers and repercussions of formalism. Architects often only produce propaganda for their clients, like a communication agency would do. They are, by default, outsiders. If, within the desolate situation of the profession, one can be optimistic, this position is their strength and primary asset. Architects have always attempted to develop proposals on the basis of their relative autonomy. Nevertheless, formalist architects primarily interested in building stand-alone physical structures often cling to the structures of power, aligning with the client while falling in love with the idea of never-ending egotistical and economic opportunities to build.

Scene 4: Spatial Practice beyond the Romantic

Historically, architecture has been understood as the profession of designing buildings and environments. Traditional practices generally concentrate on formal agendas, spectacle, commodity, infrastructure, or context. By describing it as such, I am not attempting to make a value judgment, but rather an observation of the way in which architecture at large operates. In this economy, the architect is forced to maneuver with as little friction as possible, to the extent that he or she becomes a player in a field of mediocre indifference in which the act of raising questions about conventional frameworks and customs is understood as the undesirable attempt to shatter the consensus machine. In the rendering of the practice as such, the architect is a designer and construction supervisor, the person in charge that propels an über-vision and brings along a personal lifestyle that allows for Architecture (with a capital A) to emerge as a unique product. In this context, contemporary architectural projects are often commissioned on the basis that the architect will, or is supposed to, contribute a predefined and already tested architectural language and signature to the project or site.

The great ideal of the Renaissance man was the polymath, a person of diverse knowledge. In those days, architecture would span the "unwritten," as it was a "practical" practice and craft, to an intellectual exercise. And much later, the nineteenth-century gentleman emerged as a derivation of the Renaissance man.[95] In the context of spatial practices, one could argue that this understanding of architecture as a blend of practices—spanning building, theory, and a multilayered universe of practices in between—illuminates a key moment: these two archetypes inaugurated an understanding of a proto-conceptual architecture, one liberated from the impulse and necessity to build. This implied that it no longer mattered if something was built or not; the intellectual product was already understood as the product itself.

In the context of contemporary capitalism, the polymath has undoubtedly

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[95]   See Andrew Saint, *The Image of the Architect* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1983).

become highly expendable as his or her potential inefficiency cannot compete with a system geared toward maximum efficiency and profit. It rules out experiment, exploration, and failure. Today, results have to emerge quickly. Without elaborating on extensive interdisciplinary knowledge and complimentary vision—or even the possibility of questioning existing patterns of functionality and the way we do things—today's architect is faced with an ever-increasing system of economic efficiency. While clients often demand original design alongside economy, improved detailing and gain of profits, the architect is left to juggle outdated regulations, corrupt builders, and diminutive remuneration. Today's architect faces the paradox of the need for greater security accompanied by the desire for more creativity and innovation. This evolution is without a doubt one of the main reasons why the so-called developer has become the new architect. Many contemporary architects have succumbed to a position in which they have been limited to the ones who deliver form—a perilous progress since most developers can design and build either cheaper or faster than architects, and simply outsource architects to produce form. An unprecedented legislative onslaught now dictates the production and appearance of a building, while the architect is rendered an impotent monkey in a red fez taught to dance when the music plays. In this rendering of practice, the architect—often no longer needed—has been reduced into the one who places ornamental cherries on top of the finished cake.

In order to be able to unmark those common formats of developer architecture, it might be helpful to think of architecture as a post-disciplinary field of knowledge, a practice concerned with spatial realities and their becoming.

Today, we are in vital need of a reevaluation of spatial production beyond traditional definitions, acknowledging the possibility of an "architecture of knowledge"—a practice premised on actively participating in space. The understanding, production, and alteration of spatial conditions presents us with a prerequisite of identifying the broader reaches of political reality. Today's spatial practices not only utilize the speculative nature of

experimental inquiries (as opposed to scientific research with a presented hypothesis, these does not need to be proven or falsified) related to the transient conditions of urban and institutional realities, the politics of space, and societal protocols, but consequently develop, situate, and apply physical and nonphysical structures in order to alter and amend specific frameworks of relevance and consequence. While the differences engendered may appear marginal, it has an undeniable asset: that of an inoperative optimism coupled with concrete impact on how space is enabled or disabled for future use, open to interpretation and potentiality.

Such a belief not only presents an optimistic endeavor,[96] but illustrates the complexity of the environments we inhabit every day. Diversified practices strengthen our perception of the realities of micro-political struggle. If one wants to understand processes of spatial becoming, it is crucial to overcome existing discourses of loss, and transform practice into a mode of observation that incorporates both the transient nature of spatial constructs as well as the transformation of urban cultures generated by everyday phenomena and practices. The liberating aspects of recent cartographies of spatial practices seem to lie in the ability to look at given situations without assuming the worst right from the start, enabling forms of critical optimism that celebrate the complexities of the physical world we live in: complexity as opportunity to engage.

In the context of architecture and the city, participation is often understood as an alternative form of access, a means of empowering the "user." In the late 1990s, there was an increasing interest among architects and urban planners in issues of participatory frameworks and public planning processes. But this interest was often based on shallow motifs of job creation rather than genuine interest in political experiment. Most of those projects and discourses centered around the notion of systems designed for user contribution in the

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[96]   This can be viewed in opposition to the pessimism and unilateral prognosis about public space that, particularly in North American urban and spatial theory of the 1980s and early 1990s, dominated discursive knowledge production—as put forward by, for example, Sharon Zukin, Mike Davies, or Michael Sorkin. See, among others, Michael Sorkin, ed., *Variations on a Theme Park: The New American City and the End of Public Space* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1992).

name of (at least partial) public funding.

Throughout the history of twentieth-century architecture, there have been numerous attempts to critically engage with traditional building practice from the point of view of participation. Nevertheless, most do not manage to establish more than a formulation of proposed inclusion. In contrast to the expressive juxtapositions of the Surrealists and the ideological assembly of the Situationists, there have been early examples of a formulation of resistance to commercial practice in architecture. When, in the 1960s, Team 10 advocated for the use of concepts such as mobility, patterns of everyday life, and incremental urban growth as the basis for city planning, social change was seen as emerging bottom-up from society's own internal processes, which architecture and planning were to manage.[97] In this context, the task of the designer was understood as the facilitator of hardware: the amplifiers, attenuators, and gates that regulated the rate and intensity of flow within those systems.

In France, the work of Yona Friedman—based on principles of unpredictability, social and spatial mobility, and self-building processes—investigated issues of reconstruction such as the acute housing shortage and urban rebuilding.[98] Friedman proposed gigantic structures in which residents could build their own dwellings and developed simple manuals in the form of illustrated books that enabled people to make decisions about the design of their living environments. In England, Cedric Price propagated the architecture of "calculated uncertainty" based on the firm belief that a structure should last only as long as it is socially relevant. His lateral approach to architecture and time-based urban interventions has had an enduring influence on contemporary alternative practice.[99] Similarly, the work of Swiss-

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[97]   Social change was previously imposed top-down by an avant-garde that assumed an *a priori* agency of architecture.

[98]   Friedman's work can also be viewed in parallel to the work of architects Giancarlo De Carlo or Bernard Rudofsky, for example.

[99]   See *Cedric Price: Opera* as well as Stanley Mathew's *From Agit-Prop to Free Space*, however, both publications situate Price historically; as a more contemporary read and operative example of how Price's practice can be understood and interpreted today, see *Fun Palace 200X*; all these publications can be found in the bibliography.

born sociologist and economist Lucius Burckhardt—who was interested in planning methodologies and alternative models for participatory urbanism with a focus on the diverse roles involved in planning processes—continues to be an important precedent. Price's approach was used as a parallel investigation for the International Congress for Architecture and Urban Planning (IKAS) conferences during the 1980s. More than 200 participants from forty countries discussed the social task of architecture, rather than its formal or constructive aspects, which were the subject of postmodern discourses running parallel to it. These conferences investigated themes such as democratization of space, user participation, construction in continuity, and the use and misuse of architecture over time.

And today, in parallel to the recent oversaturation and use of the word participation in the field of architecture and planning, there have been similar developments in the art world, such as Nicolas Bourriaud's coining of the term "relational aesthetics" in the 1990s, judging artworks on the basis of "human interactions and its social context, rather than the assertion of an independent and private symbolic space."[100] In contrast to the majority of production in the 1980s and early 1990s, the relational approach within art focused less on the object, and more on site-specificity and performative events that explicitly relied upon audience interaction and participation.[101] The fashionable, increased use of the term participation also bears a number of issues when ideological framework is turned into a practice. Architect Jeremy Till argues,

> the word participation has recently become as overused as that other catchphrase of contemporary politics, "sustainability". The two meet in the notion of "sustainable communities" which, according to the rhetoric, are founded on the principles of democratic participation in their own formation processes. The trouble is that in the overuse "participation," "community" and "sustainable" have become more or less meaningless buzzwords. The words create a veneer of

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[100]   Nicolas Bourriaud. *Relational Aesthetics*. Translated by Simon Pleasance and Fronza Woods (Dijon: Les presses du reel, 2001), 14.
[101]   See the work of artists such as Liam Gillick, Carsten Höller, Maurizio Cattelan, Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, Pierre Huyghe, Philippe Parreno, and Rirkrit Tiravanija, to name a few.

worthiness, but scratch the surface and one discovers a striking
absence of critical interrogation of what is at stake. Too often
participation becomes an expedient method of placation rather than a
real process of transformation.[102]

Till's rendering of the way in which the term has been hijacked as a means to feign surplus is valuable here, and I would add that the term has managed to be applied in almost any context, with a high degree of misuse in regard to its romantic potential.

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[102]   Jeremy Till, "The Architect and the Other," *openDemocracy*, June 26, 2006,
http://www.opendemocracy.net/ecology-landscape/architecture_3680.jsp.

Scene 5: Undoing the Innocence of Participation

"The pressure of responsibility that democracy itself is superimposing on those, who believe in [democracy] and it becomes unbearable when this belief is being interrogated by the reality of images and the doubt of the infidel. It cannot be what must not be, and those, who want to help carry the responsibility, no longer recognize the fraud that is being committed upon them by leading representatives of this very democracy on a daily basis. Instead, they cane the messenger. [...] One can be pretty sure that someone like Haider would never have existed as a political public figure, if—in Austria—there would have been a democracy in place that was lead by representatives, who complied to the basic principles of this very democracy."
—Josef Bierbichler[103]

"Why is nice bad? What kind of a sick society are we living in when nice is bad?"
—George Costanza[104]

A generic city hall; the audience has been seated, still in light conversation with one another; money talks. The mumbling is silenced by an official looking gentlemen stepping up to the microphone: he is a he, and aware of it – wearing a slim-cut suit and a tie that seems just a bit too colourful. He immediately dives into the subject, the *neighborhood city* – a city that is co-designed and appropriated by its residents, so he says. He chooses his words carefully; he says "co-authors". He presents colourful renderings of urban squares with lush greenery and slick aluminum facades, kids running around, dogs off their leashes, young families, who apparently know exactly what kind of city they want; and need. The audience in the city hall is impressed, mumbling again. Fascinated not only by the flawless images of a future without problems, but also by the impeccable verbal presentation interspersed

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[103]   Josef Bierbichler, *Verfluchtes Fleisch* (Frankfurt: Verlag der Autoren, 2001), 93; my translation.
[104]   Tom Leopard, "The Café," *Seinfeld*, season 3, episode 7, directed by Tom Cherones, aired November 6, 1991.

with humour, just in the right moments. He dwells on the potential of inclusion, of open frameworks and the liberation of the citizen. Just before another man steps up onto the stage, he says his two final sentences, with his voice raised just a bit more than needed: "this project will not only bring new investment to this area, it will give people the opportunity to finally feel at home, to *participate* in what will be their city. And *this* is the man, who will help us turn this vision into reality!" The architect takes over the microphone.

Participation is often stipulated and promoted politically, but is in fact misused as a false social-democratic nostalgic desire. Modes of participation can also be of populist participation, like the 2009 public vote regarding the ban on minarets in Switzerland. Here, the *Schweizerische Volkspartei* (Swiss People's Party, SVP) used their wide reach, especially through boulevard media as well as a ruthless campaign, in order to "help" people make up their minds, using participatory democracy as a tool to foster xenophobia. Based on a common and well-established populist rhetoric that only public referenda indicate the real majorities in a country or given political system, the SVP managed to exploit their economic potential as well as media expertise in order to campaign accordingly. Although, generally speaking, this does not hold true for every single referendum, the result in this particular case is a pecuniary politics rather than what people often assume in bottom-up democracy in Switzerland. While 57 percent of the Swiss population who went to vote voted against minarets, statistics tell us that, curiously, Switzerland is a less xenophobic nation than other countries in Europe.[105]

To appropriate the populist jargon: where would we end up, if it were not possible to make decisions independent from the most popular sentiments? On a larger societal scale, it seems that the more we talk about sex, the less sex we actually have. The more we are superficially and publicly engaged, the less we seem to care.

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[105]   See Editorial, "57% of Swiss vote to ban minarets," *The Washington Times*, November 30, 2009, http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2009/nov/30/57-of-swiss-vote-to-ban-minarets/; and: Tony Paterson "Minaret poll casts a dark shadow over Switzerland," *The Independent*, November 28, 2009, http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/minaret-poll-casts-a-dark-shadow-over-switzerland-1829905.html.

To consider participation as a tool or modus operandi itself renders it as something lacking any specific quality. It is like saying "hammer" when in fact you want to build a house. There is a false and sometimes perverted sense and urgency regarding the issue of inclusion, which, in the case of the British New Labour party, was fuelled by the fear around losing power, sustaining constituencies, and shaping and controlling stakeholders in order to be able to use them strategically and, of course, economically. Today, participation has become a radical chic; it is en vogue with those who want to make sure that stakeholders and/or constituencies focus on the tool and process of participation itself rather than content production.[106] They are to focus on the structure rather than the content that it delivers. As long as they participate, they will feel like they are part of the process. Not realizing that the process in which they are participating will most likely produce the same product as if they would have accepted facts like a silenced majority. Finally they got their aluminum facades next to their bit of green space, which was possible because the density of the urban block was doubled. And they were able to decide, collectively, where the trees would be planted, and where the children could swing in the drizzling rain.

Similarly, in architecture, processes of participation have been used as strategic entry points into projects and local economies. It has become a mode of buoyancy-production, a societal sedative, not in terms of the potential decisions that the populous can make, but in terms of withdrawing them from the space in which they can actively critique the actions of decision-makers and so-called representatives. This leaves us with the feeling that today the notion and concept of horizontal organization can be presented as something worthwhile, but is also used as political currency. In such an economy of

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[106]   As Catherine Bachel illustrates, participation in the public policy and decision-making process was explored and used a "key element of New Labour's modernization propaganda. [...] Whilst this may appear to be a relatively straightforward concept, its translation into practice can be complex and confusing, which may in turn impact on the policy making process and potentially policy outcomes. The involvement of groups such as 'users' might be seen as a radical approach to the policy process, however little consideration has been given to the process once people are involved, as the effects this may have on participants, or on the relevance and usefulness of the policy outcomes."

"participatory currency," political correctness has been rendered *ad absurdum*. There seems to be an underlying consensus that we are not only supposed to think and act in a politically correct manner, but—put bluntly—be nice to each other and stir as little confusion and disruption as possible. Hence, critical interrogation has become a rare phenomenon. What seems most problematic is a politically correct tolerance that has infiltrated even those politicians and practitioners who view themselves as critical—often simply unable to speak out because they see their meticulously sketched out career plans endangered.

State politics is predominantly concerned with the reading, delineation, rendering, and implementation of power structures. Therefore, it is almost impossible to try to interact or maintain a position within this field, if one's own interest is focusing on the preservation and expansion of power. This is not to attack or criticize political correctness per se, however, participation has become the ultimate volition toward a practice of unconsciousness in which the active player becomes a representative of the taste, opinions, and conduct of a supposed majority. Within such a regime, hardly anyone seems to have the guts to step out of line and say, *wait a minute, something weird is going here—let's rethink!* There are a few that do tend to be rather right wing, like certain contemporary populist politicians in Europe including Thilo Sarrazin, Christoph Blocher, Roger Köppel, and Geert Wilders.

Much participation-centric discourse assumes that the closer you get to something or someone, the more social empathy you develop. This is a scary assumption. Today, once we start to think about the issue, topic, and/or problematics of participation, the first thing that comes to mind is a growing romanticism that has, by now, infiltrated the entire political spectrum.

The early 2000s—a decade of sympathetic and unquestioned use of the term and democratic principles of participation—was host to an almost fundamentalist willingness toward inclusion that went hand in hand with a grotesquely uncritical mode of setting up structures and frameworks for this so-called participation to take place, be it on the scale of national politics, local

movements, projects in the art world, and the like. It seems that in the context of such romantic nostalgia of engaging and producing the do-gooder open-source practitioner, institution, or party, we are in urgent need of an outspoken political candor. Although in software development open-source has proven to produce some of the best results, it remains unclear as to how inclusive and bottom-up processes can stimulate meaningful results in spatial practices. The aforementioned candor of criticality needs to supersede political correctness—that kind applied to foster a certain politeness, a protocol of consensual courtesy—and utilize a case-specific criticality that replaces cordiality with honesty, expertise, criticism, and, if needed, judgment. There is nothing worse than delayed decision-making as a result of a poor interpretation of political correctness.

The crisis of the (over)use of participation in architecture practices is only part of a larger crisis that the profession has been in for the last twenty years. The rapid emergence of practices turning "social" throughout the 1990s is an indicator of the economic instability of the profession. Hardly ever discussed is that many offices have turned toward a more inclusive model of process-oriented research projects because they simply could no longer get commissions for design and/or construction work. This economic aspect is often strategically excluded from the debate. Toward the end of the 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s, one could go to cities such as Berlin and be overwhelmed by the modes of inclusion and apparent social responsibility of architectural and spatial practitioners. At the same time, this phenomenon was an early indicator of the post-2008 deep economic crisis. Arguably, one could think of this economically-induced social turn in architecture as the most disingenuous approach regarding participation, as it often was not generated out of a longstanding belief in social democratic principles or interests in direct involvement, but, on the contrary, because it was seen as a open a window of opportunity, an alternative economy.

This not to suggest a lack of serious interest by some practitioners to develop inclusive and engaged models of practice—there have been a number of very interesting and relevant projects that have emerged from this particular

movement. The crisis in many design professions has in fact led to a situation in which many models of practice were being developed and tested, including Raumlabor and KARO* in Germany, or the Center for Urban Pedagogy in the United States, to name a few. As every crisis has its severe downfalls, it also of course has its critically productive and generative potentials.

More often than not, however, participation is used as an aesthetic approach and not a values-driven approach. Philosopher Simon Critchley criticizes the political and ethical apathy so often associated with younger generations: "In a world that is all too rapidly blowing itself to pieces, the passive nihilist closes his eyes and makes himself into an island."[107] We need to think through the situation in which we find ourselves, resisting the temptation of nihilism while facing the realities of a changing world. In order to achieve such crucial change in terms of practice, one needs to address the foundations of ethical decision-making based on a polemic: "without a plausible account of motivational force, that is, without a conception of the ethical subject, moral reflection is reduced to the empty manipulation of the standard justificatory frameworks: deontology, utilitarianism and virtue ethics."[108] Interestingly, Critchley is not making the claim that it is the job of a philosopher to manufacture moral selves, but quite the opposite: to assume responsibility. It is this responsibility and the reinvention of the responsible agent that I am interested in.

Politics, in Critchley's sense of a true democracy, situates practice at an interstitial distance from the state—a moving toward, a friction,"the creation of interstitial distance."[109] As a framework, it allows for the emergence of alternative and new political subjectivities. When Critchley speaks of democracy, what he refers to is a movement of and toward democratization, or, dialectically expressed, the truth of a state, a truth that no state actually embodies. Democracy is always and foremost a process of democratization. This process is never-ending and it needs to be learned and nurtured. Politics

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[107] Simon Critchley, *Infinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance* (London: Verso, 2007), 5.
[108] Ibid., 9.
[109] Ibid., 13.

is always now and many.

In order to develop strategies for a post-nostalgic practice of participation that exceeds models of bottom-up inclusion, one needs to get beyond the truism that acting democratically is all-inclusive. In fact, as stated earlier, sometimes democracy should be avoided entirely. One needs to consider the changing realities in which democratic participation has become the rogue tool for political legitimization. But what is the benefit of popular participation if those who are elected withdraw from their responsibilities, especially if their decisions might harm their popularity? It seems that the more rotation in parliament (of ministers, for example) or other representative bodies, the more responsibility one needs to assume in practice.

The notion of the "curatorial" presents us with the opposite of what one might call the "romantic participatory." It embodies decision-making from the outside—some might say top-down: it is about exclusion and the act of "ruling out." Rather than thinking about what to show, it is about what not to show. Politics, and more precisely, parliamentary democracies, embody the building of myths. A political invitation to participation usually goes hand in hand a very clear idea of how you should participate—in other words, a code of conduct, a set of unspoken rules. Strangely, whenever artists or critical practitioners work on the notion of democratic processes and decision-making, they always work outside the regime of representation, that is to say representative democracy; rather, more often than not, they look at modes of direct democracy and bottom up processes.[110] "Let everyone decide!" Why?

Politically correct and experienced engagement often achieves the opposite of what it aims to do, and in this context, "even the misdeed or crime gains a holy aura."[111] The practice of minimizing social offense is ultimately concerned with the establishment and maintenance of societal harmony, regardless of

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[110]   Joseph Beuys's "Organisation for Direct Democracy through Popular Vote" (Organisation für direkte Demokratie durch Volksabstimmung), founded in Düsseldorf in 1971, is one of countless other examples.
[111]   Harald Martenstein in Josef Bierbichler, ed., *Engagement und Skandal* (Berlin: Alexander Verlag, 1998), 28.

whether or not it manages to develop the subject or content matter in a productive way. On a very different scale and register, that of technology and humanitarian disaster, Eyal Weizman suggests that it is for this reason that "all sorts of technologies and techniques that might allow (…) to calculate the effects of violence and might harness its consequences."[112] In this regard, the existing – and supposedly innocent – forms of participation being described in the work in front of you may be understood as a "soft technology" aiming at different forms of social engineering: "here, in its secularized form, political rather than metaphysical, a similar structure of the argument sets up the sphere of morality as a set of calculations aimed to approximate the optimum proportion between common goods and necessary evils."[113]

Sometimes, the above-described retreat reaches the point in which people withdraw from hierarchical decision-making processes only to avoid the possibility of being labeled conservative. From the point of view of political correctness, this could also be interpreted as not only protective of certain values, but also advocating in favor of institutional structures. German actor Josef Bierbichler argues that it has become increasingly pressing to ask not whether *it is allowed* to produce a scandal, but more urgently, whether *it is even possible* to still produce scandal.[114] When Bierbichler refers to the notion of scandal, he by no means is interested in scandal as superficial provocation that only produces short-lived and transient media attention, but rather the opposite: a disturbance fuelled by an edged and acuminated thought that enters and penetrates a bogus societal consensus in order to debunk and unmask it over time.[115]

In this context, one may consider consensus as a homogenizing force. When outrage and heterogeneity have been eaten up by societal consensus instead of disrupting it, and controversial debates can no longer take place, there is no shared space in which conflicts can be played out. This can, sometimes,

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[112]   Eyal Weizman. *The Least of All Possible Evils: Humanitarian Violence from Arendt to Gaza*. London: Verso, 2007, p. 3.
[113]   Ibid.
[114]   Josef Bierbichler in Josef Bierbichler, ed., *Engagement und Skandal* (Berlin: Alexander Verlag, 1998), 9.
[115]   Ibid., 13.

go so far as a complete losing-face situation in which politicians give up their stakes and beliefs in order to become as electable as possible. Joined with a populist claim toward participatory structures, such a homogenizing model of public pacification has worked very well in the past, especially so under Tony Blair's New Labour government. Blair's "Third Way" promoted the replacement of long-term goals by forms of incremental and local problem solving, while "increasing and widening participation have been at the heart of the New Labour's higher education initiatives since they came to power."[116]

Within the remit and simplified idea of politics of New Labour, one was—and to a certain extent still is—able to witness one of the most brilliant examples of nostalgic but hard-boiled cravings for public participation put to action as a mode of outsourcing responsibility. While the UK had been at an historic low in terms of popular participation—people's willingness to get involved in political structures and frameworks—there had never been more claims as to why and how people should participate in politics. At a time when New Labour had turned everything into inclusion and everyone into a participant, one started to wonder about the supposed innocence of the term, the similarity of its motivations, and the romanticized means of communicating it.

New Labour decided to measure everything it could, introducing the most artificial and immeasurable targets. In industry and public services, this way of thinking and acting led to a plethora of targets, quotas, and plans. It was meant to set workers free to achieve these targets in any way they chose. What the game-theory schemes did not predict was that the "players," faced with impossible demands, would also cheat. This development was documented in Adam Curtis's "The Trap."[117] In the documentary, Curtis demonstrates how a particular kind of politician—both from the left (in the UK) and from the right (the neo-conservatives in the United States)—attempted to install individual freedom as the ultimate goal of politics. The documentary explores the concepts of negative and positive freedom—freedom from and

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[116]   Claire Callender (2002). The Costs of Widening Participation: Contradictions in New Labour's Student Funding Policies. Social Policy and Society, 1, pp. 83-94.
[117]   "The Trap: What Happened to Our Dream of Freedom" is a BBC documentary series by British filmmaker Adam Curtis. It first aired in the UK on BBC Two in March 11, 2007.

freedom to—and presents how the Blair government's role in achieving its vision of a stable society has in fact created the opposite of freedom, in that the type of liberty it had engendered wholly lacked any kind of meaning. Blair's politicians sketched out a new world where everyone was free to choose their lives, a utopian extravaganza, which promoted social mobility as a liberation from class divisions. But, as evident, the results of this political conundrum are rather different from their anticipated delight, and have created a paradoxical situation: the attempt to liberate has led to a rise of control management, while the so-called freedom of choice has actually produced a collapse and the return of class and privilege.[118] The "service" that was supposed to be delivered by the democratically elected representatives had been shifted to the population: a melancholic transfiguration under the veil of increased freedom. No longer did politicians set out to change the world; instead they saw their job as delivering nothing more than the demands of the "free" individuals. What was once envisioned and hailed as a "New" Labour party, later surrendered to the politically haphazard leader Gordon Brown, whose choleric affairs were out of control, and who was unable to generate or communicate the necessary route ahead. In other words, vision was yesterday.

Rather than strengthening democracy, referenda can also erode its very premise. Within the current ideological crisis, referenda have become popular, as established parties fear making potentially unpopular decisions. This "liability mentality" is now part of politics in the form of the aforementioned outsourcing of decision-making processes. Through a referendum, politicians and elected representatives—who are supposed to make decisions for their constituents—postpone the moment of assuming responsibility for their own actions. When they poll the public, they in turn require no vision of their own. Unfortunately, a referendum will not generate ideas either. It simply traces the relationship between majority and minority. This too can lead to the opposite of the anticipated result, an erosion of democracy and the rise of political extremism, as the Swiss model has recently indicated.

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[118]   Ibid.

Scene 6: Life after Bilbao (Interlude)

"What has finally killed urbanism is not the fact that so many people made so many desperate mistakes, but the fact that very few of the processes and operations that take place today can take place in the form of a plan, the classical product of urbanists."

—Rem Koolhaas[119]

"The slightly off-route thought of architectural practice having an impact on society is based on the idea that the education of an 'architect' formulates an all-encompassing narrative that attempts to integrate technical, artistic and social matter – and therefore explains Umberto Eco's remark of the architect 'arguably being the last remaining humanist'."

—UPW Nagel[120]

"For those characters treated less sentimentally, the disease is viewed as the occasion finally to behave well. At the least, the calamity of disease can clear the way for insight into lifelong self-deceptions and failures of character. The lies that muffle Ivan Ilyich's drawn-out agony – his cancer being unmentionable to his wife and children – reveal to him the lie of his whole life; when dying, he is, for the first time, in a state of truth."

—Susan Sontag[121]

The audience is seated. Far behind the curtain, a voice: *Let us start by assuming: there is life after Bilbao.*

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[119]   Rem Koolhaas, in: Zaera, Alejandro, "Finding Freedoms: Conversations with Rem Koolhaas", in: *OMA/ Rem Koolhaas 1987-1998*, Madrid: El Croquis, 1999, p.30
[120]   U.P.W. Nagel, 'U wie Universität', in: Hohmann, Maria and Stefan Rettich (eds.), *Von A bis Z, 26 Essays zu Grundbegriffen der Architektur*, Köln: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2004, p.127 [my own translation]
[121]   Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor*, London: Allen Lane, 1979, p.43

Aristotle arrives at the Polis

Stoicism is founded on the interconnection of the universe that is administered by absolute laws. From these laws, humans are to develop their reason and moral ethic by which they are to live by. The practical ethics of Stoicism emphasise self-control, contentment and living in harmony with nature. Assuming a context of political uncertainty, Stoicism suggests the need for permanence and stability propelled by commitment and virtue, which is to be achieved by living in moderation. According to this notion, the path to personal inner peace is through the eradication of the desire to affect things beyond ones control and through the living of the present without hope for, or fear of, the future.

But wait. Is it not the longing for such desires that allows for a critical reading of the present in order to project the future in supposedly *better* terms? One should review contemporary architectural practice by examining the position of the (practicing) individual within the larger cultural and political landscape.

Creatures of Habit – tamquam truncus stat[122]

Throughout history, a great number of intellectuals have been servants of power, a few of them having tried to use their relative privilege to help others to dismantle illegitimate institutions and practices. Arguably, the most dilettante reading of Stoicism is that of figuring out where the world is going and, as a result, to follow willingly. This, of course, raises a fundamental question: how does one lead a life of moral agency if one accepts the notion that everything was right from the start? Looking inwards as a therapeutic relationship with oneself—building up an inner fortress against the outside world rather than actively interrogating in order to generate potential change— also lays bare the tendency of suppressing issues of potential significance in favour of habit. Why is it that one consciously avoids reality? Are we holding on to things that are no longer worth holding onto?

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[122]   Latin phrase, translates: "he, the immovable institution" [literally: (tree-) trunk/log] (my own translation)

Demythologising the impact of the architectural gods

Propelled by formal experiment, within architecture, one can trace a similarly permanent therapeutic relationship, where practice cocoons itself in banalities that—within the bigger picture—seem meaningless. For decades, formal debate has dominated a practice that most-often essentially creates physical envelopes and a discourse that is concentrating on the nurturing of the ego-cult rather than participating in the socio-political environment. By now, even representatives of a more conventional architectural practice—with an interest in architecture as purely built form—have started to point out that "in an age in which people communicate through various media in non-physical spaces, it is the architect's responsibility to make actual space for physical and direct communication between people."[123] Yet, as reality proves, this is easier said than done.

Beyond the logic of the Grand Narrative

Stoicism suggests an absence of interference. In opposition, one could argue that friction, the suspension of pure logic, and the amateurish triggers from external influences often generate the most creative ideas and theories. One cannot—and should not—work in moral isolation, that is to say within the remit of a singular profession. Moreover—since one can trace a prevailing habit of architects claiming that their work struggles for constant betterment in an ethical environment—, rather than adopting a preconceived model of moral ethics, one that is based on truisms and absolute heritage, architects should frequently question the very notion of what an ethical practice would actually imply. Today, as throughout history, one is impotent to predict where all this is leading; one can feel only that it is leading, ever and ever more rapidly. Meanwhile, small-minded warriors of limited vision have cried out: the world is lost. And in desperation, like shipwrecked sailors grasping at remaining wreckage, we clung to the past. As modus vitae, 20th century architects have often followed the grand narratives of architectural history, obeying the objects

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[123]   Kazuyo Sejima, "Face to Face", in: in: Jennifer Sigler (ed.), HUNCH, Berlage Institute Report #6/7 [109 Provisional Attempts to Address Six Simple and Hard Questions About What Architects Do Today and Where Their Profession Might Go Tomorrow] , Rotterdam: episode publishers, 2003, p.407

of their predecessors, while worshipping the classical architectural object[124] as a generator for change. Strangely, this had happened at a time when it was already evident that the city is being conditioned by forces that supersede the formal and aesthetic prerogatives of the architect: "The poverty of much urbanist thought can be reduced to a central fallacy: that the city, or Metropolis, expresses itself fully in its physical form, that as a finite concrete object alone it is amenable to analysis and intervention. The city, however, is not this, but rather a perpetually organizing field of forces in movement, each city a specific and unique combination of historical modalities in dynamic composition."[125]

It is often implied that modern materials and methods are dictating contemporary architecture's expression of form. Some people understand architecture as resulting from the state of mind typical of an epoch and that architecture exists, takes form and is expressed only at that very moment when a general evolution of mind is accomplished. Rather than simply articulating a re-reading of material processes, today's practice should attempt to describe new protocols that take as a starting point the existence beyond a single truth, beyond its own truth, in a radicality that challenges space rather than controls it: an emerging architectural sub-culture rendering a spatial understanding which suspends the traditional reading of architecture as the purely spatial manifestation of built matter—object bound. Such protocols would challenge society in its obedience of conventions and institutions that defy the very creation of architecture and its creators with their illusion of controlled virtue. In contrast to the self-referential object, which has been churned out by practitioners for centuries, some recent project-collaborations and collectives have attempted to illustrate and understand processes of uncertainty, of which the city, as the ultimately unplannable object, consists of.

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[124] Not to be mistaken with Classical Architecture, but rather: the physical, formal object as architectural design

[125] Sanford Kwinter and Daniela Fabricius, "Urbanism: An Archivist's Art?", in: Koolhaas, Rem, Stefano Boeri, Sanford Kwinter, Nadia Tazi, Hans Ulrich Obrist (eds.), *Mutations*, Barcelona: Actar, 2001, p.495

This major change—moving from self-referential object lust to what one might call a *relational practice*[126]—presents us with a reading of the world that is based on re-evaluated judgement according to specific situations rather than moral truism. In contrast to the *holding onto wreckage*, it introduces a world in need of an optimistic and critical rendering of situational truths as opposed to moral truism.

Stoicism and Space – ad rem publicam accedere[127]

"Thinkers ask themselves: 'What? Men under the wardrobe? However did they get there?' All the same, they got there. And if someone comes along and proves in the name of objectivity that the burden can never be removed, each of his words adds to the weight of the wardrobe, that object which he means to *describe* with the universality of his 'objective consciousness'. And the whole Christian spirit is there, fondling suffering like a good dog and handing out photographs of crushed but smiling men. 'The rationality of the wardrobe is always the best', proclaim the thousands of books published every day to be stacked in the wardrobe. And all the while everyone wants to breathe and no-one can breathe, and many say 'We will breathe later', and most do not die, because they are already dead."[128]

If one was to engage with Stoicism in the sense of spatial politics, one realises that the Stoic is primarily interested in keeping his or her own house in order. Within that notion, there is a clear distinction between inside and outside. From the urban-stoic reading of Venturi's "Learning from Las Vegas"[129], who essentially describes a philosophy of the marketplace, to the urban-nostalgic rendering of Colin Rowe[130], the primary issue of interest seems to be the underlying question of how conversation—both in the literal and metaphoric sense—is being influenced by landscape. If one discusses

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[126]   See also: Bourriaud, Nicolas, *Relational Aesthetics*, Dijon: Les presses du reel, 1998
[127]   Latin phrase, translates: "turning towards the political" (my own translation)
[128]   Raoul Vaneigem, *The Revolution of Everyday Life* (trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith), London: Rebel Press, 1983, p.51
[129]   Robert Venturi, Steven Izenour and Denise Scott Brown, *Learning from Las Vegas*, Cambridge (MA): The MIT Press, 1977
[130]   Colin Rowe and Fred Koetter, *Collage City*, Cambridge (MA): The MIT Press, 1984

the implications of Stoic philosophy in spatial terms, one has to make sure not to mistake Stoic strategies in architecture and *a Stoic architecture*. Stoic architecture—as in *built form*—does not exist. Rather, it is the framework in which practitioners seem to operate at times that could potentially be labelled *Stoic*. Although one can identify certain architectures of detachment, bridging the gap from a purely philosophical idea to the physical and aesthetic implications of built matter is not possible. Now, it also implies that one cannot lead an argument, which is based on the question of whether or not stoical space—in the sense of ethical space—does exist. Within a contemporary political and spatial environment such grand narratives are not viable any longer. Moreover, some would argue that there has at no point in history been a serious spatial attempt in terms of outlining ethical space, because ethical space in its philosophical and ideological narrative can only ever function as a theoretical construct.

However, one also has to acknowledge that what has – in recent years – emerged as a serious pilot attempt in socio-political spatial practice is a particular technique of understanding spatial situations as local microenvironments, which obey specific rules and mechanisms. What seems imperative here is to appreciate that the essential difference between a conventional or even conservative understanding of architecture—which implies that architecture is fundamentally a controlled space[131]—is that some contemporary practitioners who follow such ideas of spatial politics are interested in mechanisms that are open and adaptable to change, systems that deal with particular organisational structures in site-specific ways: "Space is always many spaces, spaces opposing, spaces co-existing next to each other, spaces with different relationships. They are conditioned by the relationship between subject and object, between humans and their built environment. Those relationships and their vis-à-vis effects render what we call the socio-spatial construct. They are influenced by power and force, but

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[131]   Not necessarily "control" in the contemporary sense (i.e. CCTV surveillance and gated communities), but rather the physical gesture, which aims to control movement, space-time-relationships et cetera.

also marginality and dissent. Therefore, space is entirely political."[132]

Uncertainty revisited – cabente disciplina[133]

Where the traditional Stoic philosopher understands the environment as a *world beyond control* that can only be dealt with by leading an introverted life driven by virtue, the contemporary protagonist appreciates the world also as a place beyond control, but one that cannot be approached with the modernist instrument of the grand account. The fundamental difference is that in a contemporary sense, a world beyond control is understood as a quality. Today, these spaces of uncertainty are often understood as places where subtle interaction can generate self-organisational structures, which—in regards to the notion of what an *ethical space* can or cannot deliver—start to generate spatial change on a small, user-determined scale.

Nevertheless, one could oppose the fact that the very act of pursuing such practice is in itself a re-writing of an expression of desire: the will to act upon situations and generate change according to one's professional knowledge. It seems that today one no longer attempts to view the world through the image of the world, but rather the opposite: instead of going with the flow—creating spaces of controlled physical matter, representation and spectacle[134]—one is being exposed to an emerging understanding of architecture that is based on the absent object, the very process of change as a time-based, critical transformation—an interest in process rather than physical structure. Rather than being particularly interested in the development of empty sites into well-defined developed places—an ambition which essentially implies that there is a future final product, a *perfect and completed city* that flourishes as a result of visionary planning—some contemporaries have developed their action around the notion of the city being an everyday environment, the action-field of architecture, which responds to differently scaled interventions through various modalities. This notion spans beyond the simple idea of the physical

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[132] An Architektur, ‚R wie Raum', in: Maria Hohmann and Stefan Rettich (eds.), *Von A bis Z, 26 Essays zu Grundbegriffen der Architektur*, Köln: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2004, pp 110-111 (my own translation)

[133] Latin phrase, translates: "when the ancient order started to crumble" (my own translation)

[134] i.e. the self-referential object in the landscape

city as a never-ending cycle of growth and decay. It instigates thinking about a different urban practice: one of a realistic understanding of the existing that celebrates change. It is this pro-active philosophy, which sets the contemporary apart from the Stoic or even the Buddhist notion that imply an extinction of desire.

When the gods lost sight

Architecturally speaking, one could say that the difference in practice can be understood through the age-old technique of perspective drawing. Where conventional practice has always been able to translate its spatial desire through the means of visual perspective, some contemporary projects can no longer be expressed using the same technique. That is partially the case because a perspective is supposed to be an objective representation of space, allowing the *outsider* to understand how a particular space is outlined and supposedly functions, which is not possible for projects that are based on operational design rather than the alteration of physical space. Moreover, a lot of recent projects resist the notion of being transformable into the representative medium of a perspective or otherwise, because their nature is in essence not one of the visually representable object.

Traditionally, architects dream to build: rendered images of the new world signify their plans directed towards a shiny future. As professionals standing on the frontline of society's warfare against the existing, architects have always been the ones to direct and design the vision of tomorrow. The driving force of such encounter is carried by a genuine faith in progress. But the projections of their desire have also unravelled a distorted hidden pleasure: the desire to build is supported by the desire for power. In their attempt to sell their subjective dreams for tangible vehicles of progress, architects luxuriate in the power handed over to them by society. Legitimising their social position though means hiding this pleasure. Ethics are in this sense the means of doing so: architects often understand their power as a positive tool in making the world into a better place. Patronising, ironic, dogmatic or cynical, the

different modes of communicating the ethical message are all directed to support the architect's legitimacy.

Whereas the majority of traditional architectural projects are engaged with the experience from the outside[135], some of the emerging, politically charged protagonists are more concerned with the experience from the inside, that is not to say spatial interior, but to be understood as the inside of a particular, applied system. The experiential difference also points at the dissimilarity in the approach of formal reference: where the traditional architect is interested in sustaining a culture concerned with the *self*, an egomania regarding the creation of a signature style, more and more contemporaries refuse the self-referential typology as one detached from both place and culture. Although there are several historic reference points in terms of site-specific practice[136], this emerging sub-culture is touching on territories, which—within the architectural community—have so far remained untouched. Opposing an approach of technological development and an image of universality advocated by the Modern Movement, it is not concerned with the colonisation of territory, but the fading away of the object in favour of a holistic reading of the social, political and spatial environment upon which differently scaled mechanisms of change are being applied. This also implies that the traditional position and nature of sign and language changes – an internal development that ultimately changes the subject within the equation. Such evolution was already evident—to an extent—in the early discourse surrounding aesthetic reading versus external influences. Venturi's pop-urbanism, which implied that looking at the city should be about pragmatic engagement rather than aesthetic reading, could be located as an early reference point for Koolhaas' urban design strategies that were to follow the forces of the market, since they were understood to be dictated by flows of money. Nevertheless, these notions only existed as positions and the nature of their applied projects was hardly more than polemic exercise.

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[135] i.e. formal aspects, plan arrangement, spatial quality, materiality, line of sight, light configurations et cetera

[136] Artists such as Robert Smithson, Dan Graham or Gordon Matta-Clark and architects such as Alison and Peter Smithson, Cedric Price et cetera

Divinity was an illusion in the first place

Although some of the ideological background can be traced all the way back to the first issue of Potlatch[137]—a kind of laboratory of ideas for what would become the protagonists of the Situationist International[138]—the current discourse is fundamentally different because it is implemented in practice. With the early exception of Constant[139], it had—so far—remained an entirely ephemeral project. Where, based on a theory of economic exchange based on sacrifice and excess, anthropologists and utopian literates were interested in the "enhancement of status through ceremonial gift-giving or festive destruction"[140], today's spatial practice not only utilises experimental behaviour linked to conditions of urban society, but applies physical and non-physical structures in order to change and alter specific settings. It presents both the developed notion of experimental techniques and the consequential application of analytical thought, which transform everyday ephemera and physical conditions. While the difference might still occur to be rather minute, its distinction is that of concrete impact. Taking such understanding into consideration, one also has to rethink the methods in which a certain architectural discourse is being led in the academies. If we were—for a moment—to pretend that a purely formal discourse was non-existent, even most of the apparently phenomenologically, socially and politically motivated academic studios are still trading on the past: the faculties and their internalised discourse are rarely more than incestuous polemics.

In his essay "Environmental Stoicism and Place Machismo"[141], Michael

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[137] The Bulletin of Information of the French group of the Lettriste International, first published in 1954.

[138] A non-artistic group occurring in several modern capitalist countries united around the notion of the end of or the absence of art and a bohemianism that explicitly no longer envisages any artistic production whatsoever. The key term 'situation' is based on the existentialism of Jean-Paul Sartre, relating to his theories concerned with freedom of choice and responsibility: his 'situation' describes a self-consciousness of existence within a specific environment (See also: Debord, Guy, "Report on the Construction of Situations and on the Terms of Organization and Action of the International Situationist Tendency", in: McDonough, Tom, *Guy Debord and the Situationist International: Texts and Documents*, Cambridge (MA): The MIT Press, 2002, p.44)

[139] Constant Nieuwenhuys, an abstract expressionist painter, who became a member of the Surrealist group in 1947, and—later—the Cobra group

[140] Simon Ford, *The Situationist International – A User's Guide*, London: Black Dog Publishing, 2005, p.33

[141] Michael Benedikt, 'Environmental Stoicism and Place Machismo – A Polemic', in: Harvard

Benedikt describes the "ability to endure or tune out places that are cheap or neglected, depressing or demeaning, banal, uncomfortable, or controlling places to which people would normally react with despair"[142] as a typology that in his architectural terminology could be labelled "environmental stoicism". Benedikt argues "whereas stoicism advises calm acceptance of what cannot be improved, machismo—less a philosophy than an attitude—recommends pride in the grim embrace of harsh realities."[143] Although his argument concerning the juxtaposition of these two strands is valid, his proposed model is one that betrays an existing practice, which is dealing with such issues of situational particularities and micro-politics in a holistic manner. Although he adds that "environmental stoicism is less common among architects than among the general population"[144], he does not acknowledge that there are specific projects, which deal with (urban) space differently to those practitioners he is describing. In fact, the model he describes as one, which takes as a starting point the notion that architects are essentially being trained to improve the built environment, is one that — at least in architectural practice — has hardly got any precedents. Apart from fairly recent theoretical arguments, such as Margaret Crawford's "Everyday Urbanism"[145] or Jonathan Hill's "The Illegal Architect"[146], which critique current architectural institutions, the outlined phenomenon – today – is for the first time being appropriated in spatial, that is to say physical, terms: projective rather than reactive. It lacks adequate models and references in the sense that, historically, there has not been any architectural or urban attempt to deal with such matter. It is only within the realm of what one might call a contemporary politicized spatial enthusiasm that the issue of socio-political space with regards to spatial conflicts is being presented in a fashion that utilises practical optimism fuelled by opportunistic curiosity rather than theoretical pessimism. This optimism is the underlying narrative of my PhD.

Design Magazine, Number 16 - Winter/Spring (2002)

[142] ibid., p.1

[143] ibid.

[144] ibid.

[145] John Chase, Margaret Crawford and John Kaliski (eds), *Everyday Urbanism*, New York: The Monacelli Press, 1999

[146] Jonathan Hill, *The Illegal Architect*, London: Black Dog, 1998

Who said the gods were brave?

The image of the architect has historically often been related to the male heroic protagonist who introduces to the outside an established life-style that suggests a temperament "open to emotional novelty and breadth of sympathy (…). Rarely however do the architect's professional aspirations and trials come to surface; more rarely still have they found a ready audience with the public."[147] It is precisely here, where one can posit the turning point in practice: the neglect of egocentric narrative and self-referential ambition in favour of catering for a particular, site-specific situation. Such altruistic appreciation of what architecture can possibly be opposes the individualism and development of the ego. It raises the fundamental question of whether or not architecture should be taken forward as "an art practiced by and for the sake of individuals, or a commercial enterprise geared to the needs of the market and the generation of profit, or a communal undertaking dedicated to the service of society?"[148] Neither of these is true. The interesting aspect that is currently being addressed is that there is no clear distinction any longer, but specific decision making with regards to whether or not a particular mechanism should be applied within an individual project. The highly romanticised ideal of the architect—"general progress in architecture according to a personal conception, usually of style, embodied in buildings and developed from architect to architect over the course of history"[149], which essentially derived from Aristotelian idealism—is no longer valid.

When Denise Riley introduces her particular reading of Pierre Hadot's "Philosophy as a Way of Life"[150] in "What I want Back is what I was"[151], she argues that Hadot's understanding of Foucault's culture of the self—an ethical

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147   Andrew Saint, *The Image of the Architect*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983, p.1
148   Ibid., p.6
149   Ibid.
150   Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life* (ed. Arnold I. Davidson), Oxford: Blackwell, 1995
151   Denise Riley, 'What I want back is what I was', in: Diacritics, Volume 32, No.1 (Spring 2002), p.57

model as an aesthetics of existence—is burdened with the risk of a "self polished in its exquisite apartness", when a Stoical understanding of self is not in desperate need of an "elegant isolation but could well be pursued by means of public life."[152] Now, this reading is true to an extent—only until the person who pursues such endeavour of self-rendering is concerned with image; one that is being assessed as it were from the outside. This is precisely the point at which the *architecture of image* is best explained: today, one has to appreciate the difference between image-led practice[153] and what one might call *post-Bilbao architecture*. The powers, attributes and aims assumed by the architectural profession have often been at odds with reality. Today, more than ever, one is facing a situation in which it is insufficient to understand the ideological Vitruvian theories of architecture—expedience (*utilitas*), beauty (*venustas*) and stability (*firmitas*)—as the basis of what one is doing. Arguably the most interesting aspect of the emerging practice is related to the protagonists' suspension of exteriorised image: the image of oneself is being suspended and not part of the signature equation any longer.

The tower of Bilbao – salva res est[154]

The starting point for this shift from the *architect who is concerned with image* and the *architect who is concerned with specific practice* could roughly be located around the time when Frank Gehry's Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao opened in 1997. As the tail-end of 20th century architectural super-stars[155], Gehry became the epitome of a generation that set out to be part of an avant-garde and ended up as highbrow, copy-paste establishment—trading on the past. One could argue that the moment when Bilbao was born, a new generation of architects started to critically engage with the lack of 20th century western modernism and what the course of modernism, post-modernism and *supermodernism*[156] had avoided dealing with: "Modernism

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[152]   Ibid.
[153]   Essentially that of the star-architect
[154]   Latin phrase, translates: "for now, everything is still fine" (my own translation)
[155]   Amongst others, such as Zaha Hadid, Rem Koolhaas, Coop Himmelb(l)au and Daniel Libeskind, who all started as part of a self-proclaimed avant-garde, but essentially followed the tradition of the master-architect while using different mechanisms of producing image
[156]   Term coined by Hans Ibelings; his defence of placeless, context-free urban gestures pretends that the world could be a cleaner, simpler space. He sees recent architectural

misunderstood the disastrous consequences of removing symbolism from the city. If you take away the typological qualities of the park, the marketplace, the high street, then people no longer understand them as the loci of social interaction. They become merely places to service a machinic existence. (…) Here often the answer is brutal. Yes or no. There is no space for uncertainty. The power of some of these 'new projects' is often based on a powerful manipulation of archetypical situations."[157] In contrast to a process of pure image-production and the deliberate groundwork for the red carpet of the star-architect, the new practitioners do no longer operate on the *ism-level*. Although one could argue that even the creation of an anti-image is an ideological position that attempts to create an image, the difference here is the way in which the protagonists see themselves, call and title themselves and describe their practice. All of a sudden, peripheral areas have become important and interesting. Over the course of the last decade, one can trace a deliberate and amateurish (in the most positive sense) over-specialisation, which employs the notion that essentially every kind of aspect within the meta-discourse of architecture and spatial production is in need of a specialist, and consequently, the *architect* is no longer the all-encompassing master of virtue. The recent invention of particular titles and names catering for that change includes job descriptions such as *spatial consultant*, *urban researcher, architectural curator*, *spatial tactician* or *framework designer*. And since nobody really knows what that means, they have played their game quite successfully.

Unburdened by the weight of the 20th century, most recent practice has re-discovered a localism, which is based on the belief that certain problems need tailor-made solutions rather than philosophically charged meta-agendas. This belief is based on what one might call a *real geography* of the world, which emerged with the introduction and evolution of the World Wide Web. This specific kind of problem-solving left behind an understanding of architecture

developments as symptoms of a cultural shift toward more global, neutral and non-representational forms of art and exchange. See also: Ibelings, Hans, *Supermodernism – Architecture in the Age of Globalisation*, Rotterdam: Nai Publishers, 1998
[157]   Kieran Long, *MUF: children dressed up as horses take on the modernists*, in: ICON, issue 022 (April 2005)

for the sake of the *stylised object* propelled by virtuous vision. Today, if one is working on a project dealing with the West Bank or Gaza, for example, the project is most likely to be concentrating on this very situation: it is taking into consideration an open-source involvement with its cultural and political heritage. As in contrast to the late 20th century projects of *the diagram*, which were purely modern in the sense that they attempted to deliver an almost scientific solution to a problem that was being put forward by cancelling out everything else, *post-Bilbao* has started to generate a discourse that acknowledges the political implications of space as something which urgently needs to be dealt with. There is no longer any sympathy with the stoic, self-referential and rather masturbatory notion of the diagram, when—post-9/11—everyone realised that the rest of the world is burning. Political thought of the Bush Administration has gone even further towards the diagram as the drawing up of an inflexible solution, implementing it without considering what happens next.

As so many other theories and practices in history, the diagram was a stoic cocoon. Rather than a simple fashion, it dwelt on the image of the architect as the master of virtue, the master who cannot fail. As a container of the heroic tradition supported by self-image, the diagram—in its purely modern sense that it was playing with the age-old, prevailing image of the architect as impeccable master—was an intellectual claim only. The kind of anti-stoic practice that is being described in this text operates under a different agenda, the primary one being the realisation that architects are products of their times. Today, we work under a different ideological system than the modern, one that is temporary, contingent, informal, ephemeral and resists the notion of pure object-lust.

Formalism defeated

Returning to the beginning of this interlude, it was assumed that there is life after Bilbao. And there is. In his essay "Why I write"[158], George Orwell outlined his account of what a writer's ambitions are to follow his discipline with pride.

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[158]   Orwell, George, *Why I Write*, London: Penguin Books, 2004.

Orwell distinguishes between four major atmospheres in which the writer is living: sheer egoism, aesthetic enthusiasm, historical impulse and political purpose.[159] As history is written by the victorious, such atmospheres retrospectively occur to be evident in the work of many writers and architects. Since we are arguably at a turning point in the history of spatial practice, the junction where egotistic ambition is being separated from ambitious vision, we should actively engage with the current optimism towards society as both a human and spatial construct.

As pointed out, Stoicism's absolute laws constitute a particular way of thinking and living within tumultuous external political and social conditions. Nowadays we are in a luxurious position, where people are genuinely interested in changing specific situations according to their ethical beliefs. It is not the glorious virtue of the dead, but the eradication of the desire to be remembered that ambitiously sets the ground for change. They live in the present with both hope and fear for the future. Rather than mourning the passing of the old codes and the hope for a universal ethical framework, it is time to venture out into the snowstorm. This is the tragic moment of realisation, in which the Stoic faces the deadlock of stable harmony as the epitome of nihilism.

"The show is over. The audience get up to leave their seats. Time to collect their coats and go home. They turn round...No more coats and no more home."[160]

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[159]   Ibid., pp. 4-5

[160]   Raoul Vaneigem, *The Revolution of Everyday Life* (trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith), London: Rebel Press, 1983, p.176—Raoul Vaneigem referring to Vasilij Vasil'e Rozanov's definition of nihilism.

Scene 7: Participation Is War

Any form of participation is already a form of conflict. Just look at most workplace situations, academia, or cultural institutions. In war, enemy and adversary usually hold territory, which they can gain or lose, while each has a spokesperson or authority that can govern, submit, or collapse. In order to participate in any environment or given situation, one needs to understand the forces of conflict active in that environment. In physics, a spatial vector is a concept described by scale and direction: in a field of forces, individual vectors participate in the emergence and design of the environment. If one wants to participate in any given field of forces, it is crucial to identify the conflicting forces at play. In this context, participation is not to be understood as the default form that promotes, for example, planning processes or user involvement, but as a means of consciously directed, forced entry into a territory, system, discourse, or practice that one is not usually part of.

Participation is often understood as a means of taking part in something through proactive contribution, and the occupation of and involvement in a particular role. It seems, however, that this role is rarely understood as a critical platform of engagement, but rather one based on romantic conceptions of harmony and solidarity. If you look up the word in a dictionary, you will find two major descriptions: the first one understands participation as "an umbrella term, including different means for the public to directly participate in political, economical or management decision."[161] The second definition lays out an interesting depiction: "participation may mean sharing something in common with others."[162] In the context of my investigation, the latter seems to be of particular interest in the sense that it outlines what I want to oppose.

In recent years, apart from the sheer inflation of the term participation, there has been a growing part of culture concerned with what one might call a glorified or transfigured reality of participation. Romantic notions of participation focus not only on local communities, cultural and social

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[161]   *Wikipedia*, s.v. "Participation," http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Participation.
[162]   Ibid.

infrastructure and ecology, and citizen empowerment vis-à-vis local politics, but also work toward the minimization of friction. It is often the case that the design process itself that becomes participatory rather than the premise of the work (as the critical starting point of engagement). In such a context, the question seems to be: why is participation mostly understood as a consensus-based, deliberately positive, and politically correct means of innocently taking part in societal structures? Although criticality does not oppose the well-being of a society by default, it further raises the question as to whether there is a need for an alternative model of conflicting participation that attempts to undo the romantic nostalgia of goodness and sheds light on the issue of critical intervention.

From the onset of the TV series *Sex and the City*, the character Charlotte York is portrayed as the most naïve of the four protagonists. Throughout the series, she is the only one who follows "dating rules" and expresses a serious desire to marry and have children. In episode 55, Charlotte decides to quit her job as a curator in a Manhattan art gallery. When she reveals her intentions to her friends, she explains why she wants to stay home. In order to not feel "bad" about her real motives (wanting to become pregnant and redecorate the house), she justifies her decision by stating that she wants to "volunteer at Trey's hospital, and help raise money for the new pediatric AIDS wing" and, later, during an interview with a potential successor for her job at the gallery, she claims that she is "on the board of the Lenox Hill pediatric foundation."[163] In Charlotte's case, doing volunteer work for an important social cause, or claiming to do so, is portrayed as her voluntary participation in a good cause that prevents her from being judged for quitting her job, which suggests an equally false modality of participation (as active agent) as the so-called *Slacktivism* initiated and mobilized by the creation of populist and/or opportunistic Facebook campaigns.

Similarly, there has been a rise in charitable and philanthropic activities. This is particularly true in countries where such practices offer large tax incentives.

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[163] Jessica Bendiger, "Time and Punishment," *Sex and the City*, season 4, episode 7, directed by Michael Engler, aired July 8, 2001.

Bill Gates' the Giving Pledge, for example, in which the computer pioneer attempts to visit as many billionaires as possible in order to posthumously inherit their assets and property, could also be understood as a charity show, a worrisome "charitable twaddle."[164] Such a model typifies the danger that a handful of billionaires whether the "fishing in Alaska, golf resorts in Florida, or the fight against Aids will be financed" (…) essentially one devises the notion of a democratically legitimized central state that should be aware about the subjects who may be most needy in terms of support.[165]

Aren't publicity, fame, and self-affirmation precisely the modus operandi that we can find so many "socially relevant" practices today? There is a similarity between the way of arguing and the way in which certain spatial and artistic practices have hijacked the notion of participation as a positive, unquestionable means of engagement. One needs to be careful not to mistake participation with a form of social philanthropy or altruistic activity, which is intended to promote good or improve quality of life. For example, on the concept of intrusion into existing political fields of forces, we can look at Eyal Weizman's work in Palestine–Israel, Edi Rama's work as mayor of Tirana, or alternative institutional models such as United Nations Plaza or the Winter School Middle East.[166] These have all produced alternatives to default public programs and social outreach projects organized by institutions such as Tate Modern, among countless others. The latter is arguably not so different from the slacktivism of Facebook, social awareness engineered by budget requirements.

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[164] Markus Dettmer, Katrin Elger, Martin U. Müller, and Thomas Tuma, "Trio infernale; Die bekanntesten Vertreter deutschen Wohlstands sind zugleich die untypischen.," *Der Spiegel* 10 (2012), 75; my translation.

[165] Ibid.

[166] On Weizman's work, see Decolonizing Architecture Art Residency, http://www.decolonizing.ps. Edi Rama is an Albanian politician and currently the Mayor of Tirana as well as the leader of Albania's Socialist Party. Before he turned to active politics he was a practicing artist. When Rama became mayor, one of his first major projects was to order the painting of many old building in what has come to be known as Edi Rama colors, hence altering the interior and exterior identity of several inner-city neighborhoods by very simple physical means. United Nations Plaza was a temporary school project inaugurated as a result of the cancelled Manifesta Biennial in Cyprus. The non-profit and free-of-charge project took place in Berlin. The archive can be found and accessed at: www.unitednationsplaza.org; The Winter School Middle East is an ongoing educational experiment, currently based in Kuwait. Please find more information at: www.winterschoolmiddleeast.org

How is it possible to participate in a given situation without having to compromise one's role as an active agent, one who is not interested in consensus and "doing good," but asking questions while attempting to inform practice in a particular direction? Becoming a vector in the force field of conflicts raises the question of how one can participate without catering to determined needs or tasks, or—from the point of view of the traditional architect—how it is possible to participate in, for example, urban micro-politics by inserting friction and asking questions rather than doing local community work through legally-binding agreements such as the Section 106 agreements,[167] or bottom-up participatory following protocols of social inclusion?

In architecture, there are frequent examples where critical engagement conflicts with the realities of business interests. In 2006, London-based architect Lord (Richard) Rogers was sent to New York by a number of clients, who had read that he let his office be used by a group of architects that were connected to Architects and Planners for Justice in Palestine. Lord Rogers was called to the offices of the Empire State Development Corporation (which was overseeing the redesign of New York's Jacob K. Javits Convention Center that Rogers was in designing) to explain his connection to the group. As a result, several New York officials urged that Rogers be removed from the publicly funded project. This case illustrates how architects are often used as a means of power structures, but from the perspective of the power structure itself, the architect is not welcome as a participating vector or enabler in this force field, but understood as a service provider who delivers a product. As Rem Koolhaas argued: "I would say that particularly in America the political obliviousness is considered part of the role of the architect."[168] It is this chasm

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[167] Section 106 of the UK Town and Country Planning Act 1990 allows a local planning authority to enter into a legally-binding agreement or planning obligation with a landowner in association with the granting of planning permission. These agreements are a way of delivering or addressing matters that are necessary to make a development acceptable in planning terms. They are increasingly used to support the provision of public services and infrastructure, such as highways, recreational facilities, education, health care, and affordable housing, and—more generally—support the common cause.

[168] Rem Koolhaas with Markus Miessen, *Bidoun* 8 (October 2006), 41-45 (see also in the appendix to this document).

that I attempt to tackle.

It may be helpful to use such notion as a starting point of an alternative reading of participation, one that assumes responsibility not through direct means of democratic involvement, but through a practice driven by individual action, a notion of democracy beyond the concept of invitation, toward a model of individual action and decision making fueled by democratic principles.

Scene 8: Collaboration and the Conflictual

"The disappearance of class identities and the end of the bipolar system of confrontation have rendered conventional politics obsolete. Consensus finally reigns with respect to the basic institutions of society, and the lack of any legitimate alternative means that this consensus will not be challenged."
—Chantal Mouffe[169]

"In contrast to cooperation, collaboration is driven by complex realities rather than romantic notions of a common ground or commonality. It is an ambivalent process constituted by a set of paradoxical relationships between co-producers who affect each other."
—Florian Schneider[170]

As theorist Florian Schneider pointed out, in the politics of participation, one must differentiate between cooperation and collaboration.[171] Political theorist Chantal Mouffe distinguishes between two scenarios in which the dimension of antagonism can be expressed in society: antagonism proper—the classic friend-enemy relation—and the concept of "agonism," an alternative way in which oppositional positions can be played out and a model for democratic action and critique can be rethought.[172] In the latter, we are faced not with the friend-enemy relation, but with a relation of what Mouffe calls "adversaries." This reading is based on the notion that adversaries are "friendly enemies"—they have something in common, and they share a symbolic space: "How can one envisage a democratic form of commonality which makes room for conflictual pluralism? This is clearly one of the key tasks confronting liberal-democratic societies today, given the increasing fragmentation of identities and the multiplication of new forms of conflictuality."[173] What is important in

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[169]   Chantal Mouffe, introduction to *The Challenge of Carl Schmitt*, ed. Chantal Mouffe (London: Verso, 1999), 3.
[170]   Florian Schneider, "Collaboration: The Dark Site of the Multitude", *theory kit*, January 25, 2006, http://kit.kein.org/node/1.
[171]   See ibid.
[172]   Agonism is also referred to as "'agonistic pluralism," which has been widely discussed in the work of Ernesto Laclau, Bonnie Honig, William E. Connolly, James Tully, Marc Stears, Jacques Rancière, and Samuel Chambers, to name a few.
[173]   Mouffe, introduction to *The Challenge of Carl Schmitt*, 5.

this concept is the potential to undo the innocence of participation, to point out the realities of responsibility and expose the "violence of participation." In this context, "conflictual participation" is a productive form of interventional practice.

Conflict refers to a condition of antagonism or state of opposition between two or more groups of people. It can also be described as a clash of interests, aims, or targets. When we look at conflict as opposed to normative modes of participation, conflict is not to be understood as a form of protest or contrary provocation, but as a micro-political practice through which the participants become active agents insisting on being actors in the field they are facing. Thus, participation becomes a form of critical engagement.

When participation becomes conflictual, participation becomes spatial, as conflict immediately generates boundaries, territories, and new protocols about to how to navigate within and around them. Reinserting friction and differences into both the scale of the institution and the city bears the potential of micro-political forces that render conflict as a mode of spatial practice. In this context, participation becomes a form of nonphysical, productive violence.

Micro-political action can be as effective as traditional formal political action. Such micro-political fragmentation strengthens what Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri refer to in *Multitude*—a composite of multiple differences that carries with it the power of different positions, a body that arranges and organizes singularities.[174] They argue that the accelerating integration of economic, political, and cultural forces on a global scale has enabled the growth of a powerful network. "Multitude" is defined by its diversity rather than its commonalities. According to Hardt and Negri, this multitude is key for future change and might strike where it is least expected, and with maximum efficiency where the antagonism is at its peak. However, as illustrated and discussed in my conversation with Mouffe, Hardt and Negri's theory of the multitude appears oversimplified when it comes to the global versus the local

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[174] Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2005).

scale, as it lacks contextualization.[175] Countering this, critical spatial practice incorporates the diverse actors of social production, and relates them to chosen or assigned spatial fragments, which has a huge effect and affect on how humans act, communicate, and relate to one another.

In the context of spatial practices and participation as a form of direct involvement, Antonio Gramsci, who proposed a "long march through the institutions"—the appropriation of cultural institutions (media, the academy, theaters, and the like)—is essential to look at in conjunction with the theory of the multitude.[176] Like Gramsci, Hardt and Negri share the rejection of the understanding that changes in culture come after the revolution. All three recognize the importance of culture. Their "revolution" therefore is understood as the establishment of counter-institutions—as opposed to overthrowing the economic base—a slow transformation in which conflict is understood as a constructive model of antagonistic encounter, a means of intervention that the democratic process should be able to afford. It is through the expression of disagreements that the unexpected will be able to raise while appreciating culture as a living system.

Cultural Milieu

In July 2006, Rem Koolhaas and Hans Ulrich Obrist interviewed more than fifty people over the course of twenty-four hours. Their first "Interview Marathon" at the Serpentine Gallery was set up as a model to deliver a cross section of practitioners that, in one way or another, define what London is today. Surely, if one sets out to trace some kind of cross section, one would include a multitude of dissimilar voices. Now, I am not suggesting a more inclusive model or one based on political correctness. On the contrary, what was missing was precisely the conflict that *is* the city. The marathon was set up as a stimulating set of discussions. However, all participants were either part of an existing network of cultural practitioners or at least originated from the same cultural milieu.

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[175]   See conversation with Chantal Mouffe in the appendix.
[176]   See Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, eds. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1971).

In order to both appreciate and support the complexity of urban life, one also needs to register and reference the conflicting forces of that city. Consensus is only achieved through the relationality of powers. One could bring forward the argument that if such relationality had been broken, another kind of knowledge would have been produced—one that lends a hand to understand the composite realities of the contemporary city and its forces at play. Mouffe participated in the marathon; she usually expresses severe angst around so-called middle-class consensus. She spoke of how today's network and networking culture is based on consensus rather than conflict; it produces multiplications and rarely new knowledge. As Mouffe argues, "to recognize the constitutive role of power relations implies abandoning the misconceived ideal of a reconciled democratic society. Democratic consensus can be envisaged only as a 'conflictual consensus.' Democratic debate is not a deliberation aimed at reaching 'the one' rational solution to be accepted by all, but a confrontation among adversaries."[177]

A more diverse set of conflicting voices at the marathon could have potentially been a risk for the organizers, however, it would have allowed for multiple agencies and discourses that would have produced alternative and unexpected knowledge: "In any society, there are manifold relations of power which permeate, characterize, and constitute the social body, and these relations of power cannot themselves be established, consolidated, nor implemented without the production, accumulation, circulation, and functioning of a discourse."[178]

In order for any kind of participation to reach a political dimension, the practitioner's engagement ought to be based on a situated critical voice that enters the conversation from the outside. Through this conflictual participation, the exchange of knowledge in a post-disciplinary field starts to produce new forms of knowledge. Here, collaboration can be defined in

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[177]   Mouffe, introduction to *The Challenge of Carl Schmitt*, 4.
[178]   Michel Foucault, "Two Lectures," in *Power/ Knowledge*, ed. Colin Gordon (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1980), 93–94.

opposition to Schneider's view of cooperation: "as a pejorative term, collaboration stands for willingly assisting an enemy of one's country and especially an occupying force or a malevolent power. It means to work together with an agency or instrumentality with which one is not immediately connected."[179] Such a notion of collaboration is also based on the tension between an "inside" and "outside"—it will increasingly be the outsider who will act critically to pre-established power relations. The outsider will be received as nonthreatening due to a lack of knowledge of the inside's structure. And it is precisely this condition that allows one to become fully immersed as an informed dilettante. What we need today are more dilettantes that neither worry about making the wrong shift nor prevent friction between certain agents. These dilettantes are a means to—as Claire Doherty calls it— "circumnavigate predictability."[180] It is this dilettantism that might enable us to enter more productive modes of collaborative engagement. In this sense, critical production beyond disciplines could be interpreted as the temporary abandoning of one's own specialized knowledge for the benefit of entering an existing discourse through the access point of curiosity.[181] Through specialist non-knowledge—but highly specific targeting in terms of a will to participate in a given environment, system, or discourse—such curiosity engenders exploration, investigation, and learning, and allows for a forceful injection of external knowledge that is alien to the system. Or, as Shumon Basar puts it: "Being outside the mainstream knowledge space, the Professional Amateur consolidates their outsider context and believes it to be another species of the normative 'inside' that happens to be 'outside' of the normative 'inside.' Belief is the primary logic of survival for the Professional Amateur: belief that when everything is possible, the possible is merely another part of the everything."[182]

Schneider describes the notion of teamwork as something that often fails because of internalized modes of cooperation that are characterized by the

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[179]   Schneider, "Collaboration."
[180]   Claire Doherty, "The New Situationists," in *Contemporary Art: From Studio to Situation* (London: Black Dog, 2004), 11.
[181]   See "The Rise of the Amateur," *The Economist*, April 22–28, 2006, 10–11.
[182]   Shumon Basar, "The Professional Amateur," in *Did Someone Say Participate?*, 34.

opposite of knowledge sharing: "In order to pursue a career, one has to hide the relevant information from others. On the other hand it also refers to the fact that joining forces in a group or team increases the likelihood of failure much more than the likelihood of success. Awkward group dynamics, harmful externalities, bad management practices are responsible for the rest."[183] He stresses the fact that there is increasing evidence that collaboration may happen in unexpected ways. In such a practice, the individual members of a work group—who, often, are conditioned to pursue solidarity and generosity—are exposed to a more brusque method of working together, a mode where "individuals are relying on each other the more they go after their own interests, mutually dependent through following their own agendas."[184]

Cooperation should be understood as the process of working side by side, in agreement rather than in competition. Collaboration is a process in which individuals or organizations work together at the intersection of common goals. This can be adversarial, joining forces to generate a surplus, although the stakeholders' goals might be opposing. In order to clearly distinguish between modes of cooperation versus modes of collaboration, Schneider introduces cooperation as a method applied between individuals within and between organizations, whereas collaboration articulates a more disparate relationship that is generated by and based on heterogeneous parts, defined as unpredictable singularities. In contrast to an organic model of cooperation, collaboration is put forward as a rigorously immanent and illegitimate, but preferred praxis.

Collaboration connects to the concept of the outsider as well as the need for a more conflictual, self-initiated mode of participation, rather than a process within a service-oriented structure: "Cooperation necessarily takes place in a client-server architecture. […] Collaboration on the contrary presumes rhizomatic structures where knowledge grows exuberantly and proliferates in a rather unforeseeable fashion."[185] It is this collaborative structure, which

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[183]   Schneider, "Collaboration."
[184]   Ibid.
[185]   Ibid.

presents, according to Schneider, the most fertile site of revolutionary potential. It is where change can occur, frameworks of difference can flourish, and the creativity of the multiplicity generates productive practices.

Collaboration often produces actors who are motivated by things other than monetary exchange or the accumulation of capital. In many projects, there are benefits that exceed or expand the concept of gain—these are generally environments of productive learning processes. In *In Search of New Public Domain*, Maarten Hajer and Arnold Reijndorp characterize what they call a true public domain as an experience in which there is an interplay of friction and freedom, as collaborators temporarily but frequently come into contact and enter the parochial domain of others.[186] It points at the fact that if you set up a situation in which people can produce what they believe in, a set of relationships and productivities emerge that take the situation further than the conventional understanding of disciplinary or interdisciplinary practice. The logic of change is always based on the notion of exception, while unpredictable acting enables something "new" to emerge. One could argue that the autonomy of the art world produces an infrastructure for that. In that context, opposition can be read as affirmation, and whether boundaries retract or expand, they set up the limits of potentialities.

The concept of using conflicts productively, as a generator of critical collaboration, has been explored in conflict theory and later developed within game theory. As to the idea of introducing conflict, there are very formalized political, transnational, and nongovernmental structures and procedures that deploy conflict as a strategic adaptation tool, essentially implementing conflict in order to both reveal realities and generate a crisis, which allows for change to occur more rapidly. The United Nations practices a number of conflict strategies in which micro-conflicts are superimposed onto existing situations in order to deal with the source issue. This concept of introducing secondary or tertiary conflicts falls within what is officially called "conflict transformation theory," strongly influenced by Johan Galtung and Thomas Schelling, who

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[186]   Maarten Hajer and Arnold Reijndorp, *In Search of New Public Domain: Analysis and Strategy* (Rotterdam: NAi Publishers, 2001).

illustrated that an individual or collective can strengthen its option by weakening its position.[187]

To return to the notion of collaboration, conflict could be understood as a productive variable within collaboration. It points at the larger question of how we think of challenges and change. Conflict is not necessarily a given. It needs to emerge and be fostered as a generative friction, a force of critical production. However, as introduced earlier, such conflict should be understood as one that is neither physical nor violent, but a friction that is based on content and production, a conflict played out within the remit of radical democracy as articulated by Ernesto Laclau and Mouffe.[188] "Doing" and acting within this arena produces reality. In this context, those who do not act, but stand by as spectators, do not participate and simply confirm existing paradigms of practice.

The culture of agonistic collaboration could also be described as an urban rather than a rural practice. Density allows for agonisms to emerge more naturally. The space of criticality is a space that needs to be performed, a space of reaction and encounter, in which there is an intrinsic relation of what Mouffe calls the adversarial of "friendly enemies." What they have in common is that they share a symbolic space.[189] They agree on the ethico-political principles that inform the political association but they disagree about the interpretation of those principles, a struggle between different interpretations of shared principles. In a similar manner—excavating the dynamics between friend and enemy—Jacques Derrida applies the use of difference to the concept of friendship, haunted by the provocative address attributed to Aristotle: "my friends, there is no friend."[190] He does not have to problematize

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[187]   Galtung is a pioneer of peace and conflict research, and founder of the International Peace Research Institute (PRIO) in Oslo. He developed the concept of Peace Journalism, increasingly influential in communications and media studies. Interestingly, Transcend, he organization he heads, promotes codes such as: "even if electoral democracy and individualist human rights are good for you, they might not be for others." See also, Thomas Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981).
[188]   See Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (London: Verso, 1985).
[189]   Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, 13
[190]   Jacques Derrida, *The Politics of Friendship*, trans. George Collins (London: Verso,

the concept of friendship, as it is already problematized by its very own history: in its essence, friendship is marked by difference. Between friend and enemy as well as friend and friend, there is the potential for a conflictual consensus, one that produces the fertile ground for conflictual participation to emerge.

This allows for the politics of participation to be redefined by a productive difference, inserted as friction. Critical spatial practice challenges the expectation of what and how things should be done. Knowledge is necessarily shareable and occurs after a common ground is established, even if that shared ground is conflictual. If art is political by defining ways of being together and reshaping how we have things in common, then—as Thomas Keenan remarks—"art clearly can be and in fact is a mode of research in the political."[191] It is "doing" politics not through modes of representation, but through practice. The moment of the political is the moment in which agency is assumed, in which one is made visible. This, almost by default, raises a problematic: someone externally needs to recognize an act or moment as political. The relationship between practice and distribution, therefore, is the question of how to address and present. It is important to understand that architecture can never deliver solutions. What it can do, however, is to visualize and spatialize the conflicts that are contextually essential. (Even if, and especially because, the reality that those conflicts are increasingly disappearing from our visual registers.) Consequently, architecture becomes a mode of witness testimony.

Instead of breeding the next generation of facilitators and mediators, we should encourage the production of the "uninvited outsider," the "uncalled-upon participator," who is unaware of existing protocols, and who can enter an arena with nothing but creative intellect and the will to provoke change. Running down the corridor with no fear of causing friction or destabilizing existing power relations, he or she can open up a space for change, one that

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1997).
[191]   Thomas Keenan at a Centre for Research Architecture roundtable, London 2007.

enables political politics. Given the "increasing fragmentation of identities"[192] and the complexities of the contemporary city, we now face a situation in which it is crucial to think about a form of commonality that allows for conflict: a model of bohemian participation in the sense of an outsider's point of entry, accessing existing debates and discourses untroubled by the disapproval of others.

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[192]   Mouffe, *The Challenge of Carl Schmitt*, 5.

Scene 9: Consensus as Stasis

Let's start with the good news: consensus is needed. As a form of decision-making, consensus is when a majority of all participants involved in a decision-making process are in agreement, fostering solidarity. Without it, very little would get done. However, where a conflictual model is often believed to lead to a splintering of society, it is precisely the consensual model, which produces just that splintering, only that it does so by means of a collective passiveness. The conflictual model can be understood as a more active and participatory model. As the fostering of consensus requires conversation in order to arrive at a point of reciprocal appreciation, it often means that after an intense period of debate, any newly found harmony is not to be endangered by newly inflamed debate. This usually means a decrease in interaction. After a while, more interaction means stasis. If human societies would not be experiencing forms of mutation, they would have eventually come to an equilibrium. Whether one is examining state politics, decision-making in companies or small organizations, the way in which projects by nongovernmental organizations are run, or the realities of many commissioned projects in the art world, today, these entities often tend to work toward a state of consensus too quickly.

The Swiss direct and consensus-driven democracy functions—similarly to the Dutch "polder model"—fantastically smooth when concerned with the everyday administration of the country. It fails, however, once it is faced with the task to produce challenging ideas. When consensus is at the core of the state, we are presented with a situation in which everything is dealt with in terms of pragmatics. Is direct democracy a question of scale? There is no thought and critique where there is consensus. One should critically interrogate whether a populist majority carries with it the necessary enthusiasm—both pro and contra—for or about a specific project. There seems to be an increasing need for the reintroduction of affects, a belief in what one might call a "larger politics," and a setting for belief beyond the smallest common denominator.

If one recalls the earlier discussion of New Labour, the correlation between an opportunistic reading of participation and superimposed formats of consensus becomes clear. In such a context, the variables are known and the equation is simple: participation – consensus = manipulation. Here, participation is only a symbolic gesture, a new symbolic ideology. Coupled with the power of the media, the popular vote is often influenced by a strategic utilization of fear, especially by the Right. One cannot and should not introduce and incorporate the notion of democracy as all-inclusive. It is dangerous to regard democracy as the ultimate tool of problem solving in a politically-correct manner. Not every concern or affair should surrender to a popular vote. The catchall popular party has pacified the potential of the agonistic execution of nonviolent conflict. It seems that in the early twenty-first century, political parties are increasingly losing support, precisely because they are no longer able to deliver agency and mediation regarding societal and political integration. Moreover, they do not manage to communicate between the state and its citizens well. The concept of the political party per se has lost support and encouragement, as less and less people associate themselves with it and are decreasingly using this medium as a means of political participation.[193]

The concept of representational democracy is based and relies on a certain fiction: the grand narrative that everyone has the right to vote as well as an equal say in political societal matters.[194] To avoid a return to a model of democracy so in love with itself that it produces stasis, a genuine implementation of this concept would require two essential variables to come into play: an appropriate amount of stakeholders, which is manageable enough to be administered in this format, and an absence of exterior (for example, media) control.

Concerning the concept of consensus at the heart of national decision-making, it is significant to mention the Dutch version of Tony Blair's New Labour approach of simulated politics of harmoniousness, the kiss of death for

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[193]   See Franz Walter, *Im Herbst der Volksparteien? Eine kleine Geschichte von Aufstieg und Rückgang politischer Massenintegration* (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2009), 8.
[194]   This, of course, is only one of many interpretations, which is being used here purely for the excessive development of an argument.

the establishment, the polder model. This term was first used to describe the Dutch version of consensus policy in economics, but is now used in a much wider context, describing the aims of non-conflictual national debates: a pragmatic recognition of plurality and cooperation despite differences. The reason this panache of decision-making worked so well in the Netherlands is the supposedly unique situation of the proliferation of polders—such as dikes, reclaimed land, or flood plains or marshes—as most of the national territory sits below sea level. Ever since medieval times, competing or warring cities in the same polder were forced to set aside their differences in order to maintain the polder—otherwise they would flood.[195]

This notion of consensus-production is deeply embedded in Dutch society and goes as far as the rejection of political decision-making and its representatives that veer from the ordinary—or, as the Dutch curator Annick Kleizen once told me on the train from Schiphol to Almere, "your head will be chopped off the moment you stick out—do normal, this is already crazy enough." Today it is not uncommon to send leading Dutch businessmen and politicians to a speaker's academy in London in order to train them in the realm of disagreement. The Dutch consensus model has also infiltrated popular cultural in that it coined the term "BNer" (*beroemde Nederlanders*, or Famous Dutchman). As the term already implies, it is used for those, who—in one way or the other—have gotten fame in or through the media, often for no reason other than that everyone agrees with them.

Like the literary critic Marcel Reich-Ranicki said, "if you want to avoid enemies, you should either become a tax adviser, pharmacist, or midwife."[196] The "hatred of democracy"—as Jacques Rancière points out in his book of the

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[195]   See *Wikipedia*, s.v. "Polder Model," http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Polder_model. "A third explanation refers to a unique aspect of the Netherlands, largely consisting of polders, land regained from the sea, which requires constant pumping and maintenance of the dykes. So ever since the Middle Ages, when this was started, different societies living in the same polder were forced to cooperate because without unanimous agreement on shared responsibility for maintenance of the dikes and pumping stations, the polders would have flooded and everyone would have suffered. Crucially, even when different cities in the same polder were at war, they still 'had' to cooperate in this respect. This is thought to have taught the Dutch to set aside differences for a greater purpose."
[196]   Marcel Reich-Ranicki, *Wozu Lesen?*, eds. Elke Heidenreich and Marcel Reich-Ranicki, audiobook (Zurich: Kein&Aber, 2005).

same title—is certainly nothing new. Rancière describes the word democracy itself as an expression of hatred, based on the way it was used in ancient Greece: as an insult by those who saw in the unnamable government of the multitude the ruin of any legitimate order. He goes on to illustrate how, alongside this hatred of democracy, history has bore witness to the forms of its critique—a critique that acknowledges something's existence, but in order to confine it within limits: "So, confronting democratic vitality took the form of a double bind that can be succinctly put: either democratic life signified a large amount of popular participation in discussing public affairs, and it was a bad thing; or it stood for a form of social life that turned energies toward individual satisfaction, and it was a bad thing. Hence, a good democracy must be that form of government and social life capable of controlling the double excess of collective activity and individual withdrawal inherent to democratic life."[197] Rancière describes democracy neither as a type of constitution, nor a form of society, but the power particular to those who have no more entitlements to govern than to submit: "The power of the people is not that of a people gathered together, of the majority."[198] He understands a democratic society as one that is never anything but a conjured image designed to sustain principles of good government. "People like to simplify the question by returning it to the opposition between direct democracy and representative democracy."[199] Democracy for Rancière is not a structure, it is the very "doing" of politics: dissensus.

It is precisely at this point of self-initiated modes of participation that the role of the uninvited outsider comes into play. The often polarized situation that Rancière describes—the opposition between direct and representative democracy—needs to be transferred into a productive, less dichotomous relationship. This parallel condition would allow for conflict and friction, which would reintroduce the notion of the adversary, as Mouffe calls it. It seems that consensus is a huge part of the problem of many participatory projects. As Mouffe advocates, there needs to be consensus around democratic

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[197] Jacques Rancière, *Hatred of Democracy*, trans. Steve Corcoran (London: Verso, 2006), 8.
[198] Ibid., 47.
[199] Ibid., 52.

principles, but there should be a productive disagreement about their interpretation.[200]

In architecture, one can witness not only a very unproductive, but also idyllic interpretation of why consensus is necessary: architecture often does not include a space for discourse. Compared to the autonomy of the artist, the architect is often stuck within a regime, which assumes that he or she is part of a certain group that acts from within and informs a stable territory. This often means stasis.

While modernism defined roles and delegated everyone to a proper place, we now face disciplines that are no longer stable in scope. The question remains: how can this field of uncertainty be maneuvered in the most inventive and productive manner? How does one translate a means of democracy, a "larger politics" of capacity and commitment, within a system, network, or given framework? How can one facilitate a framework in which stasis is constantly broken up or corrupted?

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[200]   See conversation with Chantal Mouffe in the appendix.

Scene 10: Without Mandate

"No revolution is going to be generated out of systemic or structural laws. We are on our own and what we do we have to do for ourselves. Politics requires subjective invention, imagination, and endurance, not to mention tenacity and cunning. No ontology or eschatological philosophy of history is going to do it for us. Working at an interstitial distance from the state, a distance that I have tried to describe as democratic, we need to construct political subjectivities that are not arbitrary or relativistic, but which are articulations of an ethical demand whose scope is universal and whose evidence is faced in a concrete situation. This is dirty, detailed, local, practical, and largely unthrilling work."
—Simon Critchley[201]

"As a citizen I have the desire to say what I think. Not necessarily as an architect. An architect has to build what is being ordered and paid for. You only have one option to take a stance: to say you will or will not do it."
—Peter Zumthor[202]

The above statement by Swiss architect Peter Zumthor says it all: once you subscribe to the standard architectural project, your leeway is quite limited. What Zumthor fails to note, however, is that there are shades of gray in the spectrum of realizing a project. The kinds of projects that he is referring to are those, which necessitate a client-architect relationship that Zumthor seems to interpret from the point of view of service-provision. There is, of course, also the option to self-initiate and assume a certain responsibility oneself, beyond the notion of service provision that one can, on a project-specific basis, agree or not agree with. Faced with a reality burdened by global conflict, it is difficult to believe that such monochrome political perspective is really as shallow as it sounds. While practitioners increasingly seek to respond to and come to terms with the world around them, the message is simple: don't wait for

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[201]   Simon Critchley, *Infinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance* (London: Verso, 2007), 132.
[202]   Peter Zumthor, "Wir Schweizer sind nicht so anfällig für Modern," *Spiegel Online*, May 29, 2009, http://www.spiegel.de/kultur/gesellschaft/0,1518,627167,00.html; my translation.

invitations, otherwise things will never happen.[203]

When it comes to the question of operating without mandate, it is crucial to mobilize the role of the outsider, to understand the role of the architect in the sense of someone who is not concerned with the construction of building, but the analysis, design, and application of frameworks. This notion is based on the concept of an external practitioner rather than a peer, marginal producer of critical realities or a pure service provider. That is someone, who locates problematics rather than waits for others to present certain issues and conditions. Such an approach is a fundamentally active mode of operating. It relates to my earlier discussion of Edward Said's notion of the "ideal intellectual"—someone who works from the margins and is not infiltrated, concerned, or conditioned by the system and consensus machine that one is dealing with. It is a forced and uninvited entry from the outside. This proactive, self-initiated practice—and, by definition, optimistic practice—can benefit from an amateurish naïveté when coupled with a skilled presentation of untapped clarity. It is precisely this productive optimism that allows one to be projective beyond the expected, feared, or conventional, which are often the results of the consensus-driven realities of the system that one is investigating or dealing with. Such a practice enables a process that is fundamentally concerned with the question of what is at stake, rather than becoming the facilitator for an a priori imagined outcome. This does not necessarily mean that one attempts to attack the possibility of a consensus, but to foremost enable a situation in which critical decision-making can emerge from a conflictual and necessary debate.

In this context, the self-initiated, the independent, and the uninvited, become driving forces for breaking with the often consensus-driven relationship between architect and client. As a starting point, the question of scale is critical. The focused scale of the local can act as a bridge to tapping into specific and constructive questions. Further, the scale of the question should be considered and developed in response to the audience and how the

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[203]   Claire Gilman and Margaret Sundell, eds., *The Storyteller* (Zurich: JRP Ringier, 2010), 7.

specific discourse of the project can be spread and wander beyond its own milieu. Venturing outside the project's own context may help to create a multiplication of criticality, opening up the discourse to others who may not be involved and therefore inhabit a very different position and perspective of the issue at hand.

Such a practice could also be described as one of the "para-architect"—a position that allows for a productive role to be adopted within spatial practice, one that moves away from the notion of a developed discipline, but something that is always on the move, on the margins, repositions itself according to its surroundings and hosts, and developed alongside the work that it produces. Para-architecture is not a discipline, but a form of praxis.

Based on past projects such as Institution Building (in collaboration with Nikolaus Hirsch, Philipp Misselwitz, and Matthias Görlich), the Winter School Middle East (with Zahra Ali Baba), the recalibration of the Dutch art institution SKOR (with Fulya Erdemci), and more specifically the series of events and publications called Actors, Agents, and Attendants, my consultancy project for the Slovenian Government (East Coast Europe) was the most direct translation of an outsider asking questions. East Coast Europe took place in Spring 2008, and was a project (carried out in collaboration with School of Missing Studies) about the perceptions of contemporary European identity and its relation to spatial practices and international politics. The title is a word play: "Europe" is the central topic for investigation; "East Coast" refers to two distinct edges of Europe, both real and imaginary—the geographical East Coast of the United States of America and the political east coast of the European Union. The project invited leading figures in culture and politics from both coasts to comment on their perception of Europe today. East Coast Europe dove into the urgent details of a dense network of contemporary experience of the European Union's extensive exchange of knowledge, people, and goods with the East Coast of the United States and also with its own eastern border. It asked: What are its challenges and possibilities for social, political, and spatial practices?

Here, one could start to think of such a model of praxis as one that begins to think about idealized scalar and temporal frameworks for critical engagement. Spatial frameworks can be understood as a starting point, one that is obvious since it is physical and therefore perceptible. However, it seems that a critical scale of engagement is one that functions at a micro level and always in dialogue with a wider scale or context. Such a micro level can be interpreted in the way in which people interact socially based on the way that policy has been written and implemented. This can be influenced by the programming and soft architecture of an institution or otherwise social structure, and deals temporally, not physically, with the present/future rather than looking back to history. This agility of the non-historic is specifically important when it comes to ambition of willingness to become projective rather than to stay within the realm of the analytical.

If one focuses too much on what has already taken place, it is very difficult to change the way things work. Those processes of change can be stirred through design—the reordering of affairs on a different scale—toward conversations and productive communication. Decision-making should always be based on a set of dynamic variables and it should address and interact with several layers simultaneously. Our project Institution Building, which conceptionalized the institutional framework and everyday reality of the European Kunsthalle, was sensitive toward a local network without inciting chauvinism or nationalism, because it is so locally distributed that it shows how there is no single local space or spatial organization that is adequate, but that a content-driven approach requires the development and production of varying frameworks. In order to see what distributions of power are at play within a situation, one needs a manageable focus, with a local and specific grasp on the scope and reach of the context and project. This is another reason why the Winter School Middle East, an annual institutional platform that I founded in the Gulf region in 2007, was presented as a scalar model that frequently but irregularly emerges as a short and concentrated annual occurrence. By meeting for such a short term, in the case of Dubai, the school slid under the radar of the benevolent political dictatorship in charge. Such an approach ultimately suggests that one can work within a given system, yet

enabling a subversive potential.

Coming back to the temporality of critical engagement through the projective, this mode of operation is also connected to the potentialities outlined by Mouffe, specifically her ideas on democracy, universality, and hegemony. When asked about the specifics on democratic practices, Mouffe disagrees with the notion of being able to describe what democracy "looks like," but agrees that democracy always needs to remain a social and political horizon, a place whose end point is neither exactly known nor reachable—something to strive toward even though one may disagree about how to get there.

Such a reading complies with the advocacy of a contestable conception of politics put forward by theorist Bonnie Honig. Honig's agonistic approach to political theory develops this notion through a set of critiques, yet remains, like Mouffe, a theoretical, untested, construct that is interested in the emancipatory potential of contestation and the disruption of settled practices. Honig argues that politics can neither be reduced to modes of consensus nor to simple contestation, as both are essential aspects of politics.[204] In short, democracy will always be "in the making"; to strive for it also means to acknowledge that disagreeing is part of democracy and that it is this very plural potential that ultimately matters. What is crucial within this formulaic calculation is that dissensus is understood and is enabled as a productive possibility. The Winter School Middle East project was modeled on the school form within the remit of a laboratory-type space. It was a series of think tanks for and about pedagogical processes and venues—precisely because it was a space that opened up an arena for dissensus and speculation.

A democracy always needs spaces in which democracy itself can be thought through and imagined. These spaces may not always be democratically legitimated though. Democracy is a levitating governmentality that has to constantly rearticulate and recondition its constraints. Democratic decision-making will always rely on a space for disagreement, a space in which people

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[204]   See Bonnie Honig, *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993).

agree to disagree: "Democratic legitimation aims at the will to act [Handlung], the diversification and transformation of the existing."[205] This is the expression of a communal praxis. The difficulty of which is to always allow for possibilities rather than limitations, to use knowledge production as a means of diversification and opening the debate up to a plethora of milieus rather than remaining static in one's own. This reading of milieu is fundamentally different from the notion of profession or discipline as it suggests a certain cultural turf in which one acts (for example, the art world exists as a construct of many different professions and discipline, yet could be described as a singular milieu).

A more specific example in regard to an alternative model of spatial practice might be the case of the European Kunsthalle project Institution Building/ Spaces of Production. The project started as a reaction to the loss of the historic Kunsthalle building in Cologne, which was demolished by local authorities with the promise that a new Kunsthalle would be built. Once the existing building had been eliminated, the city suddenly claimed that there was no money to build a new one. As a result, a grassroots initiative of local and regional artists, activists, and cultural producers, Das Loch e.V. (The Hole Society), was founded and posed a series of questions: What can be done? What needs to be considered in an ongoing discourse about the institutions, both in terms of its soft architecture and administrative processes as well as the physical manifestation of it in the city or elsewhere? The working-title project European Kunsthalle was born. Instead of trying to find immediate solutions, such as trying to raise money to build a new space or accept alternatives like the multipurpose development offered by the city (which included cooperating with a real estate developer), the group decided for a more rocky path by investigating the conflicts and problematics of the institutional typology itself. It asked, given the contemporary realities, what does a Kunsthalle in Europe constitute today? The existing conflict was used to plant another one, thus to productively use the lack of consensus at a particular moment. The result was the founding of an interim institution. In this

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[205]   Christoph Möllers, *Demokratie – Zumutungen und Versprechen* (Berlin: Verlag Klaus Wagenbach, 2009), 55; my translation.

case, consensus would have been much easier and would have led to a tangible result. Instead, where the European Kunsthalle's interest lay was in the rethinking of a model that was already in place through the strategic introduction of friction, one that would enable discourse rather than produce place.

Modes of participation, as a tool, are most constructive when understood as a means of proactively taking part in something other than a necessarily bottom-up democratic process. This was one of the reasons why the approach of Nicolaus Schafhausen, the founding director for the European Kunsthalle, meant to point at acute shortages in the current discourse on the role that institutions can play in politics through the scale of the local.

Participation is most operative if its framework is clear: if there is a delimitated audience that one addresses, if there is an unmistakable framework for the project that one pursues. Within that framework, substructures can be ambiguous. It needs to be specific rather than universal; it needs clearly outlined aims and targets; it needs to address a clear audience; it needs to be aware but not expert of its context and what scale to operate in. It suggests that micro-political struggle is arguably more effective than the simple articulation of macro-political ambition. This concept disagrees partly with the approach to scales as propagated by Mouffe, who argues for change mainly on the scale of governments, while simultaneously tackling the regional and micro-scales. At the micro-scale, however, effects of conflict can often be directly felt and can therefore act as a test ground for larger societal conflicts. The importance of the micro-scale lies in its ability to be explicitly local and therefore work is done with specificity; it is tangible through the articulation of very exacting aims and targets that can be tested relatively quickly.

Instead of arguing over existing categories, regimes of theory, or models of thought, what is urgently needed and should be promoted is a more conflictual concept of participation, not as the process by which one invites others "in," but as a means of acting without mandate, forcing oneself into discourses, projects, or realities that can benefit from external and structurally

uninterested involvement. This does not mean that there will not or cannot be shared authorship. It simply means that the conventional model of the facilitator or do-gooder is replaced by a model of proactive practice. In this sense, participation might also involve an alternative idea of networking, not as a means of generating consensual and milieu-driven roundtables, but to collate conflicting voices and perspectives on issues to which one wishes to have access to facility the potential for *Handlung*.

—— The Crossbench Practitioner

"There is always a confused soul that thinks that one man can make a difference. And you have to kill him to convince him otherwise. That's the hassle with democracy."
—Ned Beatty as Senator Charles F. Meachum[206]

"I relate my approach to homeopathy, which puts poison in the system in order to generate energy to defeat the weakness."
—Gustav Metzger[207]

Simon Critchley claims "philosophy begins in disappointment."[208] Nihilism is the breakdown of the order of meaning, where everything that we have previously imagined as a sound basis for moral judgment becomes meaningless. According to Critchley, philosophical activity, or the free movement of thought and the possibility for critical reflection, "is defined by militant resistance to nihilism."[209] In order to remain at least borderline optimistic within the current sociopolitical and economic climate of critical practices, one needs to generate a practice in which it seems possible to overcome the constant lamenting, pessimism, and ill-speaking of the contemporary condition. The designer, as Peter Sloterdijk contends, needs to attempt to mount a certain universe of competency, a territory in which oneself can exist as a sovereign, not in the sense of relative specialization, but the reverse: the contemporary "expert" needs not to become a more and more specialized master of a singular terrain, but instead be able to navigate the ocean of practices as an *Incompetent Master*. Design, for Sloterdijk, is the skillful mastering of incompetence.[210] Skillful incompetence enables a type of neutral gear, a parallel reality, in which practice, even in the presence of those

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[206]   Antoine Fuqua, dir., *The Shooter* (Los Angeles: Paramount Pictures, 2007).
[207]   Gustav Metzger, "Protest and Survive," *frieze* 108 (June 2007).
[208]   Simon Critchley, *Infinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance* (London: Verso, 2007), 1.
[209]   Ibid., 2.
[210]   Peter Sloterdijk and Sven Voelker, *Der Welt über die Strasse Helfen: Designstudien im Anschluss an eine philosophische Überlegung* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2010), 11–12.

who attempt to render oneself unconscious, can be sustained in an optimistic mode of production.

Free movement of thought necessarily implies that one need not always cling to what is perceived as functional and "right," or what has been previously practiced or experienced. Working from the outside, like a free non-institutionalized agent (comparable, to a certain extent, to an external consultant) also means to actively perform a certain marginality. The isolation of such marginality can be overcome only by a relentless will for collaboration—a commitment and willingness to change things beyond intellectual aspirations. This must be done through significant distance that produces a mode of criticality: a distance that an insider does not posses and thus cannot offer. In this model of practice, one that seeks change through commitment, complicity connotes the death of the project. Such a model needs to be driven by result-oriented praxis as the potential of modalities can only ever be tested in reality. One should rather work toward a result, which can then be critiqued, altered, tweaked, edited, or even dismissed than simply regurgitating its theoretical potential over and over again. The key terms here are constructive critical productivity. One should attempt to produce ten critical realities a year and learn from their shortcomings in order to develop a practice. Testing allows for agility, and needs to be carried out in collaboration across cultural milieus in order to avoid self-stimulation, vanity, and the passive nestling behind walls of egocentric practice, which is both highly uncritical and vastly unproductive. The German actor and director Martin Wuttke wrote:

> There is the danger that theater is turning into a sole simulation of itself. Like a cleaning lady who swabs the floor of the stage and while observing her own reflection in the window realizes that she likes the movement of her ass while scrubbing the floor. The reflection does not reveal whether the floor is actually getting clean. She becomes so engrossed that she only concentrates on the movement of her own ass. It no longer seems to matter whether the floor is actually being cleaned, although the movement of her ass is only the result of scrubbing it. This is how I perceive theater right now: a cleaning lady

who has nothing else on her mind but the salacious movement of her own ass—while she no longer looks after the floor.[211]

To use Wuttke's analogy, it is crucial to find a way to position oneself, in an agile manner, within the context of current practices, without falling into the trap of deadlock. Today's critical practitioner should opt to become a receptor of political processes rather than a remote player that navigates through the cultural-political terrain in a deaf/dumb/blind-like manner, a worrying habit that Diedrich Diederichsen calls "surrogate-democratic participation,"[212] which presents nothing more than a depoliticization of the individual beyond serious modes of engagement. In the current political climate, it is necessary to separate oneself from buzzwords such as sustainability, participation, democracy, or the multitude. These have been propagated since the end of the 1990s; instead of using them as simple billpostings for political one-liners, one should begin to tackle their underlying motives through contextualized practice. These buzzwords were only a few of the terms used by politicians in order to move attention from the micro to the macro scale. This was happening across the board, beyond political alliances; and it became fashionable to subscribe to them, whether or not one was convinced about their content.[213] The whole point about cultural praxis is that it presupposes and assumes possible futures, and it speculates on what might be possible through a series of critical theories and practices that are still too abstract for most of society.[214]

One could claim, however, that the real value for practice is hidden in an approach in which there is neither fully rational decision-making nor consensus evident in the result. The so-called crossbencher within the British House of Lords is an interesting reference to consider, not as a *gesamt*-political structure of the House and its conservative alignment, but as a structural component, which is designed to leave space for those who want to

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[211]   Martin Wuttke in Stephan Suschke, ed., *Nahaufnahme: Martin Wuttke—Theaterarbeit mit Schleef, Müller, Castorf, Pollesch* (Berlin: Alexander Verlag, 2010); my translation.
[212]   Diedrich Diederichsen, *Eigenblutdoping: Selbstverwertung, Künstlerromantik, Partizipation* (Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 2008), 279; my translation.
[213]   Ibid., 49.
[214]   Ibid., 184.

remain disassociated in order to provoke, motivate, and eventually stir change. The crossbench politician is an independent practitioner that neither belongs to a specific party nor regularly fosters alliances with the same political camps. Although this also makes him or her a less reliable or dependable actor, someone without a clear position, it offers an alternative disinterested and less biased perspective toward the internal, consensus-driven mechanisms of the other political parties present in the House. Although these politicians undoubtedly have a political stance and opinion, they do not subscribe to the nail-down membership books or party platforms of other, consolidated politicians. This is also reflected in the crossbencher's spatial arrangement and positioning within the house, where Labour sit on one side, Conservatives on the other, and the crossbenchers in the middle, slightly retracted toward the back of the room.

By now, participation is part of the neoliberal project. Today, it serves to preserve the system. Real questions of power are no longer being negotiated. While everyone has become a contented participant, all are spoon-fed as to how to take part within the larger whole. Within the remit of such directed/invited participation and highly controlled engagement, instead of breeding the next generation of consensual facilitators and mediators, one should promote the role of the (idealized) autonomous practitioner. It calls for a new interpretation of both the late 1990s' romantic use of participation as a mode or operating as well as the function and responsibility of the crossbencher: a mode of conflictual participation that no longer perpetuates and relies on a process by which others are invited in, but as a means of acting without consensual mandate, as disinterested, but productive irritant.

In participation, there are often too many decision-makers involved, but not enough who take on the responsibility and risk, and have the courage to turn those decisions into reality, to move things along. Of course any political practice must always be based on the basic rules of the democratic arena. Nevertheless, there is a potential danger in always using the majority as a way to generate democratic decision-making. The dilemma with democracy is that, colloquially speaking, the moment you have a room full of idiots, they will

vote for an idiotic government, or, in the case of the 2009 Swiss referendum regarding mosque minarets in Switzerland, financial resources mobilized the idiots, and, in effect, made the entire country look like a fool.

The central difficulty with the romanticized notion of the participatory project is that it assumes that everyone should sit around the table in order to make decisions. Yet, this might not necessarily be in everyone's interest. Should one read seriously the British *Sun*, the *New York Post*, or the German tabloid *Bild* just simply because they are the news titles with the biggest audiences and print runs? The question at hand point at a far greater danger: the problem and helplessness of the Left. If all one can do in order to generate decision-making is to outsource it and open up the responsibility to the floor, then something in representative electoral democracy has gone severely wrong. This is also why, in the shadow of the last decade, one could witness the reemergence of the Right, which now oddly appear as those who make decisions and get things done. They developed irony to perfection, a regime and lunge that has rendered them almost invulnerable. As Stanley Fish said, "The left may have won the curricular battle, but the right won the public-relations war. The right did this in the old-fashioned way, by mastering the ancient art of rhetoric and spinning a vocabulary that, once established in the public mind, performed the work of argument all by itself."[215]

Now, what can the architect's role be in all of this? The dilemma is that architecture, as a profession, no longer really exists. There is no such thing as core competence, which, as Sloterdijk claims, is advantageous. Core competences, such as Sony to miniaturization, Honda to the combustion engine, 3M to everything you stick together, also mean that you may be very good at doing one thing, and can create supply, but cannot guarantee demand. Everyone who joins one of these companies needs to understand that those competencies are only valuable when they can be applied in different fields; they should have an understanding about how to design this

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[215]   Stanley Fish, "'Intellectual Diversity': The Trojan Horse of a Dark Design," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, February 13, 2004, http://chronicle.com/article/Intellectual-Diversity/44764/.

transfer. Most architects, until recently, did not know how to do this. Over time, they have unlearned this skill, which was, for a long time, in fact part of architectural education. In the Renaissance, the polymath and generalist were models for such a mode of practice: a reflexive, educated individual capable of lateral thinking.[216] Different times have identified different dimensions to be the primary one, but it becomes interesting when one allows those dimensions to become transparent and understood as interdependent.

Rather than long for the good old days, our nostalgia for such figureheads can also be understood as a challenge and potential. In the past, architects have been very prolific within a parasitic relationship to the discipline that actually produces architecture, the discipline of building. The natural frustration that arises when decisions are not carried through has equipped architects with a healthy amount of skepticism. Recently, the traditional profession of architecture has disintegrated in a multiplicity of practices. This change from a profession or clearly outlined discipline into a series of practices was fuelled and mobilized by a certain politicization of the field that emerged in the mid-1990s. These diverse practices have tried and continue to try to achieve many disparate aims, but are united by a singular quality: the ability to imagine, formulate, and construct strategic frameworks within which design can operate. The problem, however, is that this abstract quality is continuously applied in the same, potentially bygone area, which failed architects in the first place. This raises a question of positioning and how one situates oneself within the larger territory of critical practices.

It is easy to agree that there is a certain impotence, which seems to govern the profession. However, within the sphere that is culture there are many niches to be explored and squatted. Exploring the potential space between stability and instability, critical spatial practice can be understood as a stage set, a strategic platform for choreographing futures. Cynics might argue that the architectural project per se is simply a more baggy type of storytelling practice. Regardless of any residual truth in this sentiment, one nevertheless

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[216]   See Saint, *The Image of the Architect*.

needs to be a pretty good storyteller.

Such a polyphonic approach opens up a new role not only for the architect to re-articulate the value of his or her practice, but for critical practices in general: to go beyond conventional physical construction and venture into the construction of realities—to not follow existing protocols, but to proactively generate them. It embodies a plea to the nonacademic intellectual, with a wide diffusion beyond the academy, although most of it may have been nurtured inside it. Even more so, crossbench practitioners should not remain at the edge of the water. They should turn toward the political world precisely because it is animated by considerations of power and interest. Its impact can affect an entire practice or social body, reaching beyond the scope of the interiority of academia. This is to say that in times of crisis, one is responsible for an intellectual premise on a larger scale. In this sense, moving from relatively discrete questions of interpretation and reading to much more significant and proactive ones of social change and transformation may introduce and articulate an outsider's perspective on a larger scale: "The intellectual who claims to write only for him or herself, or for the sake of pure learning, or abstract science is not to be, and must not be, believed."[217] Later, Said summarizes the key problematic: "The hardest aspect of being an intellectual is to represent what you profess through your work and interventions, without hardening into an institution or a kind of automaton acting at the behest of a system or method."[218] The significance, in Said's mind, is to never forget that one has the choice. And choice represents strength and power, for both the individual and society at large.

Political space entails the practice of decision-making; decision-making is a process of making judgments; judgment introduces a system of hierarchies. At its core, curatorial practice includes the acts of strategizing and exclusion: making choices of what to include or what to reject. In the context of critical spatial practice, the architect as curator could be understood as an instigator, who—through the introduction of zones of conflict—transforms a cultural

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[217]   Said, *Representations of the Intellectual*, 110.
[218]   Ibid., 121.

landscape. One could therefore argue that instead of breeding the next generation of facilitators and mediators, we should support the role of the disinterested outsider, someone who exists at the margins, only waiting for the relevant moment to produce ruptures in prevailing discourses and practices. This is someone who is intentionally unaware of prerequisites and existing protocols, one who enters the arena with nothing but creative and projective intellect. Running down the corridor with no fear of causing friction in order to destabilize existing power relations, this outsider opens up a space for change, one that enables "political politics."

The question remains as to whether this is to be understood as an opportunistic endeavor, trying to simply describe one's own role within a plethora of differentiated practices, or whether this has some qualities or use-value beyond the individual. Crossbench practice could be described as fully-engaged acting without a clearly defined mandate: a freelancer with a conscience. It calls for a hermeneutics and recalibration of the notion of participation. Such an understanding of practice seems vital in order to optimistically face the future. It assumes that one defines oneself through a notion of practice rather than a specific discipline or profession. Here, skills and core competence replace the traditional notion of discipline and professionalism. Conflictual participation produces an alternative and parallel reality, which is activated and driven by self-motivation, political agenda, collaborative willingness, and the fearlessness to—at times—exclude rather than strive toward unquestioned inclusion. If one is acting from a position of critical manipulation, one must not take anything for granted and never take final sides. One cannot cop out of responsibility, but must stay flexible, agile, and critical, without being dogmatic. One should, on the other hand, be aware that crossbench tactics also have a weak side as they tend to be temporal and often local, and may be in danger of, at times, missing the bigger picture, or having trouble seeing over long spans of time.

The coterie and clique of the art and architecture world as practice rather than pure critique in this regard has, apart from a relatively small circle of practitioners, totally lost touch. Many practices in the art world rarely produce

more than one-liners, and nestle in the relative freedom and luxury of a superimposed happy-go-lucky bubble in which participation has become nothing but an esoteric self-awareness program. This has resulted in a depoliticization of the field. What is now needed is a reintroduction of critical interrogation in regards to the value, positions, and temporal nature of political engagement, being raised in and against the institutional. Along this path, an alternative rendering of participation and the relational should be produced, one that shifts the performer to a proactive enabler. This seeks to move beyond the event-driven realities of socially-aware artistic production toward a direct and personal engagement and stimulation of specific future realities. This can only be achieved by avoiding the disciplinary trap—such as the art world or the architecture profession—or singular political projects. It needs to result in a content- and agenda-driven nomadic practice fueled by critical inquiries—an extra-discursive position in which one exits a milieu in order to reenter it differently. It should allow for an ambiguity that assumes responsibility while moving from pedigree to bastard. This practitioner will be a collaborative coauthor rather than a participant—as participants are usually confronted with superimposed structures. Although the "free radical" does not exist and nothing ever remains fully innocent, such practice needs to work toward an ambition that is immune to complicity. Such complicity can be overcome by assuming and appropriating three positions and skills: attitude, relevance, and responsibility. Unfortunately, these are all to often missing.

Space is the result of *Handlung* or, action.[219] It is impossible to generate change through a passive mode of reaction. Practice always needs to go beyond absorption and become projective; it must inject itself into contextual realities and make visible in order to instrumentalize. In a time in which participation has become nothing but a rendering of tokenistic political correctness, such a propositional rather than purely reflective notion of practice offers a hideout for agonistic commitment.

Most subcultural developments of the last fifty years aligned themselves with

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[219]   See Martina Löw, *Raumsoziologie* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2001).

the military logic of the avant-gardes, rather than with the ideas of democratic participation: first on site, scouting unknown terrain, on and off transmission of information, but otherwise living the wild and dangerous life of small underground cells.[220] As Marcel Reich-Ranicki wrote about Gotthold-Ephraim Lessing, "the loneliness appeared to him as the qualification for the autonomy of the critic, the autonomy as the prerequisite for his function."[221]

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[220]   Tobias Rapp, *Lost and Sound: Berlin, Techno und der Easyjetset* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2009), 49; my translation.
[221]   Uwe Wittstock, *Marcel Reich-Ranicki: Geschichte eines Lebens* (Munich: Karl Blessing Verlag, 2005), 192; my translation.

—— *Einmischungen*: Crossbenching as proactive intervention

"I recently went for lunch in a canteen full of architects. I listened in to a lot of interesting, critical and highbrow talk about building, life, how to live, and the like. When I left the canteen, I looked down the river, and all I could see were hypermarkets, DIY-stores, and the O2 Arena."
—Christian Petzold[222]

"Maybe the secret of autonomous agency and the good life lies precisely in opening up the space of those other options through a categorical refusal to accept the forceful imposition of any terms, leaving us no choice but to choose between either yes or no. […] The political splits society and it emerges out of this split. The political is inaugurated through a cut."
—Jan Verwoert[223]

So where do we move from here? Is there a possibility for a somewhat new or amended understanding, formulation, and practice of a model that could be related and opposed to our idea of the architect or spatial practitioner? How can an alternative kind of practice be envisioned?

Throughout my expanded Participation publication project, I have attempted to introduce, analyze, and cross-pollinate existing as well as emerging models of practice, which take as a starting point the willingness of the individual to get involved in the world surrounding us, in the larger picture, and hence illustrating how—within the remit of one's own practice—one can act politically.

Within this personal involvement, critical spatial practice should be thought through the role of the implanted uninvited outsider, the nonaligned embedded practitioner. In the postscript of *The Nightmare of Participation*,

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[222]   Christian Petzold in Peter Körte, Claudius Seidl, and Harald Staun "Das System," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung*, February 2, 2011, 19; my translation.
[223]   Jan Verwoert, *Tell Me What You Want, What You Really, Really Want* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2010), 16, 97.

Carson Chan interpreted this as "the midwife": "The Socratic midwife is one that is intellectually barren, but nonetheless able to produce knowledge through bringing it forth in others. Like [the] characterization of the uninvited outsider, the non-expert interlocutor […] Socrates produced knowledge through actively locating venues for dialogue and intervention. Thus, our pangs of doubts are simply intellectual labor pains."[224] When Chan talks about the practice of assisting and enabling the existence of a particular body or practice, he is describing the very notion of that which I had previously introduced as the "Crossbench Practitioner"—an individual who defines a particular code of practice through the act of *Einmischung*. Theorist Armen Avanessian refers to this as skepticism toward the "cardinal virtues of a comfortable and complacent leftist project: the fetishization of grassroots democratic processes and its affiliated nostalgia for authenticity."[225]

Crossbenching: a potential way forward

The Crossbencher must be understood as an advocate, someone who deliberately reads and understands situated problematics through a spatial framework—analyzing, outlining, and communicating how things organized in the physical world around us—and hence being able to propose mechanisms to deal with and act upon them in ways and by means beyond the default. In the context of architecture and most commonly established spatial practices, such role distinguishes itself from normative modalities of service provision by advocating a practice based on individual belief (that is not to say "ethical") rather than a primarily economic impetus. This also implies that such a practitioner is involved in the proactive and conscious retrofitting of existing realities. This form of working can further be understood as an editorial and logistical function: editing the very situated reality that one is facing. Rather than simply rejecting the normative understanding and performative interpretations, rituals, and codes of participation, the Crossbencher performs and expands a role that is driven by a long-term, proactive, propositional, and logistical practice in order to counteract the development that "political awareness and political strategy have been replaced by the random

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[224]   Carson Chan, "Epilogue," in *The Nightmare of Participation*, ix.

[225]   Armen Avanessian, ed., *#Akzeleration* (Berlin: Merve, 2013), 9; my translation.

recombination of frantic precarious activity."[226]

Waking up, moving on

Politicians like to claim that their constituency, the so-called public, is in favor of and want to witness the production of solutions toward specific realities. However, when observing the last two decades, especially since New Labour in the UK, it has become increasingly clear that a wide range of politicians as well as other elected representatives have precisely addressed objectivity's other: affect. Addressing the political emotions of their constituency, even in a placebo-like manner, introducing a perceived turf of "the possibility for participation" as an option has been enough in order to satisfy many different publics.

Such elegiac dejection and melancholia, which has created the before-mentioned romantic and sedated citizen, in fact proposes a form of antidemocratic pacification and reassurance policy. It calls for a "new Biedermeier" as pundit Dirk Kurbjuweit calls it.[227] Its most substantial shortcoming could be described as a form of *Überantwortung*, the transfer of commitment that assigns those who are participating as responsible rather than the person or group elected to do so. Along those lines, historian Heinrich August Winkler states that "it presents an evidently impossible-to-eradicate illusion of the democratic left that (quantitatively) more direct democracy leads to more progress, improvement and equality. A systematic comparison would presumably lead to the diagnostic finding that, historically, there have been more reactionary than progressive plebiscites."[228] Winkler goes even further and—quoting juridical scientist Ernst Fraenkel, a Jewish remigrant of postwar Germany—remarks that "a nation that does not have the confidence in its own representative parliament is suffering from a democratic inferiority complex."[229]

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[226]   Franco "Bifo" Berardi, "Introduction," in *The Wretched of the Screen*, Hito Steyerl (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2012), 10.
[227]   Dirk Kurbjuweit, "Das zweite Biedermeier," *Der Spiegel* 20 (2013): 46.
[228]   Heinrich August Winkler, "Die Grosse Illusion – Warum Direkte Demokratie nicht unbedingt den Fortschritt fördert," *Der Spiegel* 47 (2011): 48; my translation.
[229]   Ibid.

Interestingly, this phenomenon can also be witnessed in the recent rise and development of parametricism in the architecture and design world, which is based on the same default model as that kind of participatory politics, which has been hijacked as a means of legitimization and laundering of ethics. Similar to the sphere of state politics, parametricism is used as a means to outsource (design) responsibility; and—more specifically—to be able to claim that the end-result of the design is not the result of specific decisions by the designer, but a complex and (pseudo-)scientific process, which is based on a set of criteria that the designer defines and is then being developed and brought to life by the computer.

This shows that a certain politics of outsourcing responsibility has become a deeply contemporary methodology as to how to deal with power struggles and its soft and consensual mediation. In this light it is most important to demystify pseudo-participation as a universal remedy or magic bullet. Such simulated democracy, in which the notion and will toward participation could be read as an infection with one's own suggestion, ultimately leads to a state of mind in that one does not only dodge responsibility, and is also no longer accountable for one's own actions, but is under the impression that he or she is acting highly responsibly. In other words: anything that does not fit one's own storyline is simply erased. In medical research, such a state of mind is referred to as "cognitive dissonance," which is considered a clinical condition. Cognitive dissonance is known as a mental stress and discomfort, which is experienced by an individual who holds several contradictory beliefs, ideas, or values at the same time: "Dissonance is aroused when people are confronted with information that is inconsistent with their beliefs. If the dissonance is not reduced by changing one's belief, the dissonance can result in restoring consonance through misperception, rejection or refutation of the information, seeking support from others who share the beliefs, and attempting to persuade others."[230]

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[230]   Eddie Harmon-Jones, "A Cognitive Dissonance Theory Perspective on Persuasion," in *The Persuasion Handbook: Developments in Theory and Practice*, eds. James Price Dillard and Michael Pfau (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2002), 101.

Crossbenching as productive opposition

The Crossbencher could also be described, in Adam Curtis's words, as someone who attempts to govern. In "The Trap: What Happened to Our Dream of Freedom," Curtis dismantles the widely spread misunderstanding that democracy by necessity is about involvement. The striking paradox here is that deliberate processes of democracy can also result in the exact opposite.[231] In his series of three subsequent documentary films, Curtis analyzes the practice of perception management and the resulting corruption of freedom. One of his findings culminates in the hypothesis that today one faces an acute level of xenophobia toward individual decision-making. In the context of the Crossbencher, it is precisely this kind of involvement and decision-making that I am interested in. As illustrated by Curtis, politics should not be understood and performed as a defensive and reactive set of performance targets, but executed in an imaginative, propositional, and personally liable manner. Rather than worrying about the unquestioned and permanent inclusion of everyone, there is a need to assume a willingness to govern. Referring to political philosopher Isaiah Berlin, Curtis outlines how in the context of the UK's New Labour, a simplified and modest form of democracy was being promoted, one that proposes and pretends that participation itself generates some form of equality. Curtis examines Berlin's rendering of "negative liberty" to unpack a now widespread politics that is primarily concerned with the practice that has one major goal: "to give people what they want."[232] Such simplified and populist rendering of democratic principles is often coupled with the dogmatic belief of what the "right" or "real" free individual is.

Instead of being interested in a simulation of participation, Crossbench Practice performs a non-illusionary form of pragmatism that is aware of the dirty realism that someone needs to be in charge. As a form of realistic candor, it calls into question whether it is a valuable asset that today there is a development toward a political landscape that, ideally, does without opposition, without resistance: "what conditions must a territory meet before it

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[231] Curtis, "The Trap."
[232] Ibid.

can present itself speciously as part of tout le monde under the democratic emblem? Or to twist the thought a bit: of what objective space, of what settled collectivity, is democracy the democracy?"[233] Nicole Deitelhoff, who researches opposition politics at the University of Frankfurt, refers to this as the "truthfulness of conflict": "opposition is not in need of being looked after as a minority. Those political parties, who are not in power, have a clear mandate in parliament: to offer an alternative to the coalition and to set an example for the public and their constituency that politics can also be performed in a different way."[234] Deitelhoff also refers to Germany's Green Party as a former activist group, which—over time—managed to perform Gramsci's "slow march" through the institutions in a successful way.

Moreover, it has to be said that the Green Party not only managed to move all this way without the use of violence, but it also gave rise to politicians such as Josef "Joschka" Fischer. Famously known for his candid "Excuse me, I am not convinced" statement in response to meeting United States Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld in 2003, speaking about Rumsfeld's purported evidence of Iraq's possession of weapons of mass destruction, Fischer, who is an example for the Crossbencher, as he came into formal politics with no coherent, acknowledged, or formal background in politics, and slowly climbed up the institutional ladder. As an individual and an official character, Fischer captivated both the German elites as well as the *Kleinbürger* (petty bourgeois). This public fascination withstood the possible but all-too-easy criticism of opportunism and agile political maneuverability. He was not interested in the so-called new social movement. For him, that would have been too romantic, *kleinbürgerlich*, too do-gooderish and transfigured— instead of an actual and determined struggle: "Fischer embodied consequence, the kind of consequence that the *Kleinbürger* can only dream of but is never willing to risk."[235] In his work on Fischer, Paul Hockenos contests

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[233]   Alain Badiou, "The Democratic Emblem," in *Democracy in What State?*, eds. Giorgio Agamben, et al. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 11.

[234]   Till Krause in conversation with Nicole Deitelhoff, "Streit ist ehrlich," *Süddeutsche Zeitung Magazin* 47 (2013); my translation.

[235]   Franz Walter, "Das Phänomen Joschka," *Spiegel Online*, May 21 2011, http://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/politische-karriere-das-phaenomen-joschka-a-763595.html; my translation.

that Fischer was vital in regard to some of the most important "public debates in Germany, debates that fall outside the parameters of narrower political discourses elsewhere […], often rich discussions—part of a sophisticated *Streitkultur*—that […] could possibly inject fresh critical thinking into debates beyond Europe's borders."[236]

As a "doer," such an individual (or collective) is not waiting for external legitimization in order to work. In regard to a nonaligned practice on a formal political level, one can attest that, even if not always being included in parliament, such opposition manages to formulate a productive form of protest and opposition, which allowed—in this case—the Green Party to shape formal state politics. Naturally, there is a backdrop to this, which is that "opposition" can also be understood as a think tank for ideas that is then intellectually exploited by those in power.

However, even if such exploitation is likely to take place, the decision-making process will benefit from this phenomenon, since cross-pollination takes place within the system. As writer and curator Federica Bueti states, it needs to be understood that opposition can only emerge out of a distinct structural and spatial setting: "Participation is not a soft structural form. Without structural distinction there is no possibility of opposition."[237] It is the existing structural framework of participation that needs to be called into question:

> Participation can resist acceleration and performance's optimization. It can resist both consensual models and homogenization. Its polyphonic, conflicting, and dispersed nature simultaneously represents a reason for inclusion into the neo-liberal system and a reason for an optimistic exclusion. It could be a motif for "changing the way we understand what is possible." If we admit that another system of representation is possible, an autonomous system that doesn't belong to anything if not to its own fulfilment, to its potentialities and capacity to facilitate the

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[236]   Paul Hockenos, preface to *Joschka Fischer and the Making of the Berlin Republic, an Alternative History of Postwar Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).
[237]   Federica Bueti, "Drilling Your Ears," in *Waking Up from the Nightmare of Participation*, eds. Markus Miessen and Nina Valerie Kolowratnik (Utrecht: Expodium, 2011), 133.

exploration of new formats and new meanings, then participation might be regarded not as a romanticized concept of community or as the bodily personification of the abstract concept of multitude, but as an operative way to produce another kind of space—a groundless space, a space of uncertainty that does not stop us from seeking that which makes difference in today's reality.[238]

Instead of a new, a "second Biedermeier," a "stay home and keep on dosing,"[239] the Crossbencher works against the increasing quiet and almost unnoticed process of disabling real political discourse, which has, by now, resulted in a "lame consent"[240] and comfort that has infiltrated the modus operandi of the general public. Kurbjuweit explains that like during the Biedermeier period in Central Europe in the nineteenth century, "this seems to be about possibly increasing participation, but not because of a meta-social or societal vision of a better world or future, but rather to be able to live an untroubled life. In this respect, this second Biedermeier is even more Biedermeier than the first one."[241] A resolution can often only be achieved if someone is willing to make a decision that might go against the will, belief, and opinion of the general public. This, of course, goes against the wish for and notion of harmony as a core principle of democratic decision-making. As Eyal Weizman states, "political activists must constantly invent new forms of struggle that are recognizant of this paradigm of power, but which also evade and subvert its embrace, attempt to rewire its webs in order to escape its calculation."[242]

Breaking the Ideology of Participation

As I have clarified in this work, participation has become the contemporary ritual of instant relief, a form of aspirin, easily obtained at any corner store or gas station: a problem-solving ideology that has deeply infiltrated the political and cultural sphere. Instead of being trapped in this discourse of participation,

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[238]   Ibid., 134
[239]   Kurbjuweit, "Das zweite Biedermeier".
[240]   Ibid., 47.
[241]   Ibid.
[242]   Eyal Weizman, *The Least of All Possible Evils: Humanitarian Violence from Arendt to Gaza* (London: Verso, 2011), 24.

which understands itself as a practice of all-inclusive mediation, Crossbench Practice demands the production of vectorial force. It avoids the trap of objectification and detests any form of prescribed participation from above. Crossbench Practice understands practice itself as a site of dissensus: a propositional site spans writing, criticism, publishing, filmmaking, curating, teaching, and consulting to applied forms of (spatial) practice including art, architecture, urban planning, work with nongovernmental institutions, policy, or the design of legal frameworks, and performative techniques.

One of the missing words in the discussion about participation to this date is ideology. Tarnished with the worthy veneer of inclusion, solidarity, and political correctness, it went unnoticed that participation has in fact become an ideology: the new contemporary narcotic. When Marx wrote that religion "is the opium of the people," he could not have possibly known that political classes across belief systems and geographies would happily replace religion by pseudo-liberating forms of political participation only 150 years later. If one was to generalize, one could claim that there is one overarching fear that unites most geopolitical territories, systems, and actors, regardless of scale or position: the fear of opinion polls. This fear has played a significant role in the rise of participation. This development and phenomenon also reflects in the rise of "slacktivism," a pejorative term that attempts to label seemingly altruistic measures or practices that have little or no practical effect other than to make the person performing it feel satisfaction and relief.

Crossbenching as a Form of Staging Discourse

In order to avoid a possible misreading, it is important to state that Crossbench Practice is by no means meant to be understood as an altruist practice. Rather the opposite: if anything, Crossbenching—as an act, a performed practice, a form of "doing"—should be understood as a self-directed, self-initiated, and propositional form of altruism that, at times, can come across as opportunistic at first. However, what is important here is to understand that altruism in this context is not to be understood as a purely exclusive concern for the welfare of others. It is meant as a genuine effort to act independently, not based on the impulse or under the influence of others,

but to the best of one's knowledge and conscience, as a free radical, without mandate. It is hence a primarily selfish practice, not in the sense of practicing against the common good, but that it is practiced with an awareness that some things can only move forward through *seemingly* antidemocratic means. Crossbenching hence can be understood as a productive attack on the looming participatory dogma: it forecasts and declares a new value of nondemocratic—rather than antidemocratic—decision-making, toward empowerment, relative autonomy, and the development of operative potential.

Such practice is in need of a realistic optimism. As Carson Chan explained in the epilogue to *The Nightmare of Participation*, it helps us bring forth a new ground for reflection, a recontextualization that unearths at the same time.[243] Crossbench Practice opens up a space for thinking beyond the normative restraints of territorialized thought. Chan's midwife analogy can be read as an assistant and external enabler of (re)organization and operation: uniting strategic (planned and tactical, conceptual and agile) activities that reframe the cultural, political, economic, and legal parameters of a given situation. Such an approach of "undoing" and "reframing" mobilizes material and parallel realities that allow and help us to understand the world around us in a more differentiated way.

But what constitutes the difference between such activities and those of, for example, an investigative journalist? Crossbenching constitutes an operative practice. In other words, it is part of a larger body of work that is building up not only in terms of quantity, but in terms of continuity and propositional implementation of irritants. As such, it forms an archipelago of knowledge clusters that can penetrate a given situation or context from the outside. Crossbench practitioners are becoming increasingly important because they are precisely not professionals or official functionaries, but embody the value of "free speech." In her essay "The Collaborative Turn," curator Maria Lind presents an incredibly relevant inventory outlining and illustrating the recent developments of self-initiated and collaborative practice. Lind accounts that in

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[243]   Carson Chan, Epilogue to *The Nightmare of Participation: Crossbench Praxis as a Mode of Criticality*, by Markus Miessen (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2010), ix.

the remit of a certain affinity with activism, such practices constitute "a response to specific, at times local, situations" and that those present valuable "examples of willing immersion."[244] Instead of considering the methodologies of collaboration, she identifies characteristics of various collectives as well as the diverse influences on their practice: "they constantly run the risk of being swallowed up and incorporated in the very systems against which they are reacting."[245] This is of acute interest to the consideration of the role of the Crossbencher, because it is important to understand that the process of being "swallowed up" or being incorporated should not be a hindrance to one's practice, but rather the Crossbencher is interested in the strategic planting of what one might call "discoursive seeds," that is to say that certain information, procedures, discourses, and practices should target and infiltrate alien contexts from the outside.

Discreet Space

Crossbenching can take on many different forms and formats. But in order to develop immersive tactics and to avoid the trap of objectification, it is important to plan for protection. In order to act polictially, one needs discreet spaces—spaces for withdrawal. Not everyhing can happen in public and not everything should be communicated or discussed. When it comes to the immediate implications of space as the prerequisite of a working evnvironment, it is very important to understand that transparency can in fact also be understood as a killer not only of critical work, but also of democracy. The idea that critical work must be generated, be debated, and can thrive in a shopfront environment is not only misleading, but a misconception on the part of those who propose to involve everyone and at any time. Democratic frameworks also require spatial secession. Public debate is vital, but there should be no false expectations that everything should be made public. If a democratic election would be carried out in an entirely open format, meaning that the individual voters would have to publically announce who they voted for or against, the outcome of the poll would most certainly be very different

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[244]   Maria Lind, "The Collaborative Turn," in *Taking the Matter into Common Hands: On Contemporary Art and Collaborative Practices*, ed. Johanna Billing, Maria Lind, and Lars Nilsson (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2007), 16, 17.
[245]   Ibid, 17.

and, one could argue, twisted.

If every discussion were televised or made public, the real debate would take place elsewhere: in the kitchen or corridor, on the train or in the courtyard, where most conversation already takes place regardless. It is precisely these in-between spaces, the gray zones of democracy, that need urgent consideration when it comes to the developmemnt of spatial frameworks for discourse. Those can range from discreet spaces of assembly to work settings; in regard to the consideration and design of procedures and processes they share a common ground: initmacy is a great asset when it comes to productive encounters.

Crossbenching as practice

"Participation is always the result of a specific social context linked to specific working conditions […] based on fragmentation and it never leads to harmony. It is a painful process, taking place in that grey area characterized by antagonism and asymmetry. Against the distorted, schizophrenic and populist definition of participation that reduces it to a static and repetitive chant, we should ignore the rhetoric of participation and propose a more sustainable practice."

—Federica Bueti[246]

Crossbenching is not meant to solve problems. Far from it, this model is meant to complicate things while denying that "complexity"—of a given situation, reality, or project—is a valid reason not to become involved. Crossbench Practice should be understood and exercised as a sounding board that makes visible and discloses the underlying conflicts of what one is facing, to accercebate them, to create and nurture complications, to work *with* and *around* them in a productive way, and to then act upon them. This is how design should be practiced. "Concerned with the decentering of normative orbits" as artist and writer Patricia Reed calls it,[247] such practice demands to

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[246]   Bueti, "Drilling Your Ears," 124.
[247]   Patricia Reed, "Eccentric Space: Democracy at All Cost and the Indisciplinary Participant," in *Waking Up from the Nightmare of Participation*, 55.

appear and behave like a self-constituting agent, to insinuate autonomous competence, and to help, in the spirit of Carson Chan's analogy of the "midwife" or Brian Eno's "drifting clarifier,"[248] give birth to ideas. As Bruno Latour has stated: "The critic is not the one who debunks, but the one who assembles. The critic is not the one who lifts the rugs from under the feet of the naive believers, but the one who offers the participants arenas in which to gather."[249] The Crossbencher is someone who thinks through situations but is not stuck to one in particular. As such, rather than dwelling on expert competence and territorial professionalism, this role envisages a "figure, which could better be discribed as *indisciplinary* […] neglecting categories of knowledge, whilst twisting and transforming, disciplinary conventions."[250]

The Crossbencher, as a model, is the outcome of the investigation that I started in 2006 with the book project *Did Someone Say Participate? An Atlas of Spatial Practice*. This identified the need to instrumentalize "spatial practices" as a then emerging movement, which became significant due to the unprecedented visibility of what one might call "globalization at work": from Iraq to Nepal, Dubai to Mumbai, a new atlas was being redrawn for the twenty-first century, one that Thomas Friedman described as a new "flatness."[251]

What was once seen as the defensive preserve of architects—mapping, devising, making, or manipulating spaces—has become a new "culture of space," produced and shaped by an ever increasing number of practitioners, backgrounds, knowledge territories, and disciplines. While *Did Someone Say Participate?* showcased a range of forward-thinking practitioners and theorists who actively trespass—or "participate"—in neighboring or alien knowledge-spaces, *The Violence of Participation*, the follow-up book, explored this terrain

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[248]   Brian Eno, "Brian Eno - in conference with CompuServe on July 4th, 1996 at his London studio," http://music.hyperreal.org/artists/brian_eno/interviews/ciseno.html.
[249]   Bruno Latour, "Why Has Critique Run Out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern," *Critical Inquiry* (Winter 2004): 246.
[250]   Reed, "Eccentric Space," 49.
[251]   Thomas Friedman, *The World Is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-first Century* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005).

in regard to speculative experiment, while *The Nightmare of Participation* attempted to synthesize the more theoretical backbone of this historic, philosophical, and cultural development. All practices and protagonists that have been introduced, described, analysed, and/or have formed parts of several collaborative projects along the way, share an essential interest: the understanding, production, and alteration of spatial conditions and geopolitical realities as a prerequisite for identifying the broader reaches of political reality today.

Within the process of this entire investigation, there was no intention to "map" a particular generation. It is the case that the spatial pracititioner may well be in their early twenties or indeed in their late fifties, sharing common discoveries through entirely unrelated contexts. The disciplinary territories include art, curation, architecture, photography, geography, humanitarianism, politics, philosophy, urbanism, information technology, pedagogy, or futurology. Empowerment sometimes emerges in conditions that theoretically ought to thwart it. Knowledge is often generated at the edges or the gaps of ignorance. Participation should simply be understood as a tactic of complicit curiosity scaled to the space that one is currently inhabiting.

The investigative project in front of you was followed up and developed through these several publications and side projects. The practices described in those works can be explicated through the work of several practitioners, who over the last decade have produced a body of work that exemplifies some of the major arguments that have been layed out in the investigation, but by no means should be held responsible for a particular direction in the forthcoming development of critical spatial practice.[252] Their work has illustrated that as an outsider (or otherwise) one can achieve relevant and seminal results in the work toward a more differentiated and holistic future, such as the reworking of extraordinary rendition programs, the superimposition of visual cultural practices, amending international

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[252]   Some active practitioners of note are artist and researcher Trevor Paglen, artist Omer Fast, filmmaker Hito Steyerl, artist and architect Céline Condorelli, designers Metahaven, artist collectives Ultra-Red and Chto Delat?, architect and researcher Teddy Cruz, architectural historian Robert Jan van Pelt, and filmmaker Laura Poitras, among others.

humanitarian law, the alteration of the space of geopolitics observed through the layering and cross-referencing of (oral) histories, the interrogation of the global circulation of images, the alternative development of forms of commonality, the influence on policymaking, the fostering of dynamic exchanges between art and political frameworks, the disclosure of struggles of migration and anti-racism, the merging of political theory, art, and activism, the rethinking of urban policy, the reworking of affordable housing and civic infrastructure, the support of civil libel suits, the protection and distribution of archives of global surveillance, the implementation of time-based urban interventions, or the placement of artists in governmental structures. Or, as Jan Verwoert put it: "To learn the lesson of the ethics of art and ideas therefore means to develop a sense of simultaneous unconditional trust and mistrust in your own principles of sympathy and resentment, affiliation and animosity, identification and hostility."[253]

The work in front of you presents the framing of all the activities that I have set up over the course and space of my dissertation work in order to formulate and define a particular approach within spatial practice. It needed that space in order to be able to witness, analyze, and think through these emerging tendencies that are the result of an increasingly occluded political class, one that pontificates the good of participation in the decision-making process. As it shows, most often the reverse is the case—and the emerging practices that I have described have found meaningful, productive, and elegant ways and shortcuts around this hermetic reality. My work framed should be understood and read as a model, a site for speculation. It offers an alternative rendering of a possible practice that goes beyond the conventional understanding of disciplinary and professional practice. It resembles a framework through which to act. My argument is not a strictly political one, but rather attempts to open up an arena for the discussion of how practice itself can become political.

In today's landscape of conventional spatial practice that includes—among

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[253]   Verwoert, *Tell Me What You Want, What You Really, Really Want*, 108.

many others—the fields of architecture and the visual arts, which form my background by trade and interest, such arena for the political is often missing. From the beginning of this project, it has been my intention that no matter the material generated or the writings produced, this work is not meant to be recognized as a fixed and solidified result carved in stone, but the beginning of something—a platform on which to develop and build ideas, thoughts, and other projects. It continues to be my intention that this material should be interrogated, amended, transformed, or hijacked—just as in *Waking Up From The Nightmare of Participation*—since I understand such a process as the natural and necessary evolution of practice. My reason for developing such model of the Crossbencher, based on the first person singular rather than a community or collective that exists in the plural, is precisely the understanding that if one really wants to become politically involved, the political role that one can perform is that of the single individual: oneself.

In an essay for *e-flux*, Hito Steyerl suggested that falling does not only mean falling apart, it can also mean a new certainty falling into place: "grappling with crumbling futures that propel us backwards onto an agonizing present, we may realize that the place we are falling toward is no longer grounded, nor is it stable. It promises no community, but a shifting formation."[254]

Follow your instinct. Embody the willingness to govern. Collaborate when necessary. Assume responsibility. Be liable. Produce consequence: "refraining is not an option."[255]

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[254]   Hito Steyerl, "In Free Fall: A Thought Experiment on Vertical Perspective," *e-flux journal* 24 (April 2011), http://www.e-flux.com/journal/in-free-fall-a-thought-experiment-on-vertical-perspective/.
[255]   Volker Weidermann, "Das Prinzip Juli Zeh", *Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung*, July 29, 2012, 21; my translation.

APPENDIX

INTRAVIEWS

On Demoicracy

(In conversation with Chantal Mouffe, published in *Critical Spatial Practice*)

Preface

From December 2006 to October 2011, we conducted a series of meetings and one-on-one conversations that tried to situate some of Chantal's key work in the contemporary socioeconomic and geopolitical condition in which we find ourselves.

This edition—the second in the Critical Spatial Practice series—presents selections from the ongoing discussion that attempt to unpack current worldwide dilemmas in terms of consensus-driven formats of political decision making. The conversations were driven by, alternately, Markus's specific concerns regarding his ongoing investigation into conflict-based forms of participation as an alternative (spatial) practice in democratic systems and settings, and Chantal's agonistic theory that asserts the need for a "conflictual consensus" in democracy.

We are aware that the text reads outdated in places. This is only natural taking into consideration that we present a series of conversations conducted at specific moments in time, with quite severe temporal gaps intervening. These conversations tried to frame a series of themes and project them onto different political geographies, using the format of the conversation in order to conduct a close but informal prognosis. Looking back at recent history, it seems that the views put forward in the conversations are being confirmed by reality.

We believe that the temporal gaps offer a possibility to both contextualize certain events that relate to the topics of our discussion as well as historically frame the themes that interest us and, moreover, the way in which some of the more abstract thinking may transit from theory into praxis.

With respect to the text, we have edited it quite substantially, while allowing the informal nature of the conversation to remain reflected in the printed version. We believe that the format of the conversation lends itself to a less constrained mode of communicating ideas, making statements, reacting to the conversation partner, and sometimes veering into surprising detours and offshoots that would often not be addressed in a more academic or formal text.

Markus Miessen & Chantal Mouffe
August 2012

PART 1 (London, Westminster University, 2007)

MARKUS MIESSEN: Chantal, you have written extensively on the struggles of politics and the radical heart of democratic life. Could you explain the main thesis of your book, *On the Political* (2005)?

CHANTAL MOUFFE: My objective in *On the Political* is twofold. First, I am convinced that the two dominant models in democratic political theory—the aggregative model and the deliberative model (the latter represented, for example, in the work of Jürgen Habermas)—are not adequate to grasp the challenge that we are facing today. I wanted to contribute to the theoretical discussion in political theory by proposing a different model, one that I call the agonistic model of democracy. My second aim corresponds to my central motivation, which is a political one. I have been trying to understand why, in the kind of society we are living in today—which I call a post-political society— there is an increasing disaffection with democratic institutions. I have for some time been concerned with the growing success of right-wing populist parties, and particularly with the recent development of al-Qaeda forms of terrorism. I feel that we do not have the theoretical tools to really understand what is happening. Of course, I do not claim that political theory is powerful enough to explain everything, but I think that it can play a crucial role in helping us to

understand our current predicament. So far, however, it has not been helpful at all; in fact, one could even say that it has been counterproductive. We have been made to believe that the aim of democratic politics is to reach a consensus. Obviously, there are different ways in which this consensus is being envisaged, but the common idea is that the distinction between Left and Right is not pertinent any more, which we find in Ulrich Beck and Anthony Giddens. They argue that we should think beyond Left and Right, and—according to Beck—that we need to reinvent politics in terms of "sub-politics." This is typical of liberal thought, which—as Carl Schmitt indicated—has never been able to understand the specificity of the political. When liberals speak about politics, they either think in terms of economics—and that would definitely be the aggregative model—or in terms of morality, which represents the deliberative model. But what is specific to the political always eludes liberal thought. I consider this a serious shortcoming because to be able to act in politics, one needs to understand the dynamic of the political.

MM: Would this constitute the book's main thesis?

CM: Yes. This is why, in the book, I insist that the dimension of the political is something linked to the dimension of conflict that exists in human societies, the ever-present possibility of antagonism: an antagonism that is ineradicable. This means that a consensus without exclusion—a form of consensus beyond hegemony, beyond sovereignty—will always be unavailable.

MM: Could you explain the relationship between your theory and the work of Schmitt?

CM: The strength of Schmitt's critique of liberalism lies precisely in having shown that liberalism is, and must be, blind to this dimension of antagonism, and that it cannot acknowledge that the specificity of the political is the friend-and-enemy distinction—Schmitt is definitely right when he insists on this point, but my main disagreement with Schmitt concerns the consequences that he draws from it. Schmitt believed that liberal pluralist democracy is an unviable regime, and that—because of this dimension of antagonism, which exists in

human societies—the only kind of order that can be established is authoritarian. According to him, pluralism cannot be accepted within a political association because it would necessarily lead to a friend-and-enemy struggle, and therefore to the destruction of the political association. On the one hand, I agree with Schmitt on the ineradicability of antagonism, while on the other, I want to assert the possibility of a pluralist democracy. So I developed the concept of the agonistic model, in which I am trying to show that the main task of democratic politics is, to put it in a nutshell, to transform antagonism into agonism.

MM: How is this model expressed?

CM: There are two ways in which this dimension of antagonism can be expressed in society. One is what we could call "antagonism proper," which is the friend-and-enemy relation. Schmitt was right to claim that this will lead to the destruction of the political association if it is allowed to be played out inside a political community. But there is another way in which antagonistic conflict can be played out, and this is what I call "agonism." In this case, we are faced not with the friend/enemy relation, but with a relation of what I call "adversaries." The major difference between enemies and adversaries is that adversaries are, so to speak, "friendly enemies," in the sense that they have something in common: they share a symbolic space. Therefore, what I call a "conflictual consensus" can exist between them: they agree on the ethico-political principles that inform the political association, but they disagree on the interpretation of these principles. If we take these principles to be "liberty and equality for all," it is clear that they can be understood in many different, conflicting ways, which will lead to conflicts that can never be rationally resolved—you can never say, "*This* is the correct interpretation of liberty or equality." I envisage the agonistic struggle as such: a struggle between different interpretations of shared principles, a conflictual consensus—consensus on the principles, disagreement about their interpretation.

MM: You have argued that democratic processes should aim to supply an arena in which differences can be confronted. Could you clarify how agonism

as a constructive form of political conflict might offer an opportunity for a constructive expression of disagreements?

CM: It is very important to envisage the task of democracy in an agonistic form, in terms of creating the institutions that will allow for the conflicts that will necessarily emerge—in other words, conflicts between adversaries, not enemies. If that agonistic form is not available, when conflicts emerge, they will very likely take an antagonistic form.

MM: In this context, what exactly do you mean by "institution"?

CM: I use "institution" in a very broad sense—in terms of an ensemble of practices, language games, discourses—but also in terms of traditional institutions like parties and other political institutions as different forms of participation of a diversity of people at local and other levels.

MM: I am interested in your critique of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri. Could you elaborate on your distinction between their idea of an "absolute democracy" in relation to what you call "forms of construction of a 'we/they' compatible with a pluralistic order"[256]?

CM: The institutional aspect that Hardt and Negri put forward in *Empire* (2000), and later in *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (2004), is something with which I disagree. Their view is very anti-institutional: they are against all forms of local, regional, or national institutions, which they declare to be fascistic. They think that belonging to specific places is something that should be overcome, and that we should propel some kind of cosmopolitan view and understanding; the multitude should not have any form of belonging. I think this is completely inadequate theoretically because they do not acknowledge (and in this sense, I think they do share something with most liberals) the importance of what I call "passions" for political collective identities, what Freud refers to as libidinal investment, which are mobilized in

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[256]   Chantal Mouffe, *On the Political* (Routledge: London, 2005), 115.

the creation of local, regional, or national forms of identities. They think that these attachments can and should be overcome. In fact, in this view, they are not so far from Habermas's idea of post-conventional identities and his notion of a post-national Europe. From the point of view of a philosophical anthropology, I find this completely inadequate. My main disagreement with Hardt and Negri is in their proposal of an "absolute democracy," a democracy beyond any form of institution—it is even difficult for me to imagine what this could be. Their view has a messianic tone; they think it is possible to reach a perfect democracy in which there will no longer be any power relations—no more conflict, no more antagonism. This position is completely against the point that I want to defend—and is the basis of most of my work—which is precisely the fact that antagonism is ineradicable. It can be tamed, which is what agonism tried to do, but we will never arrive at the point where it will definitely be overcome.

MM: Is there someone in this context that you feel more sympathetic toward than Hardt and Negri?

CM: I am much more interested, for example, in Jacques Derrida and his notion of a "democracy to come." Insisting on the fact that this democracy will always be "to come," there is never a point at which we can say that democracy has been realized—

MM: While Hardt and Negri are waiting for exactly that.

CM: The moment we say democracy has been realized, we pretend to be in a situation in which we can say: now perfect democracy exists. Such a democracy would cease to be pluralistic because there would no longer be any possibility for discussion or conflict. This idea is absolutely contrary to my idea of an agonistic democracy. For me, there is democracy as long as there is conflict and as long as existing arrangements can be contested. If we arrive at a point where we say, "This is the endpoint, contestation is no longer legitimate," it means the end of democracy.

I have another problem with Hardt and Negri. I see their entire theory as some reformulation—even if it is in a different vocabulary, one influenced by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari—of the Marxism of the Second International. It is the same type of determinism in which we basically don't have to do anything, just wait for the moment in which the contradictions of Empire will bring about the reign of the multitude. All the crucial and fundamental questions for politics are automatically evacuated. For example, Hardt and Negri see the alter-globalization movement as a manifestation of the power of the multitude. I also think it's an interesting movement, but it is very heterogeneous: we can find many groups with many very different and often conflicting objectives. For me, the political task is to create a chain of equivalence among these different struggles and have them converge in a movement that presents some form of unity. Of course, Hardt and Negri disagree with this completely: they believe that the very heterogeneity of the movement is its force. They argue that these diverse groups are not linked on a horizontal level, but instead go straight—vertically—to the power of empire, and so their capacity for subversion is much greater.

MM: What is your feeling about this?

CM: I think it is completely inadequate. One of the main reasons why this alter-globalization movement is, at the moment, encountering difficulties is precisely because it has not yet managed to establish enough forms of coordination between the different forms of struggle.

MM: How does that relate to institutions?

CM: The people who, in this movement, are influenced by Hardt and Negri do not want to have anything to do with existing institutions such as parties or trade unions. They want a pure movement of civil society, because they are afraid (and here I can see they have a point) that if you enter into contact with established institutions, they will try to neutralize or co-opt you. This danger exists; I would not want to negate this. On the other hand, without a form of synergy between the alter-globalization movement and those institutions, I

don't think important advances can be made. For instance, Hardt and Negri very much celebrate the piquetero movement.

MM: The movement of unemployed workers in Argentina—

CM: Yes. This is exactly the kind of movement of civil society opposed to any form of institution that Hardt and Negri advocate. To be sure, such a movement managed to bring down the government of de la Rúa.[257] Their main slogan was "Que se vayan todos" (They all must go). The problem, however, is that when it came to reestablishing some kind of order at the time of the elections, the piqueteros were absolutely impotent because they had no relay at all with the institutions or the parties. So when the elections took place, it was a struggle between traditional parties, between Menem and Kirchner.[258] Thank God Menem was defeated. Kirchner won and turned out to be much more radical than expected. He tried to establish contact with the piqueteros in order to bring them into his government. He managed to work with one part of that movement. There are still parts, however, that want nothing to do with the government, and those are people are now very isolated. I think this example shows that when those movements of the so-called multitude are not articulated with more traditional forms of politics, they cannot go very far.

MM: Would this one voice—or, in your words, a "more traditional form of politics"—not require some form of consensus? It seems to me that it requires a certain negotiation to bring these different voices together.

CM: Well, it will be a conflictual consensus, some kind of articulation—I prefer this term—between the different movements so that they manage to have some common aim. I don't like to use the concept of consensus in this case, because it carries more than I think is necessary. A conflictual consensus

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[257]   Fernando de la Rúa, president of Argentina from December 1999 to December 2001, represented the Alliance for Work, Justice, and Education.
[258]   Carlos Menem, president of Argentina from July 1989 to December 1999, and Néstor Kirchner, president of Argentina from May 2003 to December 2007. Both Menem and Kirchner represented the Justicialist Party.

suggests that we are working together towards a common aim; that is enough.

MM: Could you describe more precisely what these practices and institutions could potentially be, or how they would come into being? I am particularly interested in the formation of alternative institutions and spaces of knowledge here.

CM: The essential differences and conflicts are going to remain, but there is at least articulation. In regard to Hardt and Negri, the idea of a necessary process needs to be put into question. I am not sure whether capitalism is its own gravedigger, which is what they claim and what the Second International claimed as well. They believe that Empire will bring itself down: it's the traditional Marxist argument that the productive forces will reach a stage in which they are necessarily going to create an emergence of forces—which is the multitude—that will bring the prevailing system down. Unfortunately, I cannot share this optimism. I do not believe that this process is a necessary one. I think it is a possibility, but only a possibility—and that, in order to take place, a political intervention is necessary. This is what they don't see. I saw a documentary made in Germany called *Was Tun?*—it's about the alter-globalization movement and the influence of Hardt and Negri on it. At the end of the film, the filmmakers ask them, "So, what is to be done?" Negri answers, "Wait and be patient." And Hardt: "Follow your desire." This is their kind of politics, and I seriously do not think it is enough. "Just wait, the development of capitalism is going to bring about the reign of the multitude." We cannot envisage radical politics this way. In fact, I have many more points of contention with Hardt and Negri, but we cannot possibly go into these today.

MM: Since, as you have said, we are now facing a situation in which it is crucial to think about a commonality that allows for conflict as a form of productive engagement, could a model of "bohemian participation"—in the sense of an outsider's point of entry—allow for the outsider to become a role model for the future?

CM: I find it really necessary today to create an agonistic public space, an agonistic type of politics—this is what's missing. We live in a situation that, in *On the Political*, I call post-political: we are constantly being told that the partisan model of politics has been overcome, there is no more Left and Right, and the consensus at the center doesn't really allow for an alternative. We are told that, given the state of globalization, there is nothing we can do. And this is why most socialist or labor parties have moved towards the center—what they offer is really not fundamentally different from what Center-Right parties offer. The current general consensus that there is no alternative is extremely dangerous. In my view, such a situation has prepared the way for the rise of right-wing populist parties in Europe. They are the only parties that say, "There is an alternative to this consensus at the center, and we will offer it. We will bring back to you—the people—the voice that the establishment has taken away from you. We will provide you with the possibility to exercise popular sovereignty." Of course, the alternatives they present are inadequate and unacceptable because they are usually articulated in a xenophobic language. But given that right-wing populist parties are often the only ones that pretend to represent an alternative, it is not surprising that they are attracting more and more people. They are also the only ones trying to mobilize passions, and offer forms of identification with a strong affective component. It is very important for the Left to understand that instead of reacting with moral condemnation, they need to first understand the reasons for the success of these parties to be able to provide adequate answers.

MM: In this context, what is your specific understanding of dissensus?

CM: It is important to subvert the consensus that exists in so many areas, and to reestablish a dynamic of conflictuality. From that point of view, what you call "the outsider" could play a role. I would put it differently though, because it's more the person who disagrees, who has another point of view. It's not necessarily an outsider—somebody from within the community who is not part of the prevailing consensus could allow people to see things differently.

MM: Yes, but is this not precisely the outside voice that enters the arena? It

depends on those who will be able to access existing debates and discourses untroubled by their disapproval.

CM: Of course. In some cases it can be somebody from the outside who suddenly opens up the view and says, "Look, there are also these other things that you do not take into account." So, yes, it can be an outsider, but it need not be an outsider. Voices within communities have also been silenced. But I agree, you could say that it is an outsider to the consensus. It is important to hear most of the voices that have been silenced or that have not been able to express themselves. I am not necessarily saying that they have not been granted the right to speak, but maybe a voice has not yet emerged because the whole culture of consensus simply does not allow for people to envisage that things could be different. I like the slogan of the alter-globalization movement for this reason: "Another world is possible." It's really important for all of us to begin thinking in these terms. Another world is possible. And the present neoliberal hegemony has tried to convince us that things can only be as they are. Fortunately, this is not the truth. All forms of what we call the "productive engagement to disturb the consensus" are crucial in order to bring to the fore the things that consensus has tried to push aside. Many different voices and people all play a role in the creation of what I call an agonistic public space—for instance, this is definitely an area where artists, architects, or people who are engaged in the field of culture at large play an incredibly important role, because they provide different forms of subjectivities from the ones that currently exist.

MM: It seems to me that there is an urgent need to undo the innocence of participation, which is precisely the modus operandi that we find in so many seemingly "socially relevant" practices today. These practices have hijacked the notion of participation as an unquestionably positive, user-driven and, by default, bottom-up means of engagement. In this context, it could be useful to think in terms of "conflictual participation" as a productive form of intervention.

CM: You have touched on an important point. Today, we are in a post-Washington Consensus phase. Of course, the Washington Consensus is still

in place—although challenged to a greater extent fortunately, particularly in Latin America. More and more countries simply say that they no longer want to obey the International Monetary Fund or the World Bank, but instead want to organize things their own way. The power of globalization has begun to realize that it needs to use a different strategy, a strategy of participation. And this is why participation has become such a buzzword. But, in many cases, participation consists simply in people exploiting themselves: they do not just accept things the way they are, they actively contribute to the consensus and accept it. Consequently I find your notion of the "violence of participation" very interesting. We need to realize that participation can also be very dangerous.

MM: What constitutes the danger?

CM: I was in a discussion at the London School of Economics with people who participated in the Davos World Economic Forum as well as people who participated in the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre. They were all bringing their different experiences to the table. One person who had been in Porto Alegre was telling a story about the event, and then a person who had attended the Davos forum would say, "But that's incredible, because it's exactly the same thing that was discussed in Davos—it's exactly the same thing." This was understood as something optimistic, and I was saying, "But wait a minute, they cannot possibly be talking about the same thing." The fact that they use the same vocabulary at both forums is because the people at Davos have realized that they need to transform their vocabulary—they need people to feel that they are part of this movement. I am very suspicious of this notion of participation, as if participation by itself was going to bring about real democracy. Of course, there are many different forms of participation. If it's some kind of agonistic or, as you call it, conflictual participation in which there is a real confrontation between different views, then, yes, I think it's very good. But participation can also mean participating in some form of consensus, which nobody is really able to disturb, and which presupposes agreement. I would definitely not see that as something positive. Participation really depends on how you understand it; it is certainly not an innocent notion.

MM: In order to participate in any environment or given situation, one needs to understand the forces of conflict that act upon that environment. How can one move away from romanticized notions of participation into more proactive, conflictual models of engagement? What would you refer to as micro-political environments, and where do micro-political movements exist?

CM: Concerning the issue of space, I don't think that there is such a big difference between the micro-political, the macro-political, and the geopolitical—the political dimension can manifest itself at all levels. One mustn't believe that there are some levels that are more important than others. In a way, we are coming back to what I said before in regard to Hardt and Negri. When we began to organize the European Social Forum, they were against this idea, saying the struggle should be at a global level and there is no point in having a European Social Forum because it automatically privileges Europe. But I think that it is very important to have social forums at all levels and scales: cities, regions, nations. The agonistic struggle should take place at a multiplicity of levels, and should not privilege either the geopolitical or the micro-political, but instead realize that the political dimension cannot be localized in a privileged space. It is a dimension that can manifest itself in all kinds of social relations, whatever the space may be. As many recent geographers have insisted, space is always "striated," to use an expression that Deleuze and Guattari criticized. Deleuze and Guattari were thinking of a smooth and homogeneous space, while Doreen Massey, for instance, argues that every form of space is always made up of a configuration of power relations. The political struggle—or what I would call the hegemonic struggle—needs to take place on all these spatial levels. Hence there is a potential for politicization on multiple levels, and it is important to engage with all these levels and not just simply say, "Oh well, the global struggle is the most important one." This is not the case. We need to really try to transform and articulate power relations on all levels.

PART 2 (London, Chantal Mouffe's apartment, 2008)

CHANTAL MOUFFE: Since our first discussion about participation, I have developed this issue in other directions. I was already kind of critical or skeptical about the notion of participation last time. One of the problems I have with it has to do with the type of understanding of democracy and of the political that is normally implied when people speak of participation. Usually, the idea of participation connotes that if everybody were included and would participate, consensus could be reached and full democracy realized. Often an opposition between the ideas of participatory and representative democracies arises—a valorization of participatory democracy, participation in general, and other things that indicate that, in fact, representative democracy normally works in the interest of the elite, while participation is more progressive. So it presupposes a certain understanding of the political, which is precisely what I have been challenging in my work.

MARKUS MIESSEN: Can you please elaborate on the political in this context?

CM: This issue of the political is being addressed in two ways by different theories today. The first could be called the "associative view" of the political; the second, the "dissociative view." The associative view understands politics as everyone acting in concert—for instance, one finds it in Hannah Arendt, as well as in many thinkers who are influenced by Arendt. I think it aligns with participation. The dissociative view of the political—the one I identify with— has to do with the dimension of conflict, the dimension of antagonism and hostility that exists in human societies.

MM: How does this relate to the notion of pluralism?

CM: It depends on how you understand pluralism. Here again we have two positions. The liberal one is based on the idea that pluralism has to do with multiplicity, with the recognition of plurality. I call it a pluralism without antagonism, in the sense that it acknowledges different points of view,

different interests, different values, and that we will never be able to embrace all of them. But it postulates that, when all these values are put together, they constitute a harmonious ensemble. This is also the view of pluralism that we find in Arendt's work. For example, she advocates the use of Immanuel Kant's notion of "enlarged thought"—the need for putting ourselves in the shoes of other people—to imagine occupying the position of the Other.

MM: What is the other position?

CM: Another conception of pluralism—the one I identify with—can be found, for instance, in Max Weber or Friedrich Nietzsche. It is the idea that pluralism necessarily implies antagonism because all these different, multiple views cannot be reconciled—some of them require the negation of others. So you can never imagine all these views put together as composing a harmonious ensemble. Accepting the fact and existence of pluralism implies, therefore, accepting the fact of antagonism, of conflict—conflict that is ineradicable and irreconcilable. In fact, this is exactly my understanding of antagonism.

MM: Antagonism as a productive conflict?

CM: Antagonism is a specific type of conflict—a conflict for which there is no rational solution, simply because the two positions are irreconcilable. This point is important to stress when we speak of pluralism: to understand it along the lines of what I introduced as the second conception, the view of Weber and Nietzsche, which fits with the dissociative conception of the political. We could also address this issue from the point of view of the "we the people" model of democracy, which is meant to underline the sovereignty of the people. But how do we envision "the people"? I think the specificity of modern democracy—let's call it Western pluralist democracy, because I have a problem with the term "modern," which we might want to discuss later—is, in fact, the recognition that the people is not one. What does this mean? It can mean that "the people" is multiple, and this is exactly the case in the associative view of pluralism. The people can also be thought of as not one because it is divided. This view goes with my understanding of the

dissociative mode of the political, of pluralism in its conflicting mode. We already find this view in Niccolò Machiavelli, who stated that there is always a conflict and an antagonism at play between *i grandi* and *il popolo*. When we take into account all these different dimensions—the dissociative view of the political, the conflictual view of pluralism, and the division of the people—then we are led to understand participation in a very different way. So if we want to keep the term "participation," we will need to redefine it and understand it in terms of what I will call an "agonistic mode of participation."

MM: This is the mode I am trying to propose and develop within spatial practices.

CM: Precisely. Thinking of participation along these lines will always require the choice between different alternatives: to participate, you need the possibility of choice, not simply participating in the creation of a consensus. It's necessary to have this choice that implies a decision between alternatives that can never be reconciled.

MM: And one that implies responsibility. When I talk about the de-romanticization of participation, I am also referring to the fact that not everyone can always be included or play a role.

CM: Yes. It also means that there will necessarily be a moment of exclusion. If you have opposing alternatives, you participate in the decision about which alternative should be adopted. Therefore some alternatives will not be adopted and will in fact be negated. This is absolutely central. Consensus is only possible on the basis of excluding something that cannot take place—this is what the idea of a conflictual pluralism implies. My critique of a certain understanding of participation is also linked to my critique of deliberative democracy. I am not against deliberation, but for it to be meaningful, the people who deliberate need to have a choice of alternatives. If only one alternative is presented, what are they really going to deliberate about? This problematic is also linked to the question of participation.

MM: You say that participation needs choice—who produces or presents this choice?

CM: It depends of course on which level of participation we are talking about. I am particularly interested in political participation, which is why I have always insisted on the importance of the Left/Right distinction in my work. To give an example: Contrary to Anthony Giddens and Ulrich Beck, I do not believe that the blurring between the Left and the Right represents a progress for democracy at all. We already touched on this issue in our last conversation.

MM: How would you relate this to "third-way" consensus and frameworks of participation as tools for political legitimization?

CM: My critique of third-way consensus politics and its central model is fairly simple: If there is no alternative to neoliberalism, what are we going to deliberate about? What are we going to participate in? And if we cannot really choose between alternatives, what is the benefit? Coming to the question of participatory versus representative democracy, I honestly think opposing the two is false. I know that there are many new currents on the Left that want a nonrepresentative form of democracy—Hardt and Negri's absolute democracy being one of them—since some people on the Left consider representative democracy negative. I disagree with such a view. In a pluralistic democracy that acknowledges that the people is divided, it is important to have parties that represent different positions, and that require the existence of a representative system. Of course, this should be accompanied in other contexts with grassroots, direct forms of democracy. But one should not oppose them—an agonistic conception of democracy envisages them as complementary.

MM: Before we continue, I have one question about this issue of modern democracy that you mentioned. What does it imply within the construct of your argument?

CM: I have often used the term "modern democracy" as opposed to "ancient

democracy," but I am more and more convinced that it is a fairly dangerous rhetorical move. The term "modern" has been appropriated by the West in order to establish an exclusive privilege as its model. When we speak of Western democracy, we tend to call it modern, which automatically implies that other forms of democracy are inferior. Of course, such a claim is completely in line with the majority of Western democratic theorists. They affirm that Western liberal democracy is the most rational one. Theorists from different political orientations agree that "we in the West"—"we the enlightened ones"—have established the more advanced and modern form of democracy. We have to realize that this theoretical and political move is highly dangerous. The postcolonial critique is very important here. For instance, as Dipesh Chakrabarty argues in his book *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (2000), we should recognize that Europe's appropriation of the adjective "modern" is an integral part of the story of European imperialism.

MM: Which is essentially what you are saying—

CM: I had begun to analyze the problem myself, but when I read Chakrabarty's book, I said, "Yeah, he is exactly right." Currently, my work about multipolarity is leading me to think about forms of democracy different from the Western one. I am not interested in keeping the term "modern" to refer to Western liberal democracy. Nevertheless, it might be useful to refer to the specificity of a form of democracy that has been elaborated in the Western world. We should, however, be aware of the rhetorical power of the term "modern," or "modernization," and its political implications.

MM: The buzzword of New Labour.

CM: Yes, modernization is the buzzword of the third way. Tony Blair was always speaking about modernization—"Tony Blair the modernizer," "we the modernizers." Presenting yourself as the modernizer not only automatically implies that other people are undeveloped and backwards looking, but also establishes your superior rationality and privilege.

MM: Could you please give an example?

CM: In this context, for instance, there is a discussion about alternative modernities that I find extremely interesting. In Japan, India, and many other places, people are questioning the idea that historical progress requires adopting the institutions of European modernity. They are showing that, in fact, modernity should not simply be identified with the Western model, and that there are different forms of modernity. This is what Chakrabarty calls "provincializing Europe."

MM: How can we relate this back to the issue of participation?

CM: There is another way to think about participation and maybe address the question of why it has become such a buzzword. With the development of new forms of production, the term "participation" has become more and more fashionable. In our first conversation, I referred to the fact that the business elites in Davos had adopted the language of participation. This should be understood in the context of a new mode of regulating capitalism—the abandonment of Fordist, assembly-line production, and the transition to the new mode of organization of labor called post-Fordism. It is particularly interesting to examine the different interpretations of this transition because it will also give us a different take on the idea of participation. There are many theories, but I want to single out two approaches. One is the approach of Italian *operaismo*, or Workerism—the one that we find, of course, in Hardt and Negri, but also in thinkers like Paolo Virno. According to the operaists, the workers' struggle of the 1960s and '70s forced capitalism to reorganize production in a different way because the factories were suddenly being deserted. Operaist theorists reflect on what happened in Italy in those years: the young workers did not want to remain in the factories, so the capitalists were forced to find a new mode of organizing work, which was to be more collaborative, more flexible, and more participatory. The operaists nevertheless hold different views about the political potential of this transformation. Hardt and Negri, as always, view this optimistically: they see it

as the development, within capitalism, of an emerging form of communism, which is linked to the development of what they call "immaterial labor."

MM: Do you think, to a certain extent, that this understanding is naive, or at least problematic?

CM: I am not the only one who thinks so. Virno, for instance, is much more skeptical about the consequences of post-Fordism. He sees it as a sort of "communism of capital," and acknowledges it as a new form of collaborative production that represents a form of the workers' auto-exploitation, of turning themselves into agents of their own exploitation. But another way to envisage the transition from Fordism to post-Fordism is found in Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello's book *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (2005), in which the authors bring to light the way capitalists managed to appropriate the demands for autonomy made by the movements of the 1960s and transform them through the development of the post-Fordist, networked economy into new forms of control. They show how what they call "artistic critique"—strategies of the counterculture like the search for authenticity, the ideal of self-management, and the antihierarchical exigency—was used to promote a new mode of capitalist regulation and replace the disciplinary framework of the Fordist period. Their approach is interesting because it shows how central the rearticulation of existing discourses and practices was in the transition from Fordism to post-Fordism. Such an interpretation allows us to visualize this transition in terms of a hegemonic intervention. In fact, although they never use this vocabulary, Boltanski and Chiapello analyze what Antonio Gramsci discussed as hegemony through neutralization or "passive revolution."

MM: The idea of a slow march through the institutions.

CM: No. A passive revolution consists in neutralizing the demands that could be subversive to an existing hegemonic order by satisfying them in a way that undermines their subversive potential. In French, the word for this is *détournement*—it refers to a strategy of appropriating a term in order to give it a new meaning with a different message, one opposed to the original. This is

a very interesting approach that chimes with my view of hegemonic struggle. It allows us to see this transition as a hegemonic move by capital in order to neutralize demands that call its domination into question, using them to reestablish its hegemony. The aim was to have people feel that their demands were being satisfied—but, in fact, the satisfaction made them dependent on capital.

MM: And during New Labour in the UK, this same strategy was used in order to make people believe that they could in fact participate in the political processes.

CM: Yes, one could say that. But such an approach helps us to understand why this question of participation was so popular in Davos. In the discussion at the London School of Economics, which we spoke about earlier, one woman talked about how big multinationals are becoming much more democratic and open. But, in fact, this is exactly the type of *détournement* that Boltanski and Chiapello had signaled. The multinationals are trying to use the demand for participation in a way that will allow them to reassert their hegemony.

MM: The same way that, on a cultural scale, the strategy of capitalism is to appropriate any kind of dissenting subculture and its tactics.

CM: Today, a hegemonic struggle is clearly involved in the issue of participation. Some understandings of participation can be subversive, while others are, in fact, completely complicit with capitalism because they end up making people participate in their own exploitation. Therefore we have to be very careful in this discussion, and realize how participation can be used in opposing ways. We should not dismiss it because it can be formulated in a radical way, but it can also be an expression of passive revolution.

MM: The issue of flexibility, which you mentioned earlier, is very interesting because it could be used as a tool, a productive critique of participation. It seems that it is important not to get stuck within a particular reference of

participation, but to be able to react to what is happening. When you stay flexible you can also adapt to changing circumstances and pinpoint strategies that often aim for minimal consensus to continue what they are doing; you also do not risk becoming defensive, which is a very disabling mode when it's preferable to be projective and propositional.

PART 3 (Vienna, apartment of Ulf Wuggenig, 2009)

MARKUS MIESSEN: Before we move to sustainability, can we discuss the question of the progressive potential of the current crisis?

CHANTAL MOUFFE: Yes. At the time of our last conversation, the British government—with the third-way consensus at its center—was still being presented to the rest of Europe as the model to be emulated, coupled with the idea that there was no alternative to neoliberal globalization. This, of course, has since been shattered with the financial crisis.

MM: What are the possible perspectives and alternatives?

CM: First, to think that this is the final crisis of capitalism, as some Marxists would believe, is obviously a mistake—it might be a crisis of a certain form of capitalism, but I am no longer sure of even that. So far, no radical measures have been taken, and the state has only intervened to save the banks. The banks themselves do not seem to have learned their lesson, and have quickly returned to their previous ways of operating. In fact, it is possible that the crisis is not as deep as we thought, except, of course, for the masses of people who have lost their jobs, their savings, and their homes. For the multinationals and the banks, however, things could soon be back to as they were before. A possible alternative could have presented itself when the state was suddenly seen as having an important role again, whereas before we had been told that the market was everything—the motto being, the less state, the better. Some people, in fact, were optimistic, and predicted a return to neo-

Keynesian policies. There has been some rehabilitation of the role of the state, that's for sure—but for what ultimately?

MM: What will be the new role of the state?

CM: There are two possibilities for this new role. Either—and this is what I think has happened—the state intervenes to save the banks without forcing them to make any fundamental changes in the way they operate, or the state takes this opportunity to foster another form of globalization, and to implement redistributive policies to fight against the profound inequalities created by decades of neoliberalism—reversing the trend of growing social polarization. But unfortunately the second possibility has not happened so far, and there does not seem to be any indication that it is going to happen in the near future.

MM: Let me return to a question we discussed earlier: In historian Frances Fox Piven's article "Obama Needs a Protest Movement," she suggests that Barack Obama is not a visionary leader, but rather that he became the nominee of the US Democratic Party because he is a skillful politician. How can Obama's ambition be pushed in a constructive manner?

CM: I know Frances very well; she is a very old friend of mine. In fact, I saw her in New York shortly after Obama's inauguration, and we of course discussed the new potentialities that his victory opened up. I absolutely agree with her that it will all depend on the emergence of a social movement. Interestingly enough, many people on the Left in the United States are extremely skeptical about Obama—not anti-Obama however, that would be too strong. Frances, on the contrary, was excited about a president who is intelligent; this in itself is a big change, she said. But when she said that the possibility of progressive reform depends on the mobilization of a social movement, I asked "But Frances, which social movement?" "Yeah, I know, it really does not exist," she responded. But then she said, "It might emerge." I do not know what she would say now, but back then she was pretty confident that it could emerge. In fact, being a historian, she was making a comparison

with the 1930s, saying that what happened then was similar to what is happening now. (By the way, when Frances speaks of movements, she refers to the poor people who are thrown out of their homes. It is not only the Internet kind of mobilization—it is really a grassroots movement.) Her point was that everyday in the United States, incredible amounts of people are losing their jobs and being evicted from their homes. And she said, "Well, they are simply not going to accept this—something is going to happen. This is what happened in the 1930s: it was these people who began to organize and put pressure on the government." And this is what pushed Franklin D. Roosevelt—he was radicalized. Frances said this could also happen with Obama. The way governments will deal with the consequences of the crisis depends on the relation of forces. In most of Europe, nothing very radical can be expected because there are so many right-wing conservative governments. And even when there is a Center-Left government, it is incapable of proposing alternatives, which is, of course, due to the fact that socialists and social democrats have long accepted the idea that there is no alternative to neoliberal globalization. However, even if we do return to where we were before the crisis, the idea that everything is wonderful under neoliberal globalization will have been undermined. More and more people are now becoming aware of the need for an alternative.

MM: Is this why many people are surprised that social democratic parties are not doing better in this crisis?

CM: It is true: conservative governments seem to profit from the crisis. Amazingly, only in Iceland were the conservatives ejected from power. But that did not happen in any other European country. In France, this might be due to the fact that the Socialist Party is completely divided. But the problem is that the Left has generally been implicated in neoliberal policies. In fact, in many countries, the wave of privatizations has been carried out by socialist or Center-Left governments. They did not offer an alternative to the Right, so there has been no possibility for change. That is the reason why I have insisted on the importance for people to see that there is an alternative to the existing order. If you do not offer this alternative, people tend to stick to the

existing order.

MM: Yes. Not necessarily what they trust, but what they know.

CM: The Right is in power, and the Left is not offering an alternative. This explains why the crisis has not at all advanced the prospects of the Left.

MM: Do you think that people lack the attention span? For example, I agree with you that Obama does not really represent a social movement right now—not in the sense as outlined by Frances—but during the elections Obama did manage to engage a great number of people for a certain period of time, and then it just stopped.

CM: Yes, but I do not consider mobilizing people through the Internet a form of real political mobilization, because it does not create a genuine social movement.

MM: I agree.

CM: And I think it also tells us something about the state of politics today. Basically, Obama was promoted as some kind of pop star.

MM: An icon of public media, correct?

CM: Yes, like Michael Jackson. And for many people, the excitement for Obama was the same as for, say, an actor or a footballer. This is why I do not think it was an expression of real politicization.

MM: So what would be an example of actual political mobilization?

CM: It would be when you have a variety of constituencies, including workers and poor people, who become mobilized and organized; not simply young people on the Internet. I am not saying that the Internet is unimportant, but it does not represent an alternative for me, it does not represent a social

movement. By the way, I do not know if you read it, and maybe we commented on it when we spoke in Berlin, but there was an interview with Negri in the German newspaper *Die Tageszeitung* in which he says something like, "The Obama victory is the victory of the multitude." This is completely ridiculous. I think the worldwide appeal of Obama is very much an expression of what politics has become today: a media show. A social movement is something different. When Frances speaks of a social movement, she is really thinking of people who organize, who have demonstrations, who block factories, and who are not just simply sending e-mails.

MM: How do you think Obama could be pushed so that it somehow becomes more productive, so that it moves away from this kind of shallow—

CM: Well, I am not saying that he is shallow. I am not referring to Obama; I am referring to his support as somewhat shallow. He would really need a lot of mobilization to push his health reform. Of course, his reform project is much less radical than Hillary Clinton's proposal. In fact, of the three presidential candidates, his reform was the least radical, although still being radical for the United States. So let's wait and see. But in Europe, people really have tried to resist—in France, for instance. You have certainly heard in quite a few places that workers have taken over—

MM: —the factories. You mean with the firebomb threats?

CM: Yes. They even tried to put fire to an entire factory. It really shows that because of the relation of forces, they are ready to fight the existing situation. This takes us to the other question I wanted to discuss—your other buzzword, "sustainability." What should we make of sustainability? Although I am not particularly qualified in this field, we could talk about it briefly, as it is also the one of the most publicly discussed issues today. What are the forms of sustainability? When people speak of it, they speak of the fact that we know that our way of development has created an ecological crisis. Of course this is absolutely true, and the consensus is just getting stronger—one can no longer

say it is only an issue limited to the Left.

MM: During our conversation at Café Einstein in Berlin, you said that of course sustainability is not only related to ecology, but can also be related to many other topics, phenomena, and problems. For example, you could also talk about the sustainability of a political or financial system, which, as we have just seen, has collapsed, at least to a certain extent. Sustainability is really about a holistic approach that takes long-term thinking into account. But as we just said about the Obama phenomenon, people's attention span seems to be a very short. Moreover, to come back to what you were saying before, this attention span is incredibly short when it comes to the financial crisis. Multinationals and banks are already making billions again, and it seems that, within six or eight months, all the issues of regulation that were discussed have all of a sudden been swiped off the table. So regarding this issue, different forms of economic sustainability should be also discussed, because quite often people only talk about the ecological dimension.

CM: Yes. In fact, I would want to approach this question of sustainability from another point of view, but this would definitely imply a longer discussion. Ultimately it has to do with what we discussed earlier: the fact that the economic crisis implied the possibility for an alternative to neoliberal globalization, however distant that alternative may feel. Even if everything goes back to normal, there is a moral awareness that it is no longer possible to tackle dimensions of sustainability without, at the same time, tackling the issues and questions of globalization.

MM: But how can these issues of sustainability be tackled?

CM: They can be tackled in very different ways, either from the Left or the Right. The Right, for instance, will try to develop a palette of more energy-efficient products and services. In fact, people are already thinking of how to make a profit from it, producing marketable goods that represent a more ecologically friendly approach to both production and consumption, but without putting into question capitalist relations of production. The ecological

question by itself is not necessarily an issue of the Left, and there are ecologically thinking parties that are not Left at all.

MM: What does it mean to think in terms of sustainability from the point of view of the Left?

CM: I think it means offering an alternative to neoliberal globalization.

MM: And what should be the central notion of sustainability?

CM: A critique of free trade. I find it amazing that, except in the alter-globalization movement, free trade seems to be accepted as something positive, and not challenged at all by Left parties. It's a kind of dogma: "Free trade is good and protectionism is bad. We cannot question the realities of free trade." A critique of free trade should however be at the center of our challenge of the existing order. For instance, more and more people are becoming aware of the issue of food sovereignty, that several countries are no longer able to produce enough food for their own people. I think that this phenomenon is linked to the question of free trade, and that, with neoliberal globalization, production is increasingly done for export. This fact has important and very negative consequences not only in developing and emerging countries, but also in Western countries. One of the problems is that multinationals are basically producing for export—they don't care about domestic markets any longer.

MM: What does not taking care of domestic markets imply?

CM: In the past, enterprises were producing for domestic markets, so they had to think about the conditions for people to be able to buy their products, they had to think about local jobs—there was no point to produce if there wasn't anyone to buy the product. Today, the situation has changed dramatically because enterprises are primarily producing for export; they do not care if there is a domestic market for their products or not. There is also the issue of delocalization: multinationals look for the places where labor

power is cheapest. In advanced economies, all these factors contribute to a growing level of unemployment, which also has political implications, because it creates a terrain that is very easily exploited by right-wing populist parties. Of course, the conditions are even worse for poor countries. Each week, there are cases of local industries being destroyed in African societies because they cannot compete with the cheap exports. For example, I recently read that there used to be a very thriving onion-producing business in Senegal, which is now completely destroyed because they import onions produced in the Netherlands that are much cheaper. There are constant and numerous examples of this happening. There are also cases in which countries are becoming unable to produce enough food for their own people because everything is now controlled by multinationals producing for export. The issue of food sovereignty is absolutely central for me. These countries cannot, and should not, focus all their attention on global exports. Each country should first be able to produce enough food to satisfy its own people. This is also the central claim of La Via Campesina movement, which is an international organization of small farmers; José Bové, whom you have probably heard of, is active in it. The movement insists on the importance of each country first producing food to satisfy its own domestic demand.

MM: Could you please elaborate on the relation of exporting and the destruction of local industries?

CM: An example of extreme destruction and desperation is what is happening in sub-Saharan countries. It is precisely a result of all these cheap exports from Europe and the United States that, over the years, have completely destroyed local industries. Most men have absolutely no way to maintain or earn a living and stay alive by working at home, which, of course, is the reason they are forced to emigrate. All these desperate people are trying to reach Europe by boats and risking their lives because they cannot survive in their home countries due to the lack of jobs caused by foreign exports. It is very important for us Europeans to realize that we are the ones responsible for this situation. The policies and the subsidies of the EU and the United States have caused this condition under which young people struggle for

survival and are forced to emigrate. We need to realize that this cannot continue. Of course, it is a very tricky issue, as it means that we will have to recognize our own mistakes and be willing to change our policies. Unfortunately, the Left does not have the vision or the courage to tell people that in order to tackle this situation seriously the mode of living for people in Western countries will have to change. We need to become aware that our welfare is being maintained on the basis of creating misery in other parts of the world. It is an unacceptable situation; it is both shocking and, of course, not sustainable in the long run. Something really needs to change. People in the West are accustomed to things getting cheaper. We want to pay less and less for food—in fact, not only for food, but pretty much everything. We want to pay less and less for clothing; we want everything for the cheapest possible price. Of course, we do not realize, or more importantly internalize, the vicious circle of such a mania for "the cheap": local industries are destroyed, people are delocalized, and there is a dramatic rise in unemployment. The Left needs to explain to people that this dangerous cycle cannot go on.

MM: This brings us to a topic that we are both interested in and that is of immense importance, especially within this context,: the issue of non-moralistic modes of politics. It seems that in almost every European country, left-wing politics addresses this issue by in fact not addressing it and then defending itself with some kind of moralistic politics.

CM: Some people on the European Left are critical of any form of control on immigration—they claim that we should open our borders so as to allow poor Africans to come here and work. But this is not the solution. As I mentioned earlier, the situation in those countries is not going to get better if they keep losing their potential labor force. The way to treat this question is not to combat limitations on immigration, or to simply open our borders, but to transform the conditions in those countries to allow them to develop sustainable forms of domestic economy. There is so much moralistic rhetoric about *sans papiers* and immigrants, while we actually need a properly political approach—not the type of charitable attitude of helping the poor Africans without ever questioning our privileges. This is not a question of charity but of

justice. The way to help those people is not just simply to allow them to come in—rather, we have to put into question our mode of development, which is the cause of their misery; we have to abandon these cravings for cheaper and cheaper goods. People need to understand that they have to pay more for their food and that their consumerist way of life cannot continue in the same way that it has for decades now—this would be the properly political way of dealing with this question. The other one is simply a moralistic approach, which is unable to deal with the root of the problem.

MM: How can such an approach start to communicate between scales—for example, the local and the global?

CM: To begin with, local and global scales should not be opposed. They are co-constitutive and interdependent: the global is always locally constituted and vice versa. As we spoke about before in the context of Negri and Hardt's concept of the multitude, I am against the celebration of "deterritorialization" that is currently so fashionable in some left-wing circles. For me, this is exactly the way the question should *not* be addressed. In fact, I even think that a certain amount of protectionism is important. In France, the social scientist Emmanuel Todd has been arguing in favor of some forms of European protectionism, which I support on the condition that they are not national, egoistic forms of protectionism that only consider "our" industries and "our" workers. We need to think in terms of the articulation between the local and the global.

MM: So we first need to have a conversation within Europe in order to get beyond the moralistic consensus of doing good by giving, to change our own habits and lifestyles in order to stimulate change. Could you elaborate more on your point of view and critique of modes and readings of sustainability?

CM: What I said about Europeans and their way of operating is precisely how I address the issue of sustainability: it offers an alternative to the present mode of development, which nobody, at least politically, is interrogating. From the point of view of the Left, I would insist that we are in desperate need of a

sustainable politics that considers the question of equality and redistribution. I simply cannot think of a sustainable politics that would not imply dealing with injustice and being more redistributive. In this context, I also defend the idea of a multipolar world because, as you know, I am very critical of the kind of cosmopolitan view that advocates a cosmopolitan democracy, a cosmopolitan citizenship. I think it is important to envisage issues in regional terms, and that all forms of regional organization are important. The problems of sub-Saharan Africa, for example, would be better resolved if several of the countries in the region would get together and think about a common approach. Of course, the solutions are going to change according to different areas—for example, Latin America will have to solve things differently than other regions. I do not think we can envisage a single unique model. In fact, the issue of sustainability implies a multiplicity of solutions that can adapt to different contexts. The idea that sustainability would apply one single model to everything is wrong and deeply worrisome. We need to consider the context, the conditions, and the local and regional traditions. Sustainability goes hand in hand with the idea of a multipolar world.

MM: Which in many ways will form a critique of modern democracy and a possible model of an agonistic space.

CM: Yes. We can start by saying the following: Our form of democracy needs to be radicalized. It is very specific for the West and we should not believe that the same model could work in Africa or the Middle East, to name two examples. This is not to say, as some people would argue, that democracy is only good for the West. I would, on the contrary, say that the idea of democracy is something we could call "transcultural." I would not use the term "universal" because for some people it implies the existence of one single model that is valid everywhere. There is a demand for democratic participation in the way people are ruled, which is not something specific to the West. But the way democratic institutions will be envisaged depends very much on the way they are inscribed in specific traditions and cultures. So we should really think of legitimate forms of democracy in a pluralistic way, and not believe that our so-called modern form of democracy is the only legitimate

and correct model. It is really important for people to envisage their own vernacular form of democracy.

MM: This issue of universal versus transcultural also brings to mind the question of responsibility and risk, especially when talking about the European border—instead of actually talking about the problems that exist in migrants' home countries, the physical border becomes the issue, along with whether immigrants should be allowed in or not. I think conflicts can only be overcome if somebody assumes responsibility. So the real question for me is, why is responsibility so often outsourced rather than assumed?

CM: What do you mean by "outsourced"?

MM: I mean this paradigm of safe and politically correct forms of participation in which the ruling majority gives people the impression that they themselves can participate in political decision making on a national scale. This was particularly apparent in the UK under New Labour—the outsourcing of responsibility generated all kinds of counterfeit participatory structures that gave people the impression they could participate. But from my point of view, it was merely a way for politicians to evade responsibility, because the moment they were critiqued from the outside, they could just refer to those structures being in place, and, at least in theory, that everyone could participate. This issue of responsibility is very interesting in terms of how it will be dealt with now, especially in regard to the Left. The question that I would still like to address in this conversation, and in the context of my book *The Nightmare of Participation* (2010), concerns the role of the outsider. I am referring to the outsider as someone who is not necessarily dependent on a consensus within an immediate or associated political context—within a party, for example. The crossbench politicians in the British House of Lords who don't belong to a specific party are an interesting example of this. From your point of view, what is the potential of the outsider?

CM: I disagree with you concerning the potential of the crossbench politician—for me, this crossbench practitioner is precisely somebody who

wants to avoid taking sides. It is important to have a choice between real alternatives in politics. But then you also need to know which camp is yours, and it seems to me that the crossbench practitioner does not want to take a stance and wants to be able to move from one side to the other. I do not find this attitude very political.

MM: This could be one reading of the situation. But another reading is precisely the opposite: The political attitude emerges from the ability and ambition to stir change by instigating real political confrontation. It is not necessarily about whether or not to take sides, it's about being able to decide based on your instinct and real belief, to say what you think is best and not have your opinion or approach watered down before it has even left your immediate political context—or, in the context of the parliamentary democracy, your own party. This is fundamentally different than starting from an embodied position in which the first thing you have to do is search for a consensus among your peers. In the case of the crossbench practitioners, they can start a conversation by putting something on the table that usually does not—and does not have to—satisfy everyone.

CM: Yes, I see what you mean. I have the feeling that you are, in fact, trying to theorize your own role—according to what you have told me about your different projects and spatial interventions in the past, and those you are currently working on.

MM: Yes.

CM: You are dealing with your role as an outsider to some of the contexts and internal mechanisms in which you intervene. I certainly do not disagree with that. However this approach is different from the crossbench politician who is dealing with clearly defined camps. The crossbench politician tries, in fact, to avoid taking sides by following a clearly individualistic position. I always insist that to act politically is to act as part of an "us," to act from the position of a "we." I would not want to advocate or glorify a person who acts purely from an individual point of view: this is not how I view left-wing politics. On the other

hand—and this seems to be a completely different case—I can see that your theory is very positive, and in fact productive, when you go to the Middle East or do similar projects. Your position in that sense could be compared to someone intervening from the outside—a role that is similar to somebody who wants to mediate a conflict, for instance.

MM: I do not mean to say that this approach necessarily always works in a restricted model or paradigm such as a parliament, which, as you mentioned, is highly structured in terms of political parties and coalitions and defined spatially in terms of being physically autonomous; neither should it be misunderstood as a general political theory. You are right, it is very much concerned with my own context, but I would argue further that the approach and the basic understanding of its principles can also be helpful for others who are working in similar conditions, or who find themselves in situations where they are working outside of clearly defined disciplines. It is meant to present an alternative approach for engaging oneself, or dealing with spatial practices in a world that—at least in some areas—is highly politicized, an approach to understanding how to use the status of outsider as a surplus rather than a restriction.

CM: It is always some kind of temporary intervention. What you want to do is just allow these people to talk to each other, or to put into movement a dynamic that they then have to develop.

MM: Exactly—to instigate processes of change. For example, if you come in from the outside, it is important that you are not viewed as someone from this or that party, that you have as few associations as possible.

CM: Of course, you need to be seen as independent of the sides in conflict. But this is a very specific kind of intervention.

MM: You said that if you look at the party system within politics, someone like a crossbench politician within that system would refuse to take sides. Let's talk about the idea of party representation for a moment. This issue of the

biased political party brings together people with similar beliefs and, quite often, backgrounds. But would you also agree that there is a danger in political parties becoming very dogmatic and paradigmatic, and therefore more hindering than protective? Even if the individuals within such parties sometimes understand that a different alternative would be more appropriate, they cannot follow it because they have subscribed to a certain dogmatic framework—or am I exaggerating?

CM: Well, of course there is always that danger. It depends on how the parties are organized and how much agonism is permitted and practiced internally—in fact, most parties accept having factions, and are, in this sense, pluralistic. In principle, I think a party that functions well democratically should allow for this debate to take place on the inside without being instigated by someone on the outside. I see what you are getting at and, as I said, I agree with you in the context of your praxis, of somebody trying to mediate a conflict, intervene spatially even. But in terms of the workings of internal politics and the British House of Lords, I am not so sure, especially because the House of Lords is not a particularly democratic institution either.

MM: I am aware of this—for me, it's part of the analogy's charm. It is a supposedly democratic representation rooted in an aristocratic framework, which is, of course, absurd. However, I like to use it as a comparative image simply because many people can easily understand what I am talking about. For me, its spatial setting is also interesting. You can see where the agonism occurs simply by looking at the picture. You can actually see two different parties sitting on different sides, and then these guys sitting in the middle. This is the only reason I like to talk about it—otherwise, of course, it is incredibly conservative.

CM: Yes, but this is not what you do in the context of *your* interventions, because you are not moving from one side to the other. In fact, in all of your projects, your books, your teachings, you are trying to remain outside.

MM: Yes. The "uninvited outsider"—that is the title of a text I wrote some time

ago.

CM: You try to bring people together to allow for the creation of some kind of dynamic between them. You are neither on one side nor the other for very long. So, in fact, you are not really like the crossbench practitioner either.

MM: Maybe it simply needs another word, another term. In the end, it comes down to semiotics. But parties are interesting cases. For example, it is difficult in Germany right now: In two months, September 2009, the general election will take place, and I still cannot make up my mind as to who to vote for, let alone actually belonging to a political party. For me, this is part of the internal conflict. Not that I do not believe in parties, but—are you in a party?

CM: No. [*laughs*] I feel similarly. The problem is that I never found a party that I really wanted to belong to. But I'm still looking for one.

PART 4 (October 2011, Berlin-Wedding)

Chantal Mouffe: Since our last talk, many things have been happening that are relevant to the themes and topics we have been discussing. On one hand, there is the phenomenon referred to as the Arab Spring—but that would probably be better to call uprisings—and on the other, more recently, the different political and popular mobilizations now taking place all over the world—for example, Occupy Wall Street, which turned into what is now known as the Occupy movement. It is quite interesting to discuss and try to examine the specificity and difference between these various movements since there is too much of a tendency to put them all together, from the Arab Spring to Los Indignados in Spain or the mobilizations in Greece; some people have even put the riots in London in the same category. From my point of view, lumping together the Arab uprisings and other global mobilizations is confusing—there are very important differences between these movements and we need to clarify them.

Markus Miessen: Maybe we should start with the Arab Spring because of its specificity.

CM: I agree. The Arab Spring is clearly a very important event with crucial geopolitical consequences—especially challenging the idea that Arab countries were destined to be ruled by autocrats. However, its future is definitely undecided. The optimism surrounding it at the beginning has by now already started decreasing. An Egyptian colleague of mine was recently in Egypt. She had been very enthusiastic at the beginning of the movement, but she came back from her trip saying that nothing is really going to happen, that the military will not relinquish their power. All the people she met there—political militants and middle-class intellectuals—are very disappointed and pessimistic. Of course, at least former leader Hosni Mubarak left, but saying that Egypt is entering a phase of real democratization is simply too optimistic at this moment in time—this is already something that we need to be very conscious about.

MM: The election for the constituent assembly in Tunisia is held tomorrow.

CM: This election is going to decide on an interim government. In Tunisia, the situation is completely different. The Islamist party Ennahda is presumed to be the strongest political force—they are expecting around thirty percent of the vote. Many people are concerned about this, but I don't believe there is cause to worry, because Ennahda is in fact very moderate. I happen to have met Rachid Ghannouchi, the leader of Ennahda. He was in exile in London for a long time and often gave lectures at the Centre for the Study of Democracy at the University of Westminster in London. We have a "Democracy and Islam" program there, and I was also one of the dissertation supervisors of his daughter's husband, Rafik Abdessalem, who is now foreign minister. I have not been in touch with them for a long time, but at the center we have been closely following Ghannouchi's trajectory. One of the things that particularly interested him, and which we often discussed with him, was the way that Islam and democracy could work together.

MM: The election boasts an incredible lineup.

CM: Yes, an incredible number of parties are on the ballot, which can be extremely confusing for the populace. But we will see tomorrow. There could also be high numbers of abstention because people might have no clue which party they should vote for. Of course, Ennahda could win most of the votes since it is the only established party. It has been working clandestinely for a long time, since Ghannouchi was exiled, but it has also earned the respect of the people by having fought against the former president, Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, for so long. The outlook for Tunisia seems a bit more optimistic than for Egypt, because the army does not play such an important role there as it does in Egypt. Of course, when elections are held in Egypt—and *when* is the big question—the Muslim Brotherhood will play an important role. Similar to Ennahda in Tunisia, they have been present and very close to the people.

The first conclusion we can draw from these events in Tunisia and Egypt relates to our last set of conversations and also to what is happening in Europe: the crucial role of effective forms of mobilization—people going into the field, speaking with other people, trying to organize them. This is very different than simply sending e-mails and communicating via Facebook or Twitter. I was speaking with some people that are well acquainted with the situation in Egypt and for them it was quite interesting to see how, on the one hand, the militants of the Muslim Brotherhood really organized and how, on the other, all those young people began meeting in Tahrir Square. Obviously both cases were real popular mobilizations, but some groups of young people who mobilized through Facebook and the Internet, after leaving Tahrir Square, continued purely with Internet-based communication. They were not actively organizing in the field for the elections.

MM: Yes, they were not involved spatially, one could say. I am quite interested in the moment in which these movements and mobilizations physicalize and take on another, more substantial dimension.

CM: To think about the way institutions will later be organized makes a big difference. It is one thing to bring down a dictatorship and another one altogether to begin paving the way for democratic institutions. The latter requires real popular mobilization in terms of making and establishing parties and trade unions—this is the problem I currently see in this type of movement.

MM: I share your scepticism on the subject, because in all these different situations and locations, the moment the movement reached a certain momentum was the moment it spatialized, the moment it physicalized in the cities—in the case of the Arab Spring in Cairo, when it surfaced on and around Tahrir Square, assuming an actual role within the city in regard and opposition to its inhabitants. The movement set up and developed what I would call a productive space of conflict. It was no longer something that simply happened or was organized virtually on and through the Internet, but something that took a risk and assumed a certain kind of responsibility.

CM: Absolutely. In the media, the entire situation has been presented as a Facebook revolution, or a Google revolution because one of the leaders of Egypt's movement was a Google employee. It is one thing to communicate and disperse information; another is to actually organize people.

MM: Could this be related to the burden of responsibility as opposed to participating in a light initiative?

CM: The Internet is only a medium to transmit things, a communication tool of sorts—it does not mobilize on its own. Someone from Egypt was telling me that television had actually been much more important than Facebook or other online platforms in this specific situation. In Egypt, television plays a crucial role because many people either don't have Internet access or aren't members of platforms such as Facebook. Television, however, is a medium that exists in many houses.

MM: As well as in almost all cafés and tearooms.

CM: Exactly. Television was and continues to be, at least in Egypt, the means for transmitting the message. Most members of the public understood the critical role of television in and surrounding the events of Tahrir Square. Consequently, I would claim in this instance that the crucial media was television and not the Internet, as has often been suggested by commentators.

MM: Regarding the question of the Arab Spring, we should also consider the specifics of the situation in Libya.

CM: I think it would be a mistake to present what is happening in Libya as similar to the events in Tunisia and Egypt. I know there are people who do, but I disagree strongly. One needs to distinguish very carefully when talking about real popular mobilizations against a dictator, on the one hand, and the case of Libya, on the other. What is happening at the moment in Libya is a civil war, and this is completely different. NATO unfortunately decided to actively intervene in this civil war and deliberately take the side of those who opposed Gadhafi. Having obtained a Security Council agreement with the central premise of protecting civilians, they very quickly started acting towards a regime change at all costs. NATO intervened much further than its legitimate authorization allowed. This will have significant consequences in the future, because now countries will be very careful in giving their agreement for an intervention.

MM: I just read yesterday that Sirte has been "liberated by the rebels."

CM: Liberated? This is a city that has now been occupied and conquered by the rebels. The people of Sirte were not at all "liberated"; they were fighting to the death against the rebels. This is clearly a case of civil war. It is also clear that NATO, particularly the French bombing campaigns, was absolutely crucial in the rebels' victory. I just want to clarify this point so that when we speak of the Arab Spring—about Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya, for instance—we understand that Libya is a complete different case.

MM: Why do you think the press has presented the Arab Spring as a homogenized revolution? Was it a tactic to make the point that all those territories are essentially similar?

CM: Yes, this is true for most of the Western press. Latin American newspapers, however, were generally very critical about NATO's intervention—remember also that Brazil abstained from the March 2011 Security Council vote. In fact, the media coverage in Germany is also different. Last time I was in Berlin I read the *Tageszeitung* newspaper—they also, like many of the Latin American newspapers, sounded a little more critical with respect to NATO's intervention.

MM: There are definitely exceptions, but in general the consensus was that the Arab Spring is a homogeneous movement, no?

CM: Yes, but I believe this is because many countries wanted to get rid of Gadhafi and were willing to support the NATO intervention based on those grounds. For example, France was very late in supporting the insurrection against Ben Ali in Tunisia. Foreign Minister Michèle Alliot-Marie even caused a scandal by offering to send security forces to Ben Ali to control the popular mobilizations. As we know, she lost her job and France felt that it had to actively and forcefully show its presence in Libya. The two main driving forces of the intervention were then President Nicolas Sarkozy and British Prime Minister David Cameron. US President Barack Obama was a follower—one, it seemed, that was not fully convinced.

MM: All of which then culminated in the very telling and brilliant photograph and video evidence of Cameron and Sarkozy greeting cheering crowds in Libya in September. That was scary!

CM: Of course, there is also the question of the other countries' economic interests. We have Russia, who wanted to make sure it would be the one to reap the benefits in terms of the oil resources, but also French and British companies were very active, as they were in the past. To examine this

situation one needs to also understand the mélange of complex economic interests.

MM: Let's discuss those other popular mobilizations.

CM: I would like to reemphasize that the tendency to lump everything together—Libya, Tunisia, and Egypt, and then to add Greece, Spain, and Occupy Wall Street—is a mistake. Some people even add the riots in London and the student movement in Chile. These are all very different things—it's indispensible to realize and understand that. Incidentally, I find it fascinating how so many people are trying to use these movements to validate and justify their previous arguments and positions. The neocons in the United States as well as Alain Badiou and Antonio Negri in Europe all presented the Arab Spring as the justification of their theories. The neocons were saying that this was finally proof that George W. Bush was right: he wanted to bring democracy to the Middle East and now, looking at the evidence, it is clear that this is what the people want. On the other hand, theorists such as Badiou or Negri made similar arguments. Badiou claimed that these popular mobilizations had nothing to do with democracy but were the expression of the "idea of communism" while Negri presented them as the expression of the "multitude."

MM: Let's zoom in on the movement in Chile that began in the beginning of 2011, more or less at the same time as the Arab Spring.

CM: The movement in Chile is a mobilization of students who have very specific demands: they want free education, they want better education. They have a clear leader, Camila Vallejo, who is a member of the Communist Party. We can already see an important difference with Los Indignados in Spain, which declares—as a movement—being against any leadership, any structure, and any form of institutionalization. In Chile we see a movement that is more of a traditional left-wing popular mobilization around a specific issue. Of course, they have the support of some sectors of the population— the middle class mainly—that also support the demands of better education.

Los Indignados is a movement of young middle-class people—university graduates or students—who feel that due to the high unemployment in Spain, there is no space for them in society. They reject traditional political parties, but, interestingly, they do not reject democracy: they want "¡Democracia real ya!" It is a movement in the name of democracy, but which aims towards a different type or model of democracy: they are against representative democracy and advocate direct democracy.

MM: More specifically speaking, what do you think about the ways in which this movement mobilizes itself?

CM: It is good that there is a mobilization, but the problem for me with Los Indignados is that they reject any form of organization. They do not want a leader or any form of structure, they are neither interested in party organization nor do they aim for any institutionalization. They are striving for a form of direct democracy: a real and spontaneous democracy. The aim of this direct democracy—they state in their declaration—is to reach for a general consensus. So this definitely presents the opposite of the agonistic view and model I have been proposing, since they believe that if people could assemble themselves and participate directly in their affairs, they would consequently arrive at a consensus—and this would be the real democracy. The existing one has, in their view, been perverted through party politics. In this regard, the movement reminds me of the piqueteros in Argentina, which started in the mid-'90s and was also against the political parties. Their slogan was "Que se vayan todos" (They all must go), meaning that they are not interested in any politicians or representatives.

MM: How would you compare this model or understanding to the system of direct democracy in Switzerland?

CM: In Switzerland, the state is based on a series of representative institutions. They have a form of democracy that is still based on the core notion of the party system. In Spain they are striving for something that they can't envision, something whose functioning is impossible to imagine. Of

course, I sympathize with the fact that Los Indignados mobilize against the neoliberal system. Nevertheless, I am worried that this mobilization has also produced a negative force or momentum. The movement began in the spring of 2011, but then the regional elections took place in Spain in the summer. Within the Spanish electoral system, regional elections are very important, as the system is based on regional autonomy. In some countries, such as France, regional elections are not very important—Spain, however, has regionally autonomous governments. For the first time since the death of Franco, the Right is in power in all regions in Spain, except in Andalusia. In fact, in regions previously always led by the Left—such as the south—the Right took over too. This has been the consequence so far of the slogan "¡Democracia real ya!" It has actually discouraged people from going to the elections; the movement has rejected elections and opposed the representative model of democracy. Of course, the people who did not vote were those most likely to have voted for the Left. So all the people who would normally vote for the Partido Socialista Obrero Español (Spanish Socialist Workers' Party) stayed at home—hence the Right was able to dominate all those regions.

MM: And the Right has already begun an absolutely incredible program of austerity, cutting the budget for education in half in several regions, correct?

CM: Yes, it's terrible. Now they are going to have national elections in November and all the predictions are that the Partido Popular (PP), the Right, is going to win those elections by an overwhelming majority. Of course, I do understand that there were many problems with Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero's socialist government, but a victory for the Right will have significant consequences. The PP has already announced a drastic package of budget cuts and austerity measures, which would be even worse than what we've previously witnessed, much worse than what the socialists have done. Here is the paradox: the rejection of the socialist party, who has obviously not done enough for the country, is now preparing ground for the Right—this, for me, is definitively not how democratic participation can thrive.

MM: When it comes to the current global crisis, more specifically in Europe, Spain is unfortunately not the only site of concern.

CM: Particularly interesting is the question of Greece. I completely agree with the people in Greece who are mobilizing against the so-called austerity cure being imposed by the European Union and the International Monetary Fund. First and more importantly, this is something that cannot work. Asked about the situation in Greece in a recent article, French Socialist Party politician Jacques Delors declared that it seems we are returning to the worst days of the Washington Consensus and the IMF. This model assumes that one needs to inflict measures so that the patient, having being "cured," dies. They want the Greek people to pay their taxes, but their pensions and salaries are being drastically cut, so how are they going to have the money to do that? To put it bluntly, the situation in Greece is quite desperate, and I think Europe's response has been completely inadequate.

MM: How do you see the role of Germany in this context?

CM: Chancellor Angela Merkel should have acted much more decisively and much earlier, exercising leadership while showing that it was in the interest of Germany to maintain a healthy and stable situation for both the euro and Europe in general. But it has become clear that all those measures, all basically driven by France and Germany, have been designed to secure and protect their respective banks. They are trying to find a solution to the debt, but one that also protects the interests of their own banks—a solution that will not cause their banks to lose. This is impossible though, because the banks are part of the problem.

MM: How does this relate to and what does it entail for Occupy Wall Street?

CM: What's interesting and quite important is that Occupy Wall Street is a movement with a clear opponent—it has indicated the enemy it's fighting against. It has also been joining forces with other civil institutions—for example, AFL-CIO, the main US trade union, has joined the protest. By

supporting it, the union has given Occupy Wall Street a different momentum, which makes a huge difference. Some people are very critical of the fact that there are not many blacks in this movement, arguing that Occupy Wall Street is mostly a white, middle-class movement. It is definitely important for them to attempt to open their range. Occupy Wall Street clearly does not use the simple antiparty rhetoric of, for example, Los Indignados. Their approach is more interesting, although I am not sure what kind of result it will be able to achieve in the United States.

MM: What kind of social-movement model would you propose instead?

CM: I would propose a model for popular mobilizations in Europe that clearly indicate what they are against. At a more general level of reflection, people have been wondering why France has not seen similar popular mobilizations. In fact, on October 15 there were popular mobilizations everywhere, but very little in France—the movement has not taken off at all there. Some people have tried to explain this by saying that the situation is not that bad in France—true, youth unemployment is not as high in France and the austerity measures, so far, have not been as drastic as in other countries. Nevertheless, I do not think that these are the main reasons. The political situation in France is such that the people can choose from a much wider and more heterogeneous body of political parties—for instance, there are several parties to the left of the socialists, and even within the Socialist Party there are radical tendencies. People looking for a way to express their demands can still find it within the representative system. So, in France there are still many people who believe in the possibility of changing things within and through the political system.

MM: Would you also argue that the emergence of popular mobilizations indicates the lack of an agonistic political system?

CM: Yes. What is happening in Europe is a consequence of the post-political "consensus at the center" that I criticize in *On the Political*, and the kind of third-way politics that argues that there is no alternative to neoliberal

globalization. An agonistic debate between clearly defined alternatives is something that is crucially important for political democracy. When such a system is not in place and the people feel that parties offer more or less the same policies, they lose interest in representative politics, which can lead them to express their demands through alternative forms of mobilization. In this context, it would be interesting to note that other forms of mobilization are much more antipolitical.

MM: Like the recent uprising in England?

CM: I am thinking more of the revolts of the banlieues in France in 2005, also led by young people but of a very different nature than the current Occupy movement—there were no demands at all and they went on a rampage, destroying principally public buildings like schools and sport centers. This form of mobilization is undertaken by people who have lost so much faith in politics and democracy that they feel they can only express their frustration and discontent through violent acts. In fact, we saw something similar in Greece before the crisis, in 2008. Back then, a revolt took place of young people who had no demands; they simply attacked a number of buildings in reaction to the death of a student killed by the police. This is one way that protest can be expressed: without any political discourse. In contrast, we have phenomena such as Los Indignados—an antiparty movement, but one that has not yet lost hope in democracy. This is the big difference of the Spanish movement: it expresses hope in other possible forms of democracy. So when we speak of popular mobilizations, it is so important to distinguish between the different forms and formats of their demands rather than putting everything in the same bag. The case of Chile (which we were referring to earlier) is still different because, as I was indicating, we are looking at a more traditional form of mobilization with a specific structure and without a rejection of parties. They want to put pressure on the right-wing government and they have clear demands; so they follow neither the model of the banlieues nor of Occupy Wall Street.

MM: Regarding Occupy Wall Street, I absolutely agree with you in terms of their general approach. Part of its strategy, of course, is to make it very difficult for people to disagree by being deliberately vague about its aims. In fact, it is almost impossible to disagree with its general interests: practically everybody can sympathize with what it's proposing because it's going for the most general consensus possible—what's referred to as the ninety-nine percent. How can one turn something so vague into something specific? For example, when representatives of the movement are interviewed, it hardly ever turns into a productive conversation since nobody wants to take a step forward towards an actual proposition. The moment one proposes something—the moment one becomes specific—is also the moment when you could lose most of your potential or assumed stakeholders. This is the moment where the ninety-nine percent turns into the sixty-two percent or the four percent, depending on what kind of claims or propositions you put forward.

CM: It depends of what you understand by "vague." It is important for these movements to clearly define their adversaries—but I do not think that it is fair to criticize them for not offering a clear alternative. They are not there to propose solutions; their role is rather to voice concerns and put pressure on the parties. Proposing solutions and generating change is the role of the parties, which is why it is so important to insist upon an exchange between the different movements and the parties. This is how to envisage the relation between civil society and political institutions. Civil society is important for voicing concerns about certain issues, but once it does that it is then necessary for parties to respond to those demands. Creating a synergy between social movements and parties is vital, because parties are the ones that are going to translate those demands politically. But if a social movement refuses all communication with parties, then there is a problem. This does not mean that these types of movements are useless, since they do put issues on the agenda, but somehow they are less effective than if they would agree to work with parties. This is what I find really problematic with Los Indignados in Spain: not that they do not put forward any real proposal, but that they totally reject the representative system.

MM: How do you view this in the context of Occupy Wall Street?

CM: Occupy Wall Street has an opponent, it defines an adversary, as I mentioned before. Even if it does not say what should be done, it indicates that something needs to be done. It's the same in Chile. The students are clear about what they want, they have a clear objective: a reform in the educational system. Concerning what you were saying about the ninety-nine percent—it is true that in order to remain comprehensive this kind of mobilization cannot make many concrete proposals, because the moment this happens, the movement is divided. The same problem exists in Tunisia or Egypt, where all these people were united against Ben Ali or Mubarak. The mobilization was very wide ranging because they had a common adversary. But when the moment came to decide how society should be organized, then the differences emerged. You cannot maintain a broad popular mobilization in which everyone will agree on the kind of society they are striving for. In Tunisia, where the process has advanced further, there is already a stark dividing line between the people. At this point, socioeconomic issues have moved to the background, because the main issue now is what the role of Islam is going to be. All these people were fighting together to bring down Ben Ali, but now, when it comes to establishing a new order in Tunisia, there are big disagreements. This is not surprising; it's how democracy works. In Egypt it's basically the same although it's not so much in the open yet, because they are still in an intermediary process with the military still in power. There has not yet been a possibility for these different proposals to be articulated in political terms in order to form parties, but if the process of democratization really takes place the same thing is going to happen. So this "ninety-nine percent" is only possible in the first phase of popular mobilization.

MM: It surprises me in the context of Occupy that somehow, as a physical movement in the city, it does not manage to receive more support. One would think that because of its homogenized message it would be able to mobilize huge support, also in terms of the number of actual protesters on the ground. In Frankfurt, for example, there were only 11,000 people protesting. And the

last time I was in Frankfurt, a week ago, I went to the main site at the European Central Bank (ECB) with my students and there were only 200 protesters left.

CM: And what kind of slogans did they have?

MM: There was not a singular homogenized slogan—there were all sorts of them, but none standing out. It was quite interesting, because it was almost like a campus environment, with different meetings and discussion groups taking place, food areas being assembled. It was, at least spatially, a kind of replication of the New York situation, but it was organized in a really smart way. Particularly how the organizers had clearly made the effort to understand the urban, spatial, and legal protocols and policy of the site and its surrounding area, and had spatially adjusted the setup in order to deal with those restrictions. As a result, they could not be moved. The camp surrounds the huge sculpture of the euro at the foot of the ECB, which of course as a symbolic gesture is quite powerful.

However, talking about the numbers of people attending these protests—regardless of whether we talk about the protests in Europe or in the United States—I am quite disappointed and surprised by the poor turnout. I wonder whether this is a specifically Western phenomenon in the sense that, to some extend, people are almost luxuriously apathetic and seem too tired to get involved politically—meaning, physically being somewhere to present their cause. Maybe this is because the situation is not bad enough yet.

CM: Are you talking about Germany?

MM: Yes, I am talking from the position of being in Germany right now, but also witnessing what is going on in other Western democracies at the moment. If I recall correctly, there has not yet been a protest in any European country that has managed to accumulate more than 10,000 people.

CM: In Rome there were big demonstrations—but they were also against then-Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi. There was also a big one in March 2011 with 300,000 people, led by the feminist movement. Italy is another case altogether, because there the crisis was seen as an opportunity for the people to organize and mobilize opposition against Berlusconi. So it is not a movement that was genuinely born out of the crisis, but it is taking advantage of it.

MM: Are you sure that it isn't the same in the United States?

CM: I was reading an article yesterday in *Le Monde* that said that the newspapers in the United States are amplifying the movement, making it look much bigger than it actually is. However, as I have not been there, I do not know if this is true.

MM: When you read the news you get the impression that it is an extremely big movement, so it is surprising that the press is making so much of it when in fact it is not so big, at least not in Europe. I have been told that at the beginning of Occupy Wall Street in New York, some people were complaining that the press was ignoring it. I think part of the reason why press coverage has gone up so much is due to the fact that the movement is *spatial*. Not only in the sense that it is a physical movement, but that it very much ties itself to the specificities of individual spaces and hence creates *places*—like at Tahrir Square, which is a good example of this phenomenon. The Occupy movement is actually in a highly important location in Manhattan and is really visible, as it is in Frankfurt and many other cities. This is key. Space in this regard turns into a symbolic currency—a currency that is somehow being recognized by the press. It creates a very different scenario, of course, to be physically demonstrating off Wall Street as opposed to in some field in Ohio. There is a very interesting and positive disproportion between the kind of visibility the movement gets through the press and the small number of people actually on site.

CM: This is why Occupy Wall Street is very clever, because it is about occupying symbolic spaces. The writer from *Le Monde* compared Occupy Wall Street to the Tea Party, saying that it represented a kind of "Tea Party of the Left." In many ways I think this is positive because it is important not to leave popular mobilization to the right. And it is possible that this movement could help Obama. During our last conversation in Vienna, I said that Obama needed a popular movement—maybe this could give him an impulse. It could be an interesting move.

MM: How do you see the situation in Europe? In Europe those movements could put pressure on Center-Left parties to begin looking for alternatives, couldn't they?

CM: Unfortunately, Europe is in a much worse state now than it was the last time we spoke in Vienna. We have conservative or right-wing governments almost everywhere now, which are heavily pushing towards the destruction of what remains of social-democratic institutions. In fact, they are using the excuse of the crisis and the question of debt in order to push austerity measures, which are introducing serious cuts and privatization in fields that had not been drastically affected previously. If you think of the cases of the Netherlands and the UK—in the field of education and the arts, for example— the recent measures are really bad. Cameron's austerity policies have been incredible. The cultural field has been heavily affected. And so has education at large—thousands of students have demonstrated in the streets of London.

MM: The measures are also destructive beyond this current generation. In the Netherlands—previously known for its visionary and generous policy of supporting cultural and artistic institutions, activities, publishers, etc.—these measures have led to a severe crisis in cultural production and the arts. All support has been cut back. To give an example: SKOR, one of the leading Dutch cultural institutions and the central commissioning body for art in the public realm, had its governmental funding cut 100 percent. These are not indications of a change in the funding of culture; this is a carpet bombing of the realm of critical cultural practices at large.

CM: The problem is that the Left has not been able to propose an alternative. At least it seems now that the British Labour Party with Edward Miliband is attempting to develop and propose solutions. The good thing is that the era of the third way—and its core notion that there is no alternative to neoliberal globalization—is, in a sense, finished. Since 2008 and the financial crisis, the socialist parties have learned that they can no longer align themselves with such concepts; they are realizing that they need to seriously rethink their strategy. Nevertheless, so far they have not become propositional, but they are only slowly becoming aware of this necessity. In that sense maybe these movements can be useful in putting pressure on Center-Left parties. In fact, they might get more public support for more radical policies. I think that the mood is changing. These movements definitively express this change— indicating the need for radical policies—and hopefully the socialist parties are going to be able to begin thinking about alternatives. Although the situation is really bad, there is a little light at the end of the tunnel: we might be at the beginning of the new era. I am more pessimistic about the future of the EU. I do not know what is going to happen, but increasingly there is the tendency to retreat to nationalism instead of staying together and facing the challenges. Europe is torn between these movements. We need to move forward, but the political will seems to be missing at such a crucial historic moment.

MM: So do you think that for Europe to move ahead, it needs the institutions in place for it to be a fully functioning body, or do you think it could also push those agendas in the same structure that the EU already has?

CM: What do you mean by that? That we need something like a United States of Europe?

MM: Currently there are spatialized and physically existing institutions such as the European Parliament, but their actual power is fairly limited, with many key decisions being subject to national or even regional jurisdiction. Also, you get the regular populist opposition by the British, who at this point in time should simply leave the EU if they only choose to unproductively criticize it

while reaping the benefits yet refusing to join the euro zone. Then of course you have the ECB as an institution. But without a constitution and the key positions that can make joint statements in the name of all member states, such as a European foreign minister, the EU will always be perceived not only as a decentralized territorial entity, but also as one that is missing a single, unified voice, even if the process of getting there is not necessarily a consensual one. To what extent do you think that the EU could function without those institutions?

CM: Some important reforms definitively need to take place. One needs to have new rules in crucial areas that take account of the fact that now the EU is bigger than before. I agree with you that, on a certain level, more integration is certainly needed. On the other hand, I do not think that this requires the establishment of what one may refer to as a "European Super State." The aim of the EU should not be to create a homogeneous demos at the European level that would be the bearer of sovereignty and provide a central place for democracy to be exercised.

MM: If I understand correctly, this also very much relates to your latest work on Europe.

CM: Indeed. I am doing work at the moment concerned with an agonistic conception of Europe, which would have to acknowledge the diversity of the collective identities existing in its midst and the effects that they mobilize. The challenge of European integration resides in combining unity and diversity, in creating a form of communality that respect differences: we should relinquish all attempts to construct a homogeneous post-national *we* that would overwhelm the diversity of the national *we*. The view defended by some supranationalists is predicated on the transfer of people's allegiance from their nation-states to the EU. The negation of the national *we*—or the fear that this could happen—is at the origin of many resistances against European integration, and it could lead to the emergence of multiple forms of antagonism among the various European nations. To reject such an approach means that democracy at the European level cannot be conceived as

representative writ large. Some political theorists have proposed to envisage Europe as a "demoicracy": a union of states and people that acknowledges the plurality and permanence of the different *demoi* that constitute its parts, a union that respects the national identity of its members as expressed in their political and constitutional structures. I find such an idea very interesting; it's a conception that I fully endorse.

MM: What would you propose to be the underlying structure of this notion of demoicracy?

CM: In thinking about the possible mode of integration best suited for an agonistic Europe, the reflections of the French legal theorist Olivier Beaud in his book *Théorie de la fédération* (2007) have proven particularly useful. Beaud proposes to rediscover the notion of a "federal union." Conceived as a union of states, the aim of the federation is for the states to jointly constitute a new political entity in order to be able to maintain their political existence, and therefore to remain as states. While acknowledging the need for a sort of European identity and making a distinction between insiders and outsiders, a federal union also regards the diversity of its component states as something valued and to be maintained. It takes account of the constitutive multiplicity of Europe "united in its diversity" and would not aim at eradicating national differences.

MM: A European framework of decentralized identities all with a common goal.

CM: To be supported by the peoples of Europe, it is necessary that the EU should not be understood as a threat to national identities, but as the condition for its different nations to maintain their respective identities in a globalized world. This is why I think that the idea of the federal union is the direction in which we should be thinking. It is very different from federalism: federalism implies some super state, a central European demos. A federal union however is a different type of organization, and thinking about European integration in this framework should serve as a good argument in its favor for

all those who remain attached to the existence of the nation-states. In the context of globalization, the different European states are in no condition to face the numerous challenges confronting them each on their own; hence the need to create a broad union. Conceived as a federal union, the EU could become the solution to this challenge. Instead of being seen as announcing the end of nation-states, it would provide the conditions for their survival in a globalized world.

MM: How can interest in European politics be resuscitated?

CM: European politics needs to have a partisan character framed in terms of Left and Right. People should have the possibility to choose between different political projects for Europe. Brussels always tries to present its decisions as if they are the expression of a consensus, and these decisions are not really political in the sense of being the result of a confrontation between Left and Right—this is a very technocratic model, and not agonistic at all. Right now the development of the European Left is highly important. One of the reasons why there is such a lack of interest in respect to Europe is because many people cannot identify alternatives; they only see the "really existing" Europe, which is neoliberal. The people against this kind of Europe are immediately and mistakenly identified as anti-European, when what they want is a *different* Europe. In France, people rejected the constitutional treaty in the referendum of 2005 for different reasons—some because they are against European integration, but many people from the Left did it because they do not support the idea of a neoliberal Europe. In my view, this was a mistaken notion because the treaty in fact provided some democratic advances. It is not by withdrawing from Europe that we are going to change things; it is by engaging with European politics. Europe can become what its citizens want it to be—it's neoliberal today because the current hegemony is neoliberal. But this, of course, is neither fixed nor should be understood as a stable and definitive condition. If we had a strongly organized European Left it could be fighting for different ways to organize Europe. My hope is that Europe would become the vanguard in alternatives to neoliberalism, and that a European Left would realize this project.

MM: We have discussed, in previous meetings, what you understand as the sum of important and productive issues in regard to this— for example, the danger of the idea that the market offers a single solution for everything, and the defense of public services. This has, traditionally, always been a strength of the European model, and this is a point where Europe as a social-democratic model was always more significant than, for example, the United States. Would you agree?

CM: Yes, of course. These aspects need to be defended, which is also why I argued in a previous discussion with you in favor of the idea of European protectionism, provided that it is not envisaged in an egoistic or nationalistic way. This form of protectionism could create conditions that would have favorable consequences for other countries. I've indicated that cheap European exports are very destructive for many countries in Africa and other places where they destroy local industries—which also leads to huge emigration problems. People cannot continue to live in these countries due to economic conditions that are caused by Europe and other exporting economies. They are forced to leave, but of course they are not welcome in Europe. It's a vicious circle. A European protectionism conceived in terms of a wide-ranging critique of free trade could therefore be very important, and it should be enacted by the Left. Another important element for a European Left agenda is the question of environment—to position itself very strongly in its defense and assume leadership in related issues. In this vein, I have a lot of sympathy for the movement Food Sovereignty, which advocates prioritizing domestic needs when it comes to agricultural products. In too many countries, most of the food production is made for export while people there are starving. So for me a lot of issues are very important for a left-wing European project.

MM: How do you see what is happening in South America in this context?

CM: What is happening in South America is very important. Those countries, which are doing quite well today, are precisely the ones that no longer submit to the diktats of the IMF—countries like Brazil and Argentina have witnessed a

crucial improvement in their situation. Progressive governments are also leading these countries. Tomorrow, Cristina Kirchner will hopefully be reelected in Argentina with perhaps up to fifty-five percent of the votes. Dilma Rousseff in Brazil is another example. Left-wing governments are also in power in Peru, Ecuador, Bolivia, Nicaragua, Venezuela, Paraguay, and Uruguay. The only two countries with right-wing democratic governments are Chile and Colombia, but the rest of Latin America has left-wing democracies. These progressive governments have reinforced cooperation among themselves and even with other countries in South America by creating a variety of economic and political institutions to establish and strengthen solidarity. So we are seeing the development of a "regional pole" organized by and in South America. The multipolar world I have referred to in previous conversations is not a dream: we already live in it. When I started talking about this multipolar world ten years ago people were very reluctant to accept it. And now you see it mentioned in newspapers, you see it everywhere.

MM: Can you imagine in thirty to fifty years the existence of something like a "United States of South America"?

CM: No, because I do not think that is what they want. We should not homogenize South America since it is so diversified—just like Europe, in fact. The socioeconomic conditions are so different in Peru, Argentina, Brazil, and Ecuador, and people there are very conscious about their differences and they seem not to be interested in developing a model for South America. They repeatedly stress that each country is different and they want to establish solidarity among each other without trying to impose a common model. For them it's necessary to create a series of institutions to organize this solidarity—for example, the Unión de Naciones Suramericanas (Union of South American Nations), Mercosur, and Banco del Sur. This network will allow them to become a regional pole in the multipolar order.

MM: What does the idea of the multipolar world imply for democracy?

CM: Different forms of democracy will exist in different parts of the multipolar world. I am consequently against the concept of "cosmopolitan democracy," which supposes that Western democracy is the only legitimate model and that it should be applied everywhere regardless of geography or local histories. We need to envision the possibility of different ways that the democratic idea can be inscribed in varying historico-cultural and geographical contexts. The form this will take is up to the people in the different regions to decide— European political theorists should not impose their own model.

MM: One crucial question is what is going to happen in the Middle East.

CM: The question of the legitimacy of different forms of democracy is particularly important in regard to the development of a Muslim form of democracy. How can the democratic idea be inscribed in a socio-historical Muslim context? It is not at all comparable to the context in Europe, which has been one of Jewish and Christian heritage. This will be the big challenge for Ennahda in Tunisia and for the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. There is a dangerous tendency to conceive of democratization as Westernization, when in fact democratization can take on many forms according to the way it adapts to different contexts. This issue is already being discussed and I know that many people are thinking about how to articulate Islam with democracy, especially with respect to the role of the Sharia. One of the many issues raised is about the role of secularization, which is sometimes presented as a necessary condition for democracy.

MM: This leads to our previous discussion about multiple modernities.

CM: If we accept different paths of modernity, we also have to accept multiple forms of democracy, because all the various modernities will conceive of and implement democratic institutions differently.

MM: How does this relate to the de-colonial perspective?

CM: This perspective represents a new current within the debate about modernity but I disagree with its approach. The purveyors of this perspective are very critical about the idea of multiple modernities. They argue that it is not radical enough because we need an alternative to modernity, not multiple versions. They say that modernity necessarily goes along with colonialism and therefore it must be abandoned—grounding their argument in the historic fact that the modern project was articulated with the colonial project. This is no doubt true, but it does not mean that there is a fundamental relation between modernity and colonialism. A contingent relation did exist, but it should be possible to disentangle modernity from colonialism. So my critique is essentially theoretical.

Moreover, what would an alternative to any type of modernity at all look like in practice? De-colonial theorists often refer to the situation in Bolivia. In Bolivia, before the Evo Morales's presidential victory in 2005, two different movements fighting against the previous government were trying to organize the indigenous population. You have to remember that sixty percent of the population of Bolivia is indigenous and had always been excluded from politics. So the question was, how can the indigenous population participate? Felipe Quispe was driving a movement, a very radical one, with the Aymara Indians. He was saying that Bolivia needs a form of government that will be an alternative to modernity and is representative of the traditional and ancestral Aymara indigenous institution. As a mouthpiece of his movement, Quispe said that society needed to be organized around the ancestral Aymara institution of the *ayllu,* a form of direct assembly that was the original model of indigenous democracy. But this view was problematic because Bolivia has more indigenous groups than just the Aymara, and there are also nonindigenous citizens—the mestizos, for example. So his movement only represented a particular sector of the population; its project was very exclusive. Next to it, Morales's Movimiento al Socialismo proposed a project more in line with the notion of multiple modernities. Morales was trying to find a form of modernity that would be able to articulate the demands of different groups and to propose a new form of democracy suited to Bolivian conditions. After Morales's victory a new constitution was established that conceives of

Bolivia as a pluri-national state so as to acknowledge the diversity of its collectives' identities. The Bolivian experience is interesting because the Morales government, in attempting to find an alternative to the Western model of modernity, did not reject modernity but instead found its own path to modernity.

MM: Could you also comment on the current debate about communism—specifically, the revival of the communist idea?

CM: Nowadays the communist idea has again become fashionable in certain circles of the Left, mainly as promoted by Badiou and Slavoj Žižek. Now, since the first publication of *Hegemony and Socialism Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (1985), where Ernesto Laclau and I defended the project of radical democracy, our work has been a critique of this idea of communism. I do agree with Badiou that there is a tendency today to identify the communist ideal with actually existing socialism and, on that same basis, to dismiss it. This is absolutely illegitimate. The idea of communism cannot be invalidated based on what happened with the Soviet model. On the other hand, we cannot simply say that the Soviets perverted the communist idea and that now the task is to implement it in a proper way. We need to learn from the disastrous experiences of socialism that the idea of a completely harmonious society in which politics and antagonism will no longer exist is in fact problematic. Any attempt to try to realize this idea of communism necessarily leads to perversion.

MM: Do you think that it leads to homogenization?

CM: It leads to a negation of pluralism, which is incompatible with the way I understand agonistic democracy. Democracy requires us to always have the possibility of questioning existing institutions. Imagine if we had a "harmonious" democracy: it would mean that the people who disagree would be portrayed as either mad or irrational and consequently be stripped of their voice. Such a fully realized democracy would in fact mean the very destruction of democracy—this is the real lesson to be learned from Soviet

communism. But we don't need to give up the idea of emancipation because of this. By "emancipation," we need to understand something different from the totalizing and the all encompassing, something that consists in an unending process of the radicalization of democracy. To accept pluralism requires accepting that "the people" are not one, but divided. What does this mean for democracy's crucial issue of "the power of the people"? It means that the power of the people will always be the power of a *part* of the people—hence the importance of being able to challenge the existing hegemony. Accordingly, the project of radical democracy should be the core of the Left's agenda since it is much more suitable than defending the communist idea.

MM: How can such model of agonistic pluralism be used and applied in different contexts?

CM: One of my current concerns is to examine how this agonistic approach can pertain to different areas. My published works so far aim at presenting this model as an alternative to the aggregative and deliberative models, which in fact returns to our very first conversation that took place in London some years ago. How should we interpret our Western democratic institutions? Recently I have been interested in the question of how this agonistic approach can be relevant in the field of international relations—more precisely, by allowing us to envisage the relation between the different poles of a multipolar world. As I mentioned before, I am also working on elaborating the idea of an agonistic Europe. On another level I am trying to clarify my understanding of agonism in respect to other understandings of the term found in a variety of thinkers who also belong to the agonistic camp.

MM: Are you referring to people such as Bonnie Honig?

CM: I am trying to clarify and distinguish my view of agonism from that of thinkers such as Hannah Arendt, Honig, or William Connolly, because their agonism is what I call an agonism without antagonism. In my perspective, agonism is always a form or manifestation of antagonism. In an agonistic relation, antagonism does not disappear, it is simply staged a different way.

Not in the sense of a friend/enemy relation that we can call pure antagonism, but in the form of an agonistic confrontation between adversaries. I am also clarifying my position in respect to two different strategies in radical politics—contrasting what I call the strategy of "withdrawal from" that we find in Michael Hardt and Negri and their followers with my own strategy of "engagement with" that is influenced by the "war of position" notion developed by Antonio Gramsci. All these ideas are present, for instance, when criticizing and insisting on the need to establish a synergy between social movements and parties. My reflections on the Middle East are informed by these ideas, but it is important to systematize them further. Another of my interests is to develop my critique of cosmopolitanism to include what is referred to as a "the new cosmopolitanism." In *On the Political* I criticized the political form of cosmopolitanism represented by thinkers such as David Held and Daniele Archibugi who advocate a model of cosmopolitan democracy. But this notion of cosmopolitanism has become very trendy now and everybody wants to appropriate it in other fields—I want, for instance, to examine the possible relevance of the idea of cosmopolitanism in the fields of culture and the arts, seeing as it has became fashionable in certain artistic circles. But I think that it is also problematic to use it in those contexts.

MM: Should one reject modernity or reformulate it so that is not simply a European trend? Can we pluralize it and introduce differences?

CM: Some people are trying to use the notion of cosmopolitanism to that effect, but I am very skeptical because I think it necessarily evokes some form of homogeneity. I am trying to come up with a more relevant and productive concept, one that could be more respectful of diversity. When talking about the specific field of artistic practices it is important to envisage how to develop a pluralist modernism—accepting the notion of multiple modernisms so as to resist an imposed market-driven and Western-influenced definition of contemporary art—while making room for other places and traditions.

Postscript

Since our last recorded conversation, which took place in Berlin in October 2011, the sociopolitical landscape has reached another critical moment as the global financial crisis continues. Especially when focusing on the Middle East—and more specifically the Arab Spring—one detects many political transformations with potentially lasting effects. In Tunisia, for example, we witnessed elections in October 2011 to the constituent assembly as well as on a national scale, resulting in an interim coalition government of the moderate Islamist Ennahda party (which won the most seats), the liberal Congress for the Republic, and the Center-Left Ettakatol party. Once the assembly writes the new constitution, new elections will be held. Similarly, elections took place in Egypt, with the Muslim Brotherhood's Mohammed Morsi winning the presidency by a narrow margin in June 2012—although, as Chantal predicted in our last conversation, the military's political dominance unfortunately persists.

What does this mean for the development of Muslim democracies in line with the question of "multiple modernities"? What can one learn from the experiments and changes currently being explored—in other parts of the world as well—and turned into (spatial) practice on the basis of cultural difference and alternative economic models? What are the common denominators of the institutional and structural elements that are being challenged?

In Argentina, Cristina Fernández de Kirchner was reelected president in October 2011—her party Frente para la Victoria (Front for Victory) winning over half the seats in congress—with one of the widest victory margins in the country's history, based on the promise to profoundly challenge the national structural framework and reduce poverty by using the nation's resources to raise incomes, create jobs, and restore national industries: "The US president, Barack Obama, 'could take a lesson from this,' said [Mark] Weisbrot, co-director of the Centre for Economic and Policy Research in Washington. 'It's an old-fashioned message of democracy: you deliver what you promise and

people vote for you.'"[259] This election will arguably have a lasting effect on the looming changes in South America.

Focusing on Europe, the national elections in Spain saw the victory of the Partido Popular with an absolute majority over the Partido Socialista. In Italy, the fall of Silvio Berlusconi gave rise to a technocratic and unelected government under Mario Monti. At the same time, the situation in Greece is still uncertain after the most recent elections showed a surge for Syriza's Alexis Tsipras, who lost to the Center-Right New Democracy party by only a small margin.

The question now remains whether the leading social movements will adjust their strategies in Europe and abroad. What are the effects of these developments on the project of the (European) Left and the attempt to establish an alternative to neoliberalism and/or right-wing nationalist governments? By the time this postscript is being written, the global Occupy movement has lost momentum and the Occupy Frankfurt camp in front of the European Central Bank is about to be shut down. We are, however, eager to see whether political parties will incorporate the social movements' messages in their campaigns and, indeed, politics.

Markus Miessen & Chantal Mouffe
August 2012

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[259]   "Cristina Kirchner re-elected as Argentina's president in landslide," *The Guardian*, October 24, 2011.

Conflictual Democracies

(In conversation with Erhard Eppler, 2007, published in *BUILD*)

Markus Miessen For more than 20 years, you were the chairman of the Committee for Fundamental Values of the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD), the Federal Minister for Economic Cooperation during four administrations, and a member of the Federal executive committee of the SPD. But you're really a teacher and a philosopher. Please explain to me: how did you get into politics?

Erhard Eppler In the early fifties, a debate in Germany began over whether the Germans should once again levy an army that would act within the Western alliance. I was a member of the late war generation, that is, I was a soldier in various uniforms between 1943 and 1945, and had learnt from the Allies that German militarism was the worst thing one could imagine and that it had been abolished once and for all. So I felt provoked to take a political stance, especially with respect to the question: should the Germans in the West rearm against the Germans in the East, and vice versa? Suddenly I was involved in politics without having intended to be.

MM How did that happen, pragmatically? Did you at first get involved at the local level?

EE No, it happened like this: when Gustav Heinemann founded his own small party in the late fall of 1952 [the Gesamtdeutsche Volkspartei (GVP), or All-German People's Party], which addressed exactly these issues, I was unfortunately unable to attend the founding assembly because as a young teacher, I didn't get time off. And then Heinemann proposed to the founding assembly that they elect Erhard Eppler in his absence, which this assembly actually did. From then on I was a member of the Federal executive committee of this new party, was barely 26 years old, and already carried a certain responsibility. I then found that it is easier to slide into politics than to get back out.

MM Freimut Duve once asked you: "What does the metropolis look like from the perspective of a man formed by small-town life?" What is your response today?

EE There are different metropolises. I am again and again fascinated by Berlin, and I've always liked being in London, although that was 50 years ago, but I wouldn't want to live there. I love knowing my way around a small town, the much closer ties between people, the relations between neighbors, and probably also the architecture of the old imperial towns. I was born in the imperial town of Ulm, grew up in the imperial town of Schwäbisch Hall, and represented the imperial town of Heilbronn in the Federal Diet and the imperial town of Rottweil in the Diet of Baden-Württemberg. I'm not only a small-town person, I'm an imperial-town person, and the old imperial towns were virtually their own states, with their own territories and fiscal sovereignty, and the result was a certain civic pride that has survived to this day. I wouldn't want to miss that.

MM And would you say, now that you're no longer as active—as you were, for instance, during your time in Bonn or later in Berlin—that you feel differently about metropolises, since you now spend most of your time here, in Schwäbisch Hall?

EE My family and I have always lived in small towns, if you want to count Heilbronn among the smaller towns, and I did so consciously. I don't have anything against large cities; I like going there. Not to every one, but to many. But I prefer living where I live.

MM You maintain a self-sufficient lifestyle, subsisting mostly on what you grow in your garden. Is this about autonomy?

EE No, that's not the point. From childhood on I've always been someone who liked working in his own garden, I simply enjoyed it. As a boy, I absolutely wanted to be a gardener, and now, as an old man, I've almost come to the

point where that is my main occupation. That I produce zucchini and peppers and cauliflower and eggplants is nice, but there's no wish to be self-sufficient.

MM But when I got here, I also noticed that you have installed solar panels on your roof.

EE Yes, the electricity is fed into the power grid, and of course I am on the grid. After all, it's not like we live here on the electricity produced on the roof.

MM And is it true that you once used to have a goat?

EE No, but we have ducks in the garden; the goat was our neighbors'. The ducks help us in dealing with the scourge of snails, although then you have to watch the salad so it doesn't get eaten by the ducks instead of the snails.

MM One can call you, without hesitation, a pacifist. Is Europe a place that identifies itself through conflict? Is there peace without conflict?

EE First of all, I've never seen myself as a fundamentalist pacifist. I only felt a great distrust in military strength after I had survived, to my own surprise, during the war, and a responsibility for ensuring that my children and grand-children would no longer experience war. I think that Europe at least has made progress to a point where a war between the European states has become almost inconceivable.

MM But there are still issues of conflict between the European states, I mean, non-violent conflict.

EE Exactly, there is always conflict. Wherever humans live together and wherever there is politics, there will of course be conflict. But the question is always, are there rules in place to deal with such conflict and to settle them without shots being fired? That is obviously possible.

MM Would you say that conflict is an integral component of democracy?

EE Yes, of course. A democracy, after all, is based on the majority principle, and so you have to determine, what is the majority, who commands the majority. If you want to determine that, various groups, in this case political parties, have to make offers to the electorate in order to make the will of the majority apparent. And in this process of competition between parties, there will obviously be many issues of conflict. Democracy is, among other things, a method for settling conflicts in a civilized manner.

MM Do you believe that peace can exist without conflict?

EE I think that's a hypothetical question. Where there are humans—and even where there are only two or three of them—there will be conflict. I don't see the danger that we will run out of conflict in either our personal or our political lives.

MM Can we permit the future to consist in the execution of factors beyond political control?

EE A political practice that appeals too much to factors beyond political control is really no longer a political practice but a technocratic execution of necessities. Politics always contains also the element of free will and even of idiosyncratic designs. Moreover, most so-called circumstances beyond political control, when you examine them closely, are really compulsive intellectual limitations. I always attempt at first to find out how much of this apolitical necessity is really an intellectual limitation. Is it more of an intellectual limitation or a real factor beyond political control; that does happen, too.

MM Do you believe that Realpolitik is more of a necessity or more of an obstacle?

EE You would at first have to think hard about what Realpolitik is. If Realpolitik is a political practice that takes reality very seriously, then any political

practice must be Realpolitik. If Realpolitik is meant to be a political practice that is blind for all but a very specific reality—say, the military or the economic reality—then it is of course one-sided. A good political practice takes reality deadly seriously, but it then also attempts to change it.

MM But do you think that such change is possible when one is too occupied with the necessities of the here and now, or might one theoretically also arrive at a constructive vision by temporarily masking those necessities?

EE Someone who always simply appeals to necessities can no longer do politics at all, but will merely obey these necessities in a technocratic manner. But in order to do politics you have to know where you want to go, what your goals are. If you can only reach, or approach, these goals by very small strides, I have no objections, that is the way of the world. I've always said that what matters is not how great these strides are but that the direction is recognizable. That is also what the electorate probably has a right to: that they see the direction into which a specific political practice wants to go.

MM Is there to your mind something like a model democracy?

EE I wouldn't want to put it like that, but I learned democracy not—like some people of my generation—in America but in Switzerland. After the war, I spent three semesters in Switzerland, in the Swiss Federal capital of Berne, and I have great respect for this kind of democracy, especially for the culture of debate in Switzerland, but also for the federal structures, the division of power within the federation. I know that that is not a model in the sense that we would have to emulate it, but this experience of Swiss democracy probably plays a larger subconscious role in me than I would like to admit. In any case, I am, for instance, definitely in favor of plebiscitary elements, that is, in favor of petitions for a referendum and of referenda. That may also come from Switzerland.

MM "What is Germany?" That was the question with which you took the stage in German politics.

EE Germany is where people live who see themselves as Germans and who wish to found a state together. I always said during the time when Germany was divided that if the Germans wish to come together again, both of them, the East Germans and the West Germans, then this Germany exists, and if they don't, then there are two Germanys. However, I was always convinced that the people in the GDR really felt a stronger desire to live in a reunited German state than many in the West. That this Germany must then not seal itself off against foreigners, that a German kindergarten today looks different from one of 80 years ago and that a kindergarten in 80 years from now hence will look entirely different again, that is not something I mind.

MM What is Europe?

EE Europe, to my mind, is the space shaped by classical antiquity and by Christianity, by the aftereffects of the Roman Empire, and later by the Renaissance and the Enlightenment. Which, however, doesn't mean that Russia is outside of Europe because it didn't participate in the Renaissance and the Enlightenment. Geographically, I'm still where I was as a high-school student: the Ural Mountains form the Eastern border of Europe.

MM You wrote a book in 1998 entitled *Die Wiederkehr der Politik* [*The Return of Politics*]. Could you perhaps explain briefly what this "return" is about, what it consists of?

EE We already saw one wave of free-market radicalism sweep Europe during the 80s, one that was symbolized at the time primarily by the names of Reagan and Thatcher. During its reign, the market assumed control of more and more areas—in fact, areas were ceded to it—that had really been part of politics for centuries. And I believed at the time that this epoch was slowly coming to an end and that, at least in Europe, the question was being asked again, what is the market's business, what is that of civil society, what is the business of the state and hence also of politics? Perhaps I was a little premature in diagnosing this sea change, but today I would say with

conviction that this wave of free-market radicalism, which passed over the entire world at the time, has broken and that the majority of the people no longer believe in the promises of this free-market radicalism.

MM Experts can say, based on their specialized knowledge, *how* something should be done. But, thus Theo Ginsburg, they overreach when they want to determine *what* ought to be done. May a politician or someone who is responsible for important decisions be an expert? Must he be one?

EE He couldn't possibly be an expert in all fields, but it is certainly good if he is in one or two areas. So that he then also listens when the experts in other fields express their views. It is my experience that the emphasis on expertise doesn't guarantee the right decisions since a politician has to know exactly not only how things are but also how he wants them to be. An expert in most cases doesn't want anything beyond analyzing and understanding a field. That's why politicians always do well to make use of expert knowledge, to draw on it, but they also do well not to expect from experts that they tell them what they have to do.

MM Might one even take this thought so far as to say that in some cases the role of the dilettante can be productive?

EE Well, yes, that may happen at times, but I wouldn't rely on it. No, there is the very fruitful dialogue between the expert and the political actor, and this dialogue is fruitful when both focus on their roles, that is to say, when the politician says in which direction he wants to go and the expert then explains what this may mean, which consequences one or the other step may have—consequences that are not present to the politician's mind. And then at the end of such a dialogue, which may extend over weeks, over months, there still has to be a decision.

MM The role of the politician, then, is to determine the general direction.

EE Yes, and the business of the expert is to clarify the intended and possibly

unintended consequences of these steps and what, to his mind, is feasible, what is possible, and what to his mind is not possible.

MM In *Spannungsfelder* [*Zones of Conflict*], you quote Carlo Schmid: "A parliamentary specialist is a person who knows ever more about ever fewer things, until in the end he knows everything about nothing. The alternative would be a representative who knows ever less about ever more things, until he knows nothing about everything." So dilettantism has its advantages, too. How could someone who is seen as an outsider by an expertocracy assert himself as a visionary?

EE This pronouncement by Carlo Schmid is of course a *bon mot*, which is entirely typical of him. He had a French mother and a German father, a Swabian, and had the French penchant for the *bon mot*. But in this case he meant to point out the dangers that beset the politician on all sides and that he cannot escape. He can move either more in the direction of the expert, or more in the direction of the generalist. I think what is very important in a politician is that he knows where he is an expert and where he isn't; that is to say, that he also knows exactly what he doesn't know. The really big problem are politicians who are true experts in perhaps two, three fields and then believe themselves to be experts in everything and to know everything better. I remember, for instance, that Willy Brandt always listened when economic issues came up, at most drawing a conclusion here and there from a discussion but never creating the impression that he was a specialist, whereas when it came to foreign politics, he knew that he understood it at least as well as anyone else, and then he got involved in the debate. It is perfectly impossible to be an expert in everything, but it is good if someone really knows the methods, and then is able to ask experts in other fields the right questions.

MM In recent times, a dramatic loss of confidence in democracy and in politics in general has become evident. Without conjuring up an unnecessary nostalgia for the state, I would say that one can by now speak of a contempt for the state that has become fashionable, accompanied by an unprecedented

euphoria for privatizations; a vicious circle from which there is no escape for many nation-states. Can a federation of states such as the European Union break out of such vicious circle?

EE Now there is a great variety of reasons why the traditional nation-state has today entered a critical phase. The first reason is the deformation of the state in the 20th century: the total state, the totalitarian state, the one whose monopoly on the use of force was depraved into a monopoly on murder. The 20th century has discredited the state as a whole, and little wonder that many people to this day face the state with distrust and live in constant fear that it might once again overreach and debase its citizens by making them the means to its own ends. The second reason is that a capital that acts globally will always have the upper hand against a nation-state, and thus can impose its will upon such a state, for instance in terms of taxation. And the third reason is this wave of free-market radicalism I spoke of earlier, which proceeds according to the slogan that the market is always smarter than politics, so let's cede as much to the market as possible. These three reasons all work in the same direction, and that's why I think that in the 21st century, we have to have a discussion first and foremost about which work can and may be taken away from the state and which cannot; where its genuine tasks lie, the ones in which it is irreplaceable. I can imagine that this will take place all over Europe during the next ten years.

MM And what is the role of Europe in this context?

EE If it really works, Europe should take on those functions which the nation-state can no longer fulfill. A market of 500 million people is probably beyond blackmail, even for a capital that acts globally. If the European Union, for instance, agrees on minimum corporate taxes, stopping the downward spiral that has been moving for twenty years, this will of course also restore the individual nation-state's ability to choose between fiscal policies. The nation-states in Europe have to be sublated in Europe, sublated in Hegel's sense, preserved, lifted across the threshold of settling conflict in wars, and also abolished, annulled as fully sovereign nation-states. I think that such a

sublation, which is, after all, also a preservation, in the end doesn't weaken the nation-states but rather strengthens them. That is something that is still by far not generally understood in Europe.

MM You have publicly professed the values of "old Europe," especially vis-à-vis the US. What, to your mind, are Europe's values?

EE I've once said in a different context that Europe is where the fundamental values of freedom, justice, and solidarity, which derive from the French Revolution, are *all* taken seriously. Where only *one* of the three is neglected or violated, Europe ends. I know that is a rather rigorous definition, but European democracy has arisen from the tensions between these three fundamental values—and it lives on the tensions between them.

MM If one were to speak, in the context of participatory democracy, of a utopia, would this be a constructive or rather an impeding vision?

EE Democracy itself is already conceived as participatory; after all, the *citoyen* or *citoyenne* participate in public life, they are responsible for what should happen in their *cité*, their city. They take part in the discussion, they can found a citizen's initiative if a decision of the city's administration or the city council doesn't make sense to them. The question is which form of participation, of codetermination the *citoyens* and *citoyennes* want.

MM Or might one even also say, which form they can successfully exercise? Perhaps codetermination is not always constructive?

EE Well, of course, yes, the supervision of nuclear power simply is a matter for experts, but demanding, for instance, that a nuclear power supervisory board think through all the alternatives, that is something even a layperson can demand. I am in favor of the *citoyens*' and *citoyennes*' ability to make direct decisions as well, which is to say, if need be, to reject a law that their representatives have adopted, or in turn to enact a law that their parliamentary representatives don't want. I think that this corrective to

parliamentary democracy would also strengthen the self-confidence of the citizens, and would enliven politics and democracy. And that is something we urgently need.

MM In the context of this idea of a participatory organization, how much conflict can the constitutional state, can democracy bear? Is there a threshold that mustn't or cannot be crossed?

EE Yes, conflict is part of the essence of democracy. But what is also necessary for a democracy is a fundamental consensus, which is in most cases stipulated in a constitution. A conflict such as the one during the Weimar Republic, where the communists and, later, the Nazis wanted an entirely different republic, an entirely different constitution, and so rejected the foundations of that republic, is potentially fatal. It is perfectly self-evident that conflict is part of the world, but it can only be settled in a civilized way when there is a fundamental consensus.

MM And this consensus provides a frame, a space where people meet?

EE Yes, and it also provides a method. A constitution is, after all, also a list of methods, how does one arrive at a government, how is a government replaced, how can the citizen participate, which rights does he or she have, in which elections, and so forth. So a constitution also establishes the rules of the game.

MM How close do you think we are to a potential European constitution?

EE We believed that we were pretty close to it. Right now, we are again pretty far away from one. In my judgment, I will not see the day when the 27 or even more members of the Union agree on a constitution. What I can imagine is that one day a smaller number of states within the European Union will agree on a shared constitution.

MM In *Wege aus der Gefahr* [*Ways Out Of Peril*], you quote a sentence from

Erich Fromm's *Revolution der Hoffnung* [*Revolution of Hope*]: "Hope means being ready, at any moment, for that which has not yet been born—and yet not despairing if there is no birth at all during our lifetime." Are you hopeful with respect to Europe? What can Europe really accomplish?

EE I simply believe that once the 1.2 billion Chinese and a billion Indians truly appear on the world stage in force, even Europeans who have so far been stubborn will understand that as nation-states of ten or even 40 million inhabitants they will simply be bullied into submission, and that they will have to be sublated in a larger whole to make their survival possible.

MM You once said that "running after trains that have left is neither idealism nor realism, it is simply unpolitical behavior." What is political behavior?

EE Political behavior means that at any moment you take the existing reality as your point of departure, even if this reality has come about against your own wishes. When the Treaties of Paris, which led to the rearmament of West Germany, had been ratified, in 1955, I said: the issue on which Heinemann ran is done with. If you want to do politics now, you have to work from the basis that these treaties have created. And then you have to ask yourself, where do we want to go from here? But bemoaning the loss of the alternatives that were now off the table, that, I thought, was unpolitical.

MM You believe in dedicated work to help the disenfranchised. "The New Concept of Development": how is it faring in a time of globalization?

EE Well, I would have to deliver a two-hour-long lecture on the concepts of development as one followed the other over the course of the past 50 years. I will limit myself to saying that I've learned something new over the past 20 years, which is that economic development can succeed only when the institutions of a state function. When a state has a monopoly on the use of force, when there is something like domestic security, when there is an uncorrupted justice system, when there is a public administration that is at least no more than a little corrupt, and when there is a minimum-level

education system, paid for by the state. Right now, Africa is at a standstill. As the states fall apart, they become poorer and poorer because no one invests there. The security for investors is lacking. And because the states become not wealthier but poorer, they can no longer afford to pay for what their citizens demand from them as a minimum performance, namely that there is a policeman here and there, that a teacher is sent to the community who will teach the children, and that the judge does not decide in favor of the highest bidder. Which, by the way, also means that we need to have concepts across the different departments for these disintegrating states, from the Ministry of Defense to the Ministry of Development to the Ministry of Economics, and so on. The difficulty is that the disintegration of a state can happen in as little as a few years, whereas the reconstruction of a state takes decades. And it is probably possible only if there is something like an international monopoly on the use of force, exercised, for instance, by the World Security Council; a monopoly on force that then applies also where the national monopoly on the use of force has collapsed.

MM The Red Army Faction assassinated Alfred Herrhausen, then the chairman of the board of directors at Deutsche Bank, in 1989. Absurdly, during the period prior to the assassination, he had been a prominent advocate of debt forgiveness for Mexico, against the wishes of his own bank. Are visions directed against the market and located beyond considerations of economic pragmatism incapable of realization at a time of globalization and largely open markets?

EE Alfred Herrhausen was not killed because he had advocated debt forgiveness for Mexico, but yes, it does indeed take courage today to advance, on occasion, political arguments against those that are current, that are in currency; but it certainly is necessary.

MM During your active time in politics, you often argued against a political thinking focused on the next elections, and in favor of a thinking that keeps its eyes trained on the next decades. You are critical of the technocratic utopia of modernity. Are there any real utopias left?

EE I don't have any. Perhaps I've never had one. But that doesn't mean that one cannot, or need not, think beyond the next elections. For instance, I was convinced as early as 35 years ago, that is to say, in 1972, that ecological issues would be a dominant subject of the 21st century—which at the time was still pretty far away—and that this subject had to be taken seriously right away, and especially in the long term. Helmut Schmidt thought otherwise; that's why the Green Party exists today. To me the point was that, while I didn't have any sort of ecotopian vision, I knew that this issue would still be around in the lives of my children and grandchildren, and so I had to take it seriously, irrespectively of the next state elections. That's why we already had a pretty green election platform for the 1976 Baden-Württemberg state elections.

MM Is there always a whiff of romanticism in the idea of democracy?

EE I wouldn't call it romanticism, but democracy is, after all, never perfect; it is never at its goal, it is really an ideal notion: that there are forms in which the people govern themselves. That doesn't mean writing democracy off as some sort of romanticism, but rather knowing always that it could be better still.

MM If you look at, for instance, the attempt to create a European constitution and at the two failed referenda: the voter turnout was pretty low. To what extent can one really still speak of popular codetermination in view of such numbers?

EE Well, no one can be forced to go and vote in a referendum or an election. Of course, one has to consider very seriously what can and should be made the object of a referendum. But if, for instance, the European constitution is submitted for a referendum, the political forces that signed the contract creating the constitution really also have to give their everything in that battle, and that, for instance, was not what happened in France, nor in the Netherlands. Referenda on government proposals and popular initiatives really make sense only when they force the political agents, which is to say,

primarily the members of parliament, the ministers, to conduct a discourse over the course of weeks and months that they wouldn't conduct were it not for the referendum. That was probably not clear to everyone.

MM Can participatory democracy be put into a constructive practice?

EE Yes, I believe it can, but it has to be developed in a long-term process. You cannot impose participation on command from the top, it has to grow slowly, over the course of decades.

MM That's very interesting, because that would really argue precisely against New Labour's model, which attempted to impose participation from the top down, and in the end no one participated in it.

EE Participation is something that must be practiced, at first at the community level. Opportunities must be created, and those in responsible offices, for instance the mayors, must play along and have respect for the process, instead of regarding it all…

MM ...as mere symbolism...

EE ...or as an obstacle.

MM When and where does democracy reach its limits?

EE Right now, it reaches its limits primarily where a capital that acts globally is capable of defying any political will, even one that is democratically constituted. But of course there are other limits as well, for instance, in the willingness of people to live democracy and to fill it with life. There will always be people who want to be left alone, who are simply completely apolitical. And there will also always be people who say that the bigwigs do what they want anyway. To that extent, democracy will never be perfect, but that is not an argument against it, very few things in this world are perfect.

MM If you think about Europe, which institution comes to mind?

EE The 27 foreign ministers, who can make decisions only unanimously, and so don't make any decisions.

MM If you close your eyes and think about Europe, which building do you see?

EE The Cathedral of Strasbourg.

MM Is there a European landscape?

EE No.

MM How did your involvement in the war influence the picture you have of Europe, and what is this picture today?

EE Even as a very young soldier, near the end of the war, I thought that a war between Europeans is really a civil war, and from then on, I've really always tried to think as a European.

MM What would you say is Europe's primary conflict today?

EE Europe has to arrive at a clear vision of the social model toward which it wishes to move. Now, by social model I mean not a welfare system, but a model in which the market, civil society, and the state each do what they do best.

MM What should a potential European constitution contain?

EE First and foremost, a delimitation of the respective competencies of the European Union and the nation-states: which decisions are made in Brussels, which in Berlin, or Paris, or Warsaw.

MM What is your vision for the future of Europe?

EE I want a Europe that is capable of acting, one that can take on those functions of the state that have slipped out of the nation-states' hands, primarily that of defining a framework for the markets.

MM What does the European parliament of the future look like?

EE Like the present one, only with greater competencies.

MM If you were permitted to write a single paragraph of the European constitution, what would you put into it?

EE The Council of the European Union, with a double-majority vote as envisaged for the future, can set minimum corporate tax rates. This sentence alone would change the face of Europe.

MM Which point of conflict does Europe *need*?

EE It has always been the case in history that a state or a confederation or union of states has to distinguish itself from others. Europe has to articulate clearly how it differs from the US, or China, or Japan. This need not take the form of a severe conflict, but it must become evident why Europe is different.

Architecture as political practice

(In conversation with Roemer van Toorn, 2009, published in *Conditions*)

ROEMER VAN TOORN: The good news is that politics is on everybody lips, the bad news is that politics is about everything and nothing nowadays. Ten years ago a New York fashion line was born named Theory. Buzzwords of the cultural elite – like the return to the sixties – become the next luxurious Theory Icon project. Facing the crisis of Neoliberalism, Politics has become the next project of intellectual entertainment. Many contemporary artist, curators, philosophers, sociologist, journalists, critics and architects do tap into politics, knowing that they can no longer celebrate their work on its own autistic terms. How do you read this current trend of politics as fashion in architecture?

MARKUS MIESSEN: Suddenly, architects tend to think that they are facing the urgencies of the world. What scares me a bit is when these proclamations are based on the realisation that, without stating them, their faces might no longer furnish the cover of magazines and journals. Recently, even the most formally driven protagonists have declared an interest in politics. Most architects who build are complete nerds in the most positive sense of the word. They know very well how to do certain things but are very bad at doing others. The Renaissance idea of the polymath is long gone and, unfortunately, is no longer on the agenda of most educational institutions, which has resulted in a situation where there are some amazing people who can do perfect drawings and wire-frame models, but when they begin to talk about politics, social frameworks or policy proposal, reminds me of sitting in a pub with your best mate listening to a 70-year old at the bar, debating foreign politics.

RVT: Do you mean that with the disappearance of the *homo-universalis* out of the equation of the role of architecture – in fact all theories of critical architecture as defined by Michael Hays and Peter Eisenman for instance – with their preoccupation for architecture itself, as act of cultural resistance, is

futile?

MM: Cultural resistance – hmm. If you resist, the most important thing is that you know what you are resisting against. There are not many seriously political architecture projects that I can think of. Some of Team 10's projects are amazing in this regard, also the underlying notion of Buckminster Fuller, or, more recently Tomas Saraceno. If you think of Louis Kahn's National Assembly Building in Dhaka, Bangladesh, it has a vision that goes beyond the, mostly central European, idea of 'this architecture project is to build a parliament'. Rather, it builds on the vision of community and forum without being colonial, patronizing or romantic about notions of inclusion/exclusion. What I am slightly scared about is that most practitioners within the field today somehow tend to fall into the default romantic, leftist mode of politics as soon as they consider 'the political'. This is not to say that I would rather not have them base their political ideas left of centre, not at all, but rather that project-making of an 'alternative spatial practice' kind should aim to go beyond small, well-informed audiences from the same cultural milieu, but try to address larger publics without becoming populist. This sounds great, or not so great, but of course, I also haven't come up with the project that can prove this yet.

RVT: Do you agree with Robert Somol and Sarah Whiting[260] that instead of fighting reification with the indexical, the dialectic and hot representation, an alternative genealogy of what they call the Projective – linked to the diagrammatic, the atmospheric and cool performance should be developed? This assertion is more concerned with the visionary as opposed to the commentary, the innovative to the reactionary, addressing emerging issues such as contemporary mass culture instead of the classical language of architecture such as the one of Mies van der Rohe and Le Corbusier.

MM: I would like to try to make a really terrible generalization here: I would argue that, roughly speaking, one can divide the entire field of architecture and urbanism into two kinds of practitioners. Those, who I would call the 'peer

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[260]   Robert Somol & Sarah Whiting. "Notes around the Doppler Effect and other Moods of Modernism", Perspecta 33, The Yale Architectural Journal, 2002.

architect', the individual or collective practice whose main concern is to produce work that will challenge the field of architecture and produce discourse within this field. And secondly those, who I would call the 'external architect', those, who are interested of course in architecture and its physical becoming, but are more interested in the effect that these interventions have vis-à-vis other fields of knowledge, and in particular, what kind of space/time relationships their work generates in terms of users. I have to admit I am much more interested in the latter. Moreover, I would argue that critical attitude always has to be projective, i.e. has to have a constructive attitude with optimism at its core. Without optimism, we can give up straight away. This is something that I tremendously admire about my great colleague and friend Hans Ulrich Obrist. He always attempts to turn any situation into something that is essentially based on optimism at its core. Consequently, any decision-making becomes projective and productive in an energetic way, rather than bitter and simply critical. Critique is not enough. Also, I am not even sure if I would call it critique per se. We are in a way talking about different ways of doing things. That is also why I talked about the idea of the nerd as opposed to the idea of the polymath before. In order to take this conversation forward, we need to be pro-active, we need to put our views, ideas and actual proposals forward, and – most importantly – put our balls on the table. This sounds really testosterone driven, but what I am trying to say is that if things are only ever discussed in terms of discourse or theoretical frameworks, they are of course very difficult to test. The default defense-mode of an architect is therefore always: 'well, at least I am DOING something' (i.e. I am not JUST thinking). I think the binary opposition doesn't help at all, what we need is a middle ground. This is what I am trying to explore through some of my projects.

RVT: What we see – and the Projective is just one of the keywords trying to frame this new approach – is that a younger generation now coming into power – raised in welfare after the Sixties – no longer believes in any critique of ideology. In fact they want to move beyond the critique of ideology. Instead it is all about an approach that can effectively engage in the transformation of reality, that is – as Alejandro Zaero Polo says in this issue "to work politically –

and simultaneously update the core of the discipline." Alejandro's observation is that we have to open up the definition of architecture to the market forces, its technical advances and operate as a critical agent. Alejandro looks for a political discourse of architecture producing effects "…that may actually destabilize power regimes rather than functioning as mere representation of politics, be it of the status quo or its resisting parties". How do you read this sudden interest in politics, a resistance practiced through the discipline (materiality) of architecture itself?

MM: To comment on the issue of ideology, I find it difficult to think along the registers of ideology, because I am a very curious guy, who gets easily excited. This, by default, means that I can take a particular (learned) theory, practice or experienced phenomenon only serious up to the point that I encounter the next, more interesting, smarter or more surprising reality. And I tend to assume that there is something more interesting waiting behind the corner. This is not to say that I do not take my own work serious, but, on the contrary, to say that I take it so serious that I have to know that I should not tale myself too serious. This is, at least from my understanding, the exact opposite of ideology. As to your other question about a sudden interest in politics, most architects use very hermetic language, which makes it very difficult for me to figure out whether they are really onto something or not. Of course it sounds interesting to "destabilise power regimes", but at the end of the day I doubt that this can be achieved with the help of an I-beam and a sheet of glass. What many architects forget is that space is a rather complex matter and that it rules are rarely governed by architecture itself. In case they are, physical barriers tend to be the most simple one to overcome. I would be interested in a constructive dialogue about political space, which in my point of view needs to allow for conflicts to be played out: spatially, socially, economically, and politically. This might sound terrible, but I do believe that the most interesting spatial interventions, constructed by the public rather than architects, occur, where polar opposites clash in a conflictual way. If you look at gated communities, or other extreme forms of space, they are – on the one hand – terrible because they spatialize what our economy and welfare state has for a long time now been like, but at the same time, the urban conflict it

generates usually leads to surprising spatial and social results. It creates a momentum. Now, if one would be able to establish a spatial regime, which was as polarised without being harsh in terms of social realities, I think we would be witnessing an amazing project. Teddy Cruz' work in many ways can be read along those lines, as he is one of the few people I know today, who manage to bridge the gap between an interesting constructive discourse on the one hand and building and constructing reality on the other. To answer your question about resistance practice through architecture itself, I still believe that in order to challenge existing frameworks, the application needs to be more complex and go beyond the physicality and scale of architecture.

RVT: According to me the problem is not to make political architecture, but to make architecture politically. This notion – how to make architecture politically – is not at the heart of Alejandro concern. He never talked, or developed a theory how the architecture discipline effects people; on an imaginary/theatrical, psychological or in fact public manner. He stops short at the level of the (super)functional[261] description of the architecture object itself, simplifying and avoiding the complex, unsure and difficult issue how architecture as disciplinary knowledge in fact produces specific sensations, narratives and new notions of the collective and of the private. You have had an ongoing conversation with Chantal Mouffe over the last year, investigating the potential of a move into a definition of architecture practice as a form of radical democracy, and how dissensus works in operation on the level of architecture (city and building)[262]. What is her definition of the political and how do you *translate* that into your practice?

MM: Chantal has written extensively on the struggle of politics and the radical heart of democratic life, trying to understand why in the kind of society we are living today, which she calls a post-political society, there is an increasing disaffection with democratic institutions. Her main thesis, if I may say so, is that the dimension of the political is something that is linked to the dimension

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[261]   In search of a new Neufert, this time based on dynamic and not static data.
[262]   See interview Markus Miessen with Chantal Mouffe: 'Articulated Power Relations', in: Miessen, M. (ed), The Violence of Participation, Berlin and New York: Sternberg Press, 2007.

of conflict that exists in human societies: an ever-present possibility of antagonism. The reason why I have been very interested in this exchange was to understand how this agonistic struggle could be imagined and tested in spatial settings, frameworks, which would allow to envisage a struggle between different interpretations of shared principles, a conflictual consensus, as Chantal says, a "consensus on the principles, disagreement about their interpretation". Democratic processes should aim to supply an arena in which differences can be confronted. Agonism as a constructive form of political conflict might offer an opportunity for constructive expression of disagreements. From my point of view, this becomes most interesting on an institutional scale, a microcosm that essentially could reflect society at large. The post-political society that Chantal refers to is one, in which we are constantly being told that the partisan model of politics has been overcome, that there is no more Left and Right: there is this kind of consensus at the centre, in which there is really no possibility for an alternative. This is precisely why there is a serious need for the creation of agonistic publics and public spaces. When I say public space, I don't refer to landscape architecture, but to the 'becoming spatial' of political forms of exchange. One could argue that any form of participation is already a form of conflict. In order to participate in an environment or a given situation, one needs to understand the forces of conflict that act upon that environment. How can one move away from romanticised notions of participation into more pro-active, conflictual models of engagement? And architecture is always political, as it is the result of a complex structure of decision-making processes, both public and private in nature. Therefore, architecture is also always produces new social realities as space structures relationships between people, be it in a positive or negative way.

RVT: Do you consider yourself still an architect? You edit books, design exhibitions, develop scenarios, you do research as educator, you organize events, where is architecture?

MM: Weirdly, for the first time in years, architecture as in built space is coming back on my agenda. I had already thought it was gone somehow. The way in

which we, at the studio, approach it though is in a very selected way. This is not supposed to sound arrogant in the sense that we don't need certain jobs, but rather that we do certain things that secure our survival and would rather choose the architectural scale projects carefully, in order to continue to work on what interests. This also means that – in the long run – we can develop a thesis spatially. We are three partners, and each of us has a particular expertise, a strength that, as a team, we can build on. It works remarkably well. At the same time I continue working individually, through research, writing, and commissions in the art world. My work as an editor has somehow driven me back into architecture, which I find very interesting. There is definitely a renewed interest in architecture as a discipline, but that doesn't necessarily have to mean in the act of building per se. I would argue that there is no singular, but rather a multitude of definitions, depending on what one is interested in. I find it quite difficult to define 'the architect', but I can try to define what I understand as something that one might call 'modes of contemporary practice'. A friend and colleague of mine, who is an architect in Austria, now runs workshops for McKinsey Germany, to teach them how to think 'outside the box': how can economists and politicians learn from architects. I am most interested in the political work of spatial practitioners. Projects, where authorships start to blur. We are now working on a project with the Slovenian Government, a cultural project that runs in parallel with Slovenia's presidency of the EU council. In many ways, it presents a sequel to the Lyon Biennial project (The Violence of Participation). It wouldn't have happened without it. The Consul General of Slovenia in New York realized that this outsider's perspective is somewhat interesting. I am working on this project in collaboration with School of Missing Studies (architect Srdjan Jovanovic Weiss and curator Katherine Carl). What we are bringing to the Slovenian government here is essentially curatorial knowledge; what we are doing at the events, and finally in the book, is to question and further the notion of Eastern Europe by starting to overlap voices from an imagined East Coast Europe and the East Coast of the United States. It seems that especially in the US, there is still a very cliché perception of Eastern Europe. We want to start a conversation about cultural and spatial perception of this, to my mind, currently most important part of the Union and how to deal with its

ongoing expansion. One of the hypotheses that the project is based on is the one that I was working with for The Violence of Participation project, namely that Europe for many Europeans seems to be very difficult to grasp, because they do not perceive it, or cannot visualize it, as a space.

RVT: Is the old definition of the discipline outdated, and the classical object outdated?

MM: I don't think it has to do with whether something is outdated or not, because this would assume that we are talking about trends or particular issues that are either en vogue or not. Of course there is this recent phenomenon of 'the political' – everyone should be allowed to make up their mind about it. What is slightly irritating is if people claim it simply because it seems to be an "of the moment' thing. I would suggest that we don't think about issues or ways of practicing as outdated or en vogue, but rather, and this might sound almost hippyesque, that everyone should just be doing what they are most happy doing, what they are interested in and what they think they are best at. In regards to building, I am interested in designing spaces for social, educational and critical exchange of knowledge. In order to facilitate these spatial concerns, involvement in content is crucial. I don't think that designing containers without considering what it holds will enable us to question, challenge or develop any existing modes of operation.

RVT: In the context of projects such as the European Kunsthalle, how did this inform your work? How did it challenge existing modes of operation of musealization; the one of the museum and of art in the public sphere?

MM: From 2005 to 2007, Nikolaus Hirsch, Philipp Misselwitz, Matthias Görlich and I worked on a project titled Spaces of Production for the European Kunsthalle Cologne. The study conceptualized, tested and practically applied a spatial strategy for the European Kunsthalle, an institution in the making. It did not result from purely theoretical considerations but was the result of the activities incorporated into the European Kunsthalle founding phase. The spatial strategy for the European Kunsthalle was the direct result of applied

research – an iterative investigation informed by resonances between theory and practice. What the group tried to develop was an alternative take on how cultural institutions might spatialize in contemporary Europe. There were two major components within this two-year phase: a 30-day symposium, scattered over Cologne's city centre, with ongoing roundtable discussions that investigated the most pressing questions of artistic and cultural discourse in Europe today; the second large-scale project of the European Kunsthalle was the exhibition Models for Tomorrow, which tested some of the investigative research about the potential of post-public spaces in cities. Our work culminated in a concentric ring layout in the city centre of Cologne, which allowed for a 2,5 hour walk along a newly designed urban route, which would take you through 22 exhibition spaces with site specific installations. The point of this exercise was to illustrate that there is a plethora of possibilities for an institution to 'become', other than the default mode of constructing a physical building, which eats up the operative capital of the institution and leaves no resources left for challenging and complex programming of those spaces.

RVT: Capitalism like no other model in history is able to reinvent itself on the basis of crisis. Once it is confronted with its negative outcome[263] it is able to revolutionize its own logic. This creative destruction stands at the heart of an approach that – after severe critique and analysis– believes that you can build counter-worlds from within. According to Mike Davis[264] you can only be against Dubai, there is nothing social to be able to renew from within, the market takes it all, but you see opportunities…

MM: This is an interesting point; especially in terms of the celebration of the market. Dubai can, most certainly, be understood or read as a place that is scary. At the same time, it performs a double-function: it acts as a mirror facing the 'West' with its own, accelerated image. Simultaneously, it is, by many, understood as a test-ground with massive potential. Unfortunately most observers in the West tend to think that this idea of the test-ground refers to

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[263]   See also Shock Doctrine, Naomi Klein
[264]   See Evil Paradises, Dreamworlds of Neoliberalism, edited by Mike Davis and Daniel Bertrand Monk.

reputable architects, most of them from a different generation, living out their formal dreams. But this only holds true for a particular segment of the phenomenon. What is much more interesting right now is the micro-scale: for the first time, things are happening on a smaller, even institutional level. Galleries and other types of public platforms have been popping up over the last three years. Of course there is also the megalomaniac scale, and I think it is here that the celebration of the market that you are referring to becomes most easily detectable: everything sells. Without trying to generalize, I think one can say that the Middle East, and the Gulf region in particular, are currently going through an incredible phase. Not in terms of their construction boom, as any intelligent or not-so-intelligent daily newspaper around the globe has reported on, but because of the societal changes that these regions have been pushed through in the last two decades. Dubai is probably the epitome of those changes, where an entire society has been peacefully forced through modernity in a decade. When European newspapers today report about the shocking realities of Dubai's labour camps, they often forget to talk about another reality alongside it: that within two years the first labour unions were established and that the government has put in place a set of laws that start to hand over rights from the construction companies to the labourers. This is only one of many examples. If a benevolent dictatorship, which Dubai is, can go through such dramatic changes within two years, and essentially emancipate an entire society within a decade, I – as European – am getting slightly worried about the pessimistic debate we are leading in regards to whether or not Turkey should be allowed to join the Union. What architects should be working on are spatial responses to some of those questions rather than remote, arrogant critique. And I would argue that it is mainly an issue of scale. If we look at the Gulf region right now, and in more detail its institutional landscape, and investigate it in relation to the institutional landscape in Europe, we will detect that there is a complete lack of small-scale, public institutions. If we pay attention to the current politics of major universities in the US, especially the Ivy League ones, there is a worrying development regarding the outsourcing of campuses towards the Middle East. What is worrying is not that they are getting involved there in general, but that the average institution that is setting up a new campus simply send a selection of

their home-faculty to teach there; often with no local expertise and employed on rolling contracts, which means that after three to four years they return to their host campus. This entails that these institutions are not interested in building up local knowledge at all but simply in the export of a particular methodology of knowledge and teaching. What needs to happen instead is the slow but steady development and building up of small-scale institutions that create a platform for local exchange and allow for the building up, fostering, and growth of local knowledge. Without trading entire histories for those imported from Europe or the US. I am currently working on two projects in Dubai and Abu Dhabi: one with my office which will develop a spatial model for a small-scale platform, which will present what one might call an anti-thesis to Dubai as we know it, and the other one with the cultural district in Abu Dhabi, where we are attempting to set up a new small-scale school, which is based on some of the premises that I introduced when setting up the Winter School for the Architectural Association in Fall 2007; but no longer through the lens of an institution from Western Europe, but one that is growing locally.

RVT: Do I understand you correct that instead of what Keller Easterling recently called in a lecture during a Masterclass at the Berlage Institute about The Right Story, we have to work with The Wrong Story? After all, Mike Davis and the Financial Times are right, but the critique by Davis and the celebration of bigness by the Financial Times, et cetera don't help us to see what is happening in the faults of the system, let alone allows us to cheat in the mix, surf the creative destruction of turbo-capitalism. In other words: do you act like a pirate? Infiltrate and even celebrate the system to arrive at the other end?

MM: To return to your earlier point about ideology: Mike Davis, in my view, is someone with an ideology. Davis is a good example for ideology being a hindrance rather than something that is being used in a productive manner. I am sure you are familiar with his book Evil Paradises. He continues to talk about privileged forms of human lifes versus the 'underclass'. Of course I can understand where this is coming from, but I am not sure whether the black and white rendering of the world is so helpful in terms of moving things

forward. Also, I am not sure whether he has ever been to Dubai. Obviously it's true that what most so-called 'starchitects' are building there does not really contribute to the 'greater good', but at the same time it accelerates a liberalisation of more general practices within a society such as Dubai. The first time I went to Dubai was in early 2007, and I have been eight times since. It is just simply amazing what has happened there in this period, let alone the last decade. I am not talking about the frantic growth of the city, but the way in which things changed in a societal way, in terms of how institutions are coming alive, in the way that things are opening up. This is something that Davis does not talk about at all. Imagine a country like the US, the UK or any other central European country going through changes that, here, took place over a century, in a decade. It is too easy to just slag it off in terms of capitalism versus the worker without rights. Also, the situation of most construction workers has changed tremendously. There are now unions, which, even a couple of years ago, was unimaginable. What Davis criticizes about other practitioners such as Koolhaas is the typical spiel that one knows from China, where both Koolhaas and Herzog&DeMeuron are being accused off catering for a totalitarian regime. Where I agree in terms of the critique is that it could be more useful to consider smaller scale interventions in which the public can actually engage in, a sort of built manifesto for public congregation or a forum of sorts. This is what we are trying to establish with the AA Winter School Middle East, which I direct in Dubai. Although it is only a short 2-week annual workshop, minute in size, it manages to put into place a platform for critical exchange, which – through its rather hermetic nature – enables locals from the wider region to speak and develop ideas freely. These kinds of efforts are not singular efforts. They tend to happen more and more often, either through galleries or other small public or private institutions. I am a very strong believer in both the necessity and long-term success of such platforms.

RVT: In an earlier conversation, you also talked about alternative forms of entry. Can you please elaborate on this?

MM: What I refer to does not necessarily relate to forms of opposition but

alternative regimes of entry. How does one manage to gain access into fields of knowledge and practices that one is usually not invited to take part in; I don't think that negating will get you anywhere. It's like opposition: very often it is a way for cynics illustrating their impotence. Maybe I am a romantic driven by relentless optimism, but I genuinely believe that change is possible. And in case this does not happen through a client, the client needs to be invented or self-generated. Constructive criticism through offering alternatives is always more fruitful than simply being reactive. There are think tanks and other collectives and groups that have of course been working on outsiders' expertise for a long time – strategic consulting and so forth. One thing that I find quite problematic about conventional consulting though is that it takes almost for granted that things HAVE to change, i.e. if you look at McKinsey, Deloitte, Accenture or PricewaterhouseCoopers, these guys come into a company, city, or even country (like in the case of Bahrain) and tell them how to change things. There is this unspoken rule that if they do not alter existing realities, frameworks and customs, they are not worth the money. I like to think of it more as someone, who in the British parliamentary system would be called a crossbench politician, someone with no ties to the political parties at play. AMO of course have tried that for a while now, sometimes with remarkable success, like in the Europe project, sometimes with less success, not because they haven't done good work, but because it still takes sometime for others to understand the value of the architect's strategic expertise as an outsider that can challenge and critically add to existing institutional, economic, social or governmental frameworks. I am currently working on my PhD, with the working title 'The Uninvited Outsider'. In it, I am trying to deal with some of those questions. How can one propose an alternative practice engaging in spatial projects dealing with social and political realities? What could a polyphonic spatial practice potentially be? Spatial planning is often considered as the management of spatial conflicts. The progressive institution exists as a social and spatial conflict zone, re-negotiating its limits through constant transformation. To deal with conflicts, critical decision-making must evolve. Such decision-making is often pre-supposed as a process whose ultimate goal is that of consensus. My thesis proposes to foster micro-political participation in the production of space and ask the question of how one can

contribute to alien fields of knowledge, professions or discourses from the point of view of "space". It is my believe that through cyclical specialization, the future spatial practitioner could arguably be understood as an outsider who – instead of trying to set up or sustain common denominators of consensus – enters existing situations or projects by deliberately instigating conflictual realities between often-delineated fields of knowledge.

RVT: You are also working on a proposal for a fellowship at Harvard.

MM: Yes, Joseph Grima, Director of Storefront for Art and Architecture in New York, and I are currently working on a project and proposal that sets out to investigate to 'learn from' rather than purely 'acting against'. Energy shortages and climate change are bringing vast infrastructural projects of an unprecedented scale into reality. At the same time, private armies such as Blackwater have become increasingly influential actors on the international stage, with quasi-permanent outposts in almost every continent: fortified enclaves and de facto 'geopolitical islands' are proliferating on every scale from entire regions, such as the West Bank and Gaza, to single buildings, such as the new American Embassy in Baghdad. The project will start by developing an index of contemporary spatial strategies collected not only from contemporary architectural practice and theory, but also from military science, corporate policy, logistical infrastructure, the tourism industry and communications networks. Strategies resulting from the indexing of a substantial number of case studies will be distilled into a diagrammatic list of 'spatial formulae', the equivalent of the genetic segments of contemporary geopolitics. The objective of this index is twofold: first, it is intended to allow for objective analysis of individual strategies, disconnected from their origins, without the risk of moral prejudice induced by their current applications. Secondly, it will constitute a kit of parts that can potentially be recombined to create previously unexplored 'spatial devices', which would ideally manifest in a table of elements of sorts, through which new alloys can be formed. The ultimate objective of this list is to test possible applications and recombination of these strategies in real-world scenarios. A checklist of 'test situations' will be created to learn from existing conditions and operations through critical

reflection, analysis and the development of a set of projective tools. By testing the index of strategies against a list of contemporary geopolitical flashpoints, a series of hypothetical – and potentially fertile – design strategies will be developed.

RVT: What becomes clearer than ever to me is that reality demands a theory; a new vision beyond the one of neo-liberalism. The excellent news is that the United States is increasingly exposed and weakened on the financial markets. The current economic crisis acts as capitalism's moment of truth: it suddenly unveils the ordinary fetishized real structure of society. The bad news is that both the Left and the Right in our 21st century have no theory left. Reality as found is now all that counts, and functions as the perfect alibi to get away with murder. This addiction to extreme realism, both on the Left (disenchanted) and Right (acting big), demands a new theory according to me. Excavating and curating the real, while advocating relational aesthetics and antagonistic platforms is essential – as you have shown in your work, but is that enough? Shouldn't you also make your "hidden" ideology – why you choose certain topics and for whom you fight, create certain and not other freedoms – more explicit? Antagonism is essential, but don't you think that your principles of consensus should be clearly stated too?

MM: Speculative theories are the basis to develop projective matter. Most interesting projects start with a hypothesis that needs or wants to be tested. Sometime this can be achieved in a spatial or physical way, other times this can be developed through a series of curatorial test-beds first. What we attempt to do with the Dubai Winter School is to inquire how certain local frameworks and structures work. The last Winter School problematized the issue of the labour camps. But rather than simply blacklisting the practices that are at play, we tried to understand how some of the mechanisms function, how decisions are being made and how those realities can be altered in the future. My office also started talking to local developers and architects that are involved in the construction of the camps. We are now at a point where we might be able to intervene by proposing spatial alternatives, but things simply take time and lots of effort. At a similar scale, we are

investigating the potentials through a Vietnamese NGO to get involved in a large-scale social housing scheme in Hanoi. At this moment in time, we are doing consulting on the project, but there is now a possibility to take this to the next level. These projects, at their core, are also educational projects in many ways. You are coming into the project from the outside and first of all have to unlearn your collaborators certain status quo practices, which they take for granted.

RVT: Nowadays more and more designers are fearful of placing a particular antagonism or alternative above another for fear of choosing a faulty cause as already happened with Modernism, Communism and Maoism. They embrace pluralism and the endless relations that an intelligent system can generate. The danger is that their search for difference or the stimulation of the unpredictable is elevated to an absolute law, and the possibility of difference is fetishized. Many children of the Hippies generation produce nothing but an advanced form of entertainment, precisely because they in no way express their support for or opposition to anything, except a desire to be self-organizing and interactive. As we both know the feast of endless differences no longer guarantees liberation. Present-day capitalism has bid farewell to totalizing regulation. Digital capitalism has even turned Deleuzian. The carnivalesque character of everyday life now even guarantees high profits through the permanent revolution of its own order. In what sense could a political practice in architecture be different from the current condition I just described?

MM: I am very fond of Chantal's proposal to think both 'with and against Schmitt', referring to the political theorist and German jurist Carl Schmitt. This is a good example for how to operate: to no longer discuss and foster endless differences but to also move forward in a constructive manner. I think optimism and a constructive ambition is generally the way to go. You are totally right, to simply fetishize the possibility of difference, to crave for conflict and antagonism for the sake of it, does neither produce meaningful debate nor praxis. I really believe that architecture, as outlines by Volume a while ago, needs to go beyond itself. To be more precise, this could entail that

instead of just trying to react against, we actually try to find the weak point of the system under debate, and try to work on them, not in the sense of a Modernist problem solving or social engineering exercise, but by altering and tweaking some of the variables at play. Further, I think there is a kind of naivety at play when some people talk about opposing capitalism. This also holds true for capitalism within architecture. To just say developers are the bad guys, is not only defensive but also doesn't propel neither discourse nor practice. I would be interested, for example, on working with a large-scale developer in order to rethink housing for the elderly, a project that we have been working on for a while now through a think tank at the Serpentine Gallery. One of the more general problems we are facing today is that most practitioners are no longer willing to take risks. This comes a long with a fear of making decisions, which – together – is a lethal cocktail. Capitalism of course is the one system that manages to identify, embrace and embody – vis-à-vis its own tactics – any other system and/or opposing force and critique rapidly. This is one of the reasons, I believe, why our own positions, i.e. yours and mine, are very endangered. We could probably quite easily come up with more or less smart frameworks for alternative programmes, but one must be aware that they get eaten up very quickly by someone else, and I would strongly recommend to make sure that one is in touch with that 'someone else' rather than letting those forces hijack ones idea and misinterpret, develop and sell them themselves.

RVT: What Chantal Mouffe, Jacques Rancière and we both agree about is that the political only emerges when disagreement (conflict) is part of the system you built. A certain foreignness or even violence is enacted to invite the user/viewer to take part. Through disagreement within a system – not opposition or critique – a final answer is avoided and agonism realized. What are the advantages of such an open system? And what are the different (aesthetic and spatial) techniques you have used in publications, exhibitions, buildings and alike?

MM: We are currently working on a project with Hans Ulrich Obrist in the Swiss Alps. The aim is to generate a cultural centre, which is modeled around

his own private archive [as featured in the last issue of VOLUME: a high-alpine cultural centre that consists of a library archive of 20,000 books, video recordings, and other media, as well as a residency programme for artists, a small exhibition space, a number of overnight facilities as well as a small Summer Academy] as a central resource for conversation and exchange. For us, the social implications of this 'architecture' are most evident in two questions: first, how one can question the organizational structure of libraries in the sense that it produces surprising results and relationships between content, and secondly, how the spatial structure of the centre can produce a blueprint for social interaction, an environment for people to meet, to seclude themselves while still being part of a larger community, how conflicts can be played out. For us, this is where architecture can have an impact on small-scale societal structures.

RVT: In your works – books, diagrams and projects – I sense certain calmness, in other words a certain distance from the material (content) you mediate. You could call this the relative autonomy of your aesthetics. On the one hand this has to do with the pragmatics of reading; the accessibility of information. But that is not what I like to talk about now. There is certain calmness, silence, even emptiness present in your work. No MTV wildness, or porno populism we know from AMO's publication Content, but a downplayed roughness of simplicity and informality. Could you explain why you use these aesthetic regimes, or why this relative autonomy needs to be there? Or in other words what kind of antagonistic space is being created through this relative autonomy of silence and poetic emptiness in your work?

MM: There is something about involvement; if you get too close, you cannot stay objective I think. Many leftist projects face this problem: they interpret participation as a means of becoming a service provider for a democratic community. I have recently been thinking about this a lot. It is strange to me that a particular politics seems to be understood always in tandem with a particular style. It's almost as if, in order to come across as serious, you also need to follow a certain protocol in terms of how to do things, even to the extend of how you look. It's like choosing between Carhartt and Martin

Margiela. There seems to be a consensus within the critical left in architecture and urbanism that dislikes the idea of doing serious work and still having fun, or, indeed, trying to look like you care. To give some examples in terms of the book I have worked on collaboratively in the recent past, we have always tried to combine the super-serious with the slightly mirthful and geeky. My ultimate nightmare would be an academic book, which also has a certain claim that comes with it. I think it always helps to loose control of ones primary expertise at some point. One has to be able to let go, otherwise the nerdy turns against you. With 'Did Someone Say Participate – An Atlas of Spatial Practice', Shumon Basar and I, together with graphic designers Åbäke conceived a book, which deliberately looks like a children's schoolbook. We were very fond of the kind of visual naivety that an object like this suggests – at the same time, the content is very serious of course. I am not sure how many readers actually got the joke on the cover, where the rearranged global map spells out 'the future is inside' through the placement of islands, states, and resized continents. For the book on the Middle East that Shumon and I, together with Bidoun's Antonia Carver, edited for the Dubai-based think tank Moutamarat, we deliberately chose a kind of 'dirty paper'. Where we come from this is obviously nothing special and amongst the slightly more chic of us almost passé; however, in the Emirates, where everything that seemingly carries content has to be super-glossy in order to withstand the crowds, the book managed to create a different kind of awareness, especially in terms auf audiences and the shifting of a more conservative target group. It is neither punk nor MTV and still manages to tap, generates and plays with fashion, like Purple magazine, for example. The language is sometimes essayistic, sometimes journalistic, sometimes conversation-like and sometimes visual only. In 'The Violence of Participation', Zak Kyes and I scattered sketches of the Lyon Biennial audience throughout the book, on the one hand to give it a rhythm, on the other to intersperse the seriousness of the conversations with the liberating straightforwardness of the drawings. I believe that these aesthetic techniques – the organization of form, fonts and paper – are essential go arrive at a radical democracy in the book. My latest book, East Coast Europe, which will be published in late October, will take this a step further and literally just be a textbook, but, even with a small budget, be mass

produced by a small novel-type printer in Denmark. Through this, we will be able to achieve maximum distribution at minimal cost, plus cheap airport-like novel aesthetic, which means that readers will probably not treat it with too much respect, but rather as an everyday item that will be used, maybe used again, and then thrown away.

RVT: For many the theory of Mouffe and Rancière motivates an art and architecture of pure activism. According to me such an approach runs the risk celebrating activism only, without motivating or stating any alternative political direction. Disagreement (conflict) is no longer a tool but becomes an end in itself, with the risk of becoming anecdotic and sentimental. Questioning positions is not enough according to me. How do you see this? Shouldn't we also address certain urgencies, come up with alternative solutions? Break the museum as temple, destroy the gated community, and reinvent the public sphere, work on new forms of welfare, as we will research at the Berlage Institute[265] after neoliberals' bankruptcy.

MM: I think the question of urgency is always a misleading one, because it assumes that certain things have value and others do not. I find it quite difficult to draw the line here. I guess the only hopefully meaningful thing that I can say about this is that, personally, I am very interested in a particular discussion about urban and social frameworks in relation to architectural scale space, how that can affect the design process and the way in which institutions might function. One of the reasons why many things in this world exist as they are is because of its spatial context. This holds true even for institutional procedures, habits and practices. From my point of view, a smart architecture does not deliver a sexy rendering, but a complex operational and curatorial procedure. I totally agree with you that questioning positions is not enough. One of the major problems of built architecture is that it is always delayed. The timeframe between initial becoming and realization of a project is so immense that many changes can and will happen in the meantime. Going back to the example of Dubai, proposing something now, might mean

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[265]   See also www.berlage-institute.nl

that in two years from now the political framework has changed entirely. However, this shouldn't be a reason to give up, but rather to pursue ones objectives in the most productive and optimistic manner. We hope to be able to deliver something that can be interrogated and discussed as to its failure or success very soon.

A Flat Discourse

(In conversation with Eyal Weizman, 2005, published in *Bidoun*)

MARKUS MIESSEN: Eyal, your work allows for an alternative – architectural – reading of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In your publication 'A Civilian Occupation' as well as the Territories exhibition in Berlin's Kunst-Werke, you have explored the spatial dimension of the occupation in the West Bank. In a series of articles and studies for openDemocracy, you have argued that a coherent mental map of the conflict must include a three dimensional perspective and the introduction of the vertical dimension into geo-politics. Could you explain how verticality has become an important factor?

EYAL WEIZMAN: The "Politics of Verticality" is the process that fragmented the territory of the West Bank into a large multiplicity of alienated ethno-national enclaves not only in surface but also in volume. Since the 1993 Oslo Accord, the territorial arrangement of the West Bank limited Palestinians into enclosed territorial islands with Israel controlling the sub-terrain – in form of control of the aquifers – under them as well as the electromagnetic fields and the airspace above them. In this strange logic of partition the horizon formed a national boundary by separating air from ground and the terrain from the sub-terrain. Furthermore and following this logic – the complete fragmentation of the terrain necessitated efforts to physically connect between both types of enclaves – colonies and Palestinian cities and villages. Since this could not have been achieved on a single surface – it was performed within a volume. Some Israeli roads and infrastructure connect colonies while spanning over Palestinian lands as bridges or diving in tunnels underneath them. In these conditions – known since the time of the 1947 partition plan as "the kissing points" Palestine could be above Israel and vise versa. Currently, the American promise for Palestinian contiguity is based upon the assumption that a similar series of tunnels and bridges could achieve them. This is what the writer Meron Benvenisti calls the crashing of „three dimensional space into six – three Israeli and three Palestinian".

In this respect the intensity of the conflict seemed to have created a new type of political space, perhaps even a new way of imagining and practicing territoriality. The Politics of Verticality is as much a product of a constructed political imagination as it is physical practice that involves architecture and planning. It fuses ideological and religious belief in the sacredness of the historical sub-surface and the transcendental value of topographical latitude and the heavens -- together with a strategic logic of absolute territorial control. By fusing messianic beliefs with military strategy it is the inevitable territorial product of Zionism itself.

On the other hand the creation of this conceptual and physical space means that the politics of separation is always going to face a „spatial contradiction". Spatial contradictions are a term coined by Henri Lefebvre in relation to conceptual paradoxes embodied in spatial terms. Each one of the territorial layers – the sub-terrain, the surface and the airspace embodies another logic of partition. The hydrological cycle moves across and disregards historical borders and seize fire lines. So does the logic of electromagnetic frequencies and the airspace. All attempts to partition this land along simple lines, have faced thus spatial contradictions. The layers simply do not overlap and the terrain is too fragmented with the facts that have been placed upon it.

With the technologies and infrastructure required for the physical segregation of Israelis from Palestinians, it appeared as if this most complex geo-political problem of the Middle East has gone through a scale-shift and took on architectural dimensions. The West Bank appears to have been re-assembled in a way resembling a complex building. Regional politics was conducted, as one would design a shopping mall or an international airport.
Considering this – a viable way of managing this conflict may not lay within the realm of design – that is the logic of partition is doom to fail. Instead of a further play of identity-politics in complex geometry, a non-territorial approach based on cooperation, mutuality, and equality must lead to a politics of space sharing.

MM: Since 1967, the landscape itself was turned into the stage of debate. In what way did the new territorial relationship and its representation affect the way the conflict was waged?

EW: Traditional geopolitics is conducted as a flat discourse. It largely ignores the vertical dimension and tends to look across rather than cut through the landscape. This arrives from the cartographic imagination inherited from the military and political spatialities of the modern state. Since both politics and law perceive the terrain and other spaces only through the tools available to them [two dimensional maps and plans], borders are imagined as simple lines.

The Politics of Verticality entails the re-visioning of existing cartographic techniques. It has by now become the common practice of exercising territorial control as well as the dimension within which territorial solutions are sought by those trying to find lines of partitions. Consider the way in which Bill Clinton sincerely believed in a vertical solution to the problem of partitioning the Temple Mount. According to his proposal Palestinians would get the Harram a Sharif and the mosques and Israelis would control the archaeology underneath them. (with a meter and a half of UN layers in between)

The Israeli government decision to redeploy from the Gaza strip and dismantle the matrix of Jewish colonies and military bases there presents as well a new form of "territorial compromise": the ground will be handed back to the control of the Palestinian authority, and the occupation will be transferred to platforms crusing the skies. Indeed, Sharon's plans for pullout from Gaza do not include plans for the IDF redeployment from its territorial air and water spaces.

MM: The Israeli Knesset refused to obey the verdict of the International Court of Justice. How do you think the United Nations or the international community should intervene in the conflict?

EW: I think that the international opposition to the wall has had – perhaps for the first time in the history of the conflict – some positive achievements. The wall has given international and local opposition a clear target. If the images of mundane, almost benign, red-roofed suburban settlements were not shocking enough to mobilize a global opposition, the images of barbed wire fences and especially those of high concrete walls resonated strongly within a western historical imagination still dealing with unresolved memories of its colonial and world-war legacies. You know that the current path of the wall is very different then the one that was initially proposed. Small victories in rerouting of various parts are definitively far from being enough, and in some cases created even damage – but the international community has demonstrated that with concentrated action some facts on the ground could be changed.

In fact what was effective and must continue is a truly global campaign waged via the UN, the Israeli High Court of Justice, local and international NGOs, the International Court of Justice, the media and scores of foreign governments. It deflected the gestural sweep of the lines drawn in Sharon's plan, and currently it is likely to cancel the implementation of the eastern part of the barrier altogether. When I examine changes in the path of the wall - what was made very clear is that micro-political action is sometimes as effective as traditional state-political action. All along the path of the wall, the folds, deformations, stretches, wrinkles and bends in the barrier graph the local legal political conflicts in its vicinity and mean that more pressure on Israel is necessary and effective. Simultaneously one must not only act against the path of the wall but against its very concept – but these struggles must be joint together and continuous pressure on all levels must be maintained.

However – we must as well remember that the wall is not a single object. It was never able to translate the contradictory forces on its path into a linear geometry. From being a singular, contiguous object it shredded into separate fragments. Like splintered worms that take on renewed life - the fragments of the wall and its barriers started to curl around isolated blocks of colonies, Palestinian towns and along the roads connecting them. Each of the separate

shards, termed "depth barriers" by the Ministry of Defence, contained a similar sequence of fortifications to that of the main part of the wall. Paradoxically, in some cases the more the international community managed to place the linear component of the wall closer to the international border of the Green Line, the more depth barriers were planned and built on its eastern side, the more fragmented the terrain has become, and the more Palestinian life was disrupted. These depth barriers are as effective in disturbing life on the ground as the main barrier but are unfortunately politically invisible.

MM: Do you think that - in the context of settlements and walls - as well as in terms of your research on urban warfare, architects have committed crimes? Should some of them in fact be held accountable?

EW: Indeed. "Land Grab", the human rights report I work on with B'tselem, describes work of architects and planners conducted in violation of human right and international humanitarian law. When planners and architects participate with large-scale policies of aggression, control, and segregation, when they make particular design decisions that are explicitly meant to disturb, suppress and foster racism, a crime is being committed. The International Humanitarian Law is designed to address military personnel or politicians in executive positions. But in the frictions of a rapidly developing and urbanizing world, human rights are increasingly violated by the organization of space. Just like a gun or a tank, mundane building matter is abused as weapons with which crimes are committed.

The nature of the planning action concerned is twofold, including both acts of strategic form making: construction and destruction. "Design by destruction" increasingly involves planners as military personnel in reshaping the battleground to meet strategic objectives. And urban warfare increasingly comes to resemble urban planning. With the manipulation of key infrastructure – just like planners in reverse – the military seeks to control an urban area by disrupting its various flows. Bombing campaigns rely on architects and planners to recommend buildings and infrastructure as potential targets. The grid of roads, the width of an army bulldozer, that was carved through the

fabric of the refugee camp of reveals another planners' specialty - the replacement of an existing circulation system with another - one more accessible to the occupying army and easier to control popular unrest in.

However never has an architect faced international justice. This does not change the fact that the application of international law as the most severe method of architectural critique has never been more urgent. The legal basis for indicting architects or planners already exists, but architecture and planning intersects with the strategies of contemporary conflicts in ways that the semantics of international law are still ill equipped to describe.

MM: Your exhibition and publication "A Civilian Occupation" was banned by the Israel Association of United Architects [IAUA] in 2002. This caused a major uproar in Israel and somewhat in the international architectural community. Now three years later, did the thinking change on the part of the IAUA?

EW: Recently the IAUA decided to react to the continuing debate around *Civilian Occupation* by dedicating its 2005 annual conference to the relation between architecture and politics. They invited all of the participants of the banned exhibition to debate with the association's members, along with Shimon Peres and the Minister of Education, who inaugurated each one of the two days of the conference, and Yossi Beilin, initiator of the Oslo negotiations. I refused to take part, but other participants came and there was a somewhat heated debate. At the end, the director of the association, publicly retracted the banning and apologized for it, and accepted the validity of the project's findings. I find his retraction candid and honest, but unfortunately there were some members who said "now that we have finished talking about politics, can we finally go back to talking about architecture?" This statement embodied the attitude of some in the association and indeed in the Israeli architectural community who wanted to use the conference in order to get the issue out of the way and return to the insular and autonomous architectural discourse that was prevalent in Israel before.

MM: Where is the research going now?

EW: I am currently involved with discussion with the Palestinian Authority regarding the evacuation of colonies of the Gaza strip. The problem concerns the reuse of colonial architecture in post-colonial time. This – assuming Israel will have left some of the structures. The dangers, as far as some Palestinian colleagues see it, are that the re-inhabitation of the colonies may reproduce or at least mimic some of the colonial power relations in space. If the homes of the colonies were to be left standing, they may be transformed into "luxury" suburbs, only few minutes drive from the congested urban centres. In this scenario the systems of fences and the abundance of surveillance technology around the colonies would facilitate their transformation into Palestinian gated communities, reproducing the hostility and alienation the majority of Palestinians have already developed towards these structures.

Our work concentrates on the idea of recycling this architecture – using the structures for a variety of very different ends than what they was designed to perform. This could perhaps be understood as a similar method to that of the Situationist "Détournement". Through a complete break of the prescribed relation between space and its use, one could assist the subversion of the existing spatial power. Moreover, by studying the way the geography of the colonies worked one could abuse its otherwise destructive potential in a way that benefits from its intrinsic qualities. The fact that colonies, in the West Bank but as well in Gaza are independent secluded "islands" connected to each other in a network of sightlines, roads and infrastructure that Jeff Halper called "the matrix of control" may allow for new functions to "abuse" and subvert their potential connectivity and achieve other ends.

We are asking ourselves whether the matrix of control could turn into a matrix of interconnected public institutions of hospitals, schools and universities? Could the small-scale single-family homes be converted, extended or extruded? Would the grass lawns turn into small agricultural lots? One can surely understand those Palestinians who wish to remove the colonies that represented and put

into practice their oppression, but what could be more of a victory for their resistance and perseverance than turning places of oppression into sites of renewed life?

In discussion, two small and rather isolated colonies [Morag and Netzarim] were already designated as public functions: Morag to a university between the southern twin cities of Khan Yunis and Rafah, and Netzarim as an institute for contemporary culture. The way in which a colony of 25 single family homes organized in a circular layout around a core of few public buildings could be converted into a university, with its libraries, offices, laboratories and class-rooms is a great architectural challenge. In this respect recycling the relics of the occupation may prove more environmentally and economically sane, as well as more architecturally challenging, than their direct re-inhabitation or destruction. Given that colonies could be read as the end-condition of suburban sprawl, on more general terms the recycling of the structure of the colonies may raise some subversive thoughts about our own suburbia and its potential appropriation.

Support Participation

(In conversation with Céline Condorelli, 2010, published in *Kaleidoscope*)

MARKUS MIESSEN: It's interesting and surprising, we are both simultaneously ending a specific part of our life in practice: you are presenting the last phase of the 'Support Structure' project with Gavin Wade, while I am launching the third and final part of my participation trilogy. Why are things coming to an end, and – as an end is always also a beginning of something else – what's next?

CELINE CONDORELLI: Perhaps there is a question of duration of practice here: we have been doing what we are doing for about 10 years by now, and this may amount to the completion of a particular project and its corresponding set of practices. This doesn't need to be followed by a drastic break, but perhaps it is enough time dedicated to making a point, that would allow for something beyond to occur, being able to take a certain amount of knowledge of experience in our luggage, but in a lighter way. I feel very much that my work will probably always be inscribed within notions of supporting structures, but that I may not need to state that or explain why that is as much as I have done until now, and – hopefully – can start proceeding beyond all the efforts involved in establishing a particular idea, or position.

MM: I fully agree. It won't be a break, but will allow for a productive distance of reflection that generates corresponding sets of projects, practices and knowledge. If there is 'support' and 'participation', could it be useful to start to think through terms of non-support and non-participation and what their consequences may be?

CC: Defining things through their opposite is a useful exercise, especially when faced with such malleable, and fuzzy concepts as support and participation. Have you found yourself saturated with ideas of participation or do you feel you reached the end of its possibilities, at least conceptually?

MM: For me, dealing with and thinking through and beyond romantic notions of participation as a pluralistic notion was in many ways like dealing with and overcoming a father complex. Maybe it has to do with the specific time that I grew up in architecture, which were the late 90s and early 00s, overwhelmed by a discourse around two buzzwords: participation and sustainability. By now, I have had enough of the participation nostalgia, really. I have rarely seen it working. I think we like to see ourselves in the context of seemingly smart systems and political theories, but – honestly – when do they work out in a productive and self-reflexive manner? I strongly suggest to any Marxist theorist that he or she should walk across the DMZ into North Korea or spend some time as journalist in Cuba. They may start to think otherwise. This is not to argue against participatory structures per se, but that they may have to be rethought in terms of a realistic rendering of a pro-active and targeted individual involvement rather than simply inviting other authors to the table. Could it be productive to think through the opposites for a change?

CC: I have been toying with the idea that the opposite of support may be resistance. Both movements may be directed towards similar aims, but they go about it in very different ways: while in support the emphasis is put on the positive, and therefore constructive direction towards change over everything else, resistance is an act of force-in-defense; they are both important political actions, yet driven by polar opposites. But of course I use this as a provocation.

MM: What, more precisely, constitutes your practice of support?

CC: Support, I think, allows us to think towards an equalizing movement, and this is perhaps its most important aspect. What I mean by this is that it is a carrier for inter-dependency as a form of re-equalization. The proposition of support, therefore, is to transform what we produce by revisiting the way we do things, our modes of production, and by rethinking the very processes through which we operate, through the practice of supporting. Defining a relationship such as support aims at a different category for action – it is concerned with how the political is staged and performed, the inherent

ideology of frames and display, organizational forms, appropriation, dependency and temporariness. I work, broadly speaking, with art and architecture, and combine a number of approaches from developing possibilities for 'supporting' – the work of others, forms of political imaginary, existing and fictional realities – to broader inquiries into forms of commonality and discursive sites, resulting in projects merging exhibition, politics, fiction, public space and whatever else feels urgent at the time. I think perhaps this book is a good example of what you mean: *Support Structures* is a manual, but in truth it is also a compendium. It gathers a broad variety of essays, images and small works that address the notion of support in relationship to what we do in cultural practice. The book as a whole is also the culmination of the collaborative project entitled 'Support Structure', undertaken by myself with Gavin Wade between 2003-2009.

MM: Do you understand support as necessarily harmonic and/or similar to the notion of a helpful hand, and therefore always 'supportive'?

CC: I think support appears to be so, but much like a helpful hand, it might not help you towards your own ends – so that the first question that needs to be asked is: supportive of what? You see, what part of this project on support seeks to open up, is *how* practices of support take place, and to focus our attention towards what is often considered a subaltern, insignificant or simply positive set of actions. The deployment of support is an operation, and as such is politics-specific, whatever these politics may be, desirable, dangerous, and utopian.

MM: Does support need to be in consensus with what it supports?

CC: Let me turn the question to you: do you consider that participation is the condition for any democratic possibility? Is participation in the ways that you have witnessed and analyzed an actual process of involvement of those who were previously excluded? Or can it also be used as a form of manipulation, or distraction from the reality of a decision making process?

MM: Participation can but needn't necessarily be a manifestation of democratic involvement. What I have attempted in the latest book is to turn the notion of participation around, away from concepts of all-inclusive decision-making and round-table-like invitations towards a more pro-active and self-initiated means of involvement, by which individuals or groups force themselves into contexts, frameworks and discourses that they have not necessarily been invited to take part in. It is a means of understanding practice as praxis, a pro-active endeavor in which there is a direct relationship between research, political ambition, forceful believe, and propositional thinking towards an actualization of change. Do you understand your publication as an accumulation of research through practice?

CC: 'Support Structures' was produced by and constitutes the last phase of the 'Support Structure' project, and includes its corresponding set of works, actions, and manifestations. Therefore, the ten phases of 'Support Structure' do form a process of investigation, and as you say an accumulation of practice-based research into the methodologies and conceptual devices offered by thinking through what a support structure could or might be. The cumulative parts of this project form a research archive, with a set of terms and possibilities for thinking through support outside the traditional terms that are assigned to it.

MM: In this context, support is understood as pro-active and self-driven format, similar to my rendering of participation as first person singular. Your book opens up its contents in the form and format of a discursive site. Why a book?

CC: This is indeed how I felt it needed to be set up: a discursive site in the shape of a book, in order to create the first reader, a compendium, a supporting structure for the creation of support's discourse, which I feel had been missing until now. It had to be a book because through the process of developing a project like Support Structure, what we were missing most acutely was background materials, texts, essays that would open theoretically

what we were doing and was emerging around us practically. A book is what I thought would allow us to revive, not a subject in the taxonomic sense, but a particular way of engaging in and with subjects in a desire towards emancipation – in total seriousness, earnestness even. But you have produced more books than I have. Can you tell me how working in and on books has shaped your practice, and what you think it allows?

MM: Yes, there has been an interest and – to a certain extend – obsession in and around books for a long time. I understand the development and production of books as a vital and parallel practice of investigation and inquiry, which constantly feeds into and sometimes generates other projects. They can, on the one hand, be understood as carriers, machines and distributors of knowledge, on the other, they generate entry points, backdrops and new lineages for something that is yet to come: they are door openers and often indicators that – as Hans Ulrich would say when he quotes Douglas Gordon – it has only just begun. I do not understand books as something precious and final, but something that needs to be scrutinized, worked with and learned from. Books were also the starting point for my interest in archives as productive spaces of knowledge, zones of conflict from which new realities can emerge. With nOffice, we are working on a series of projects in this regard, concentrating on and, in a way, building an expertise regarding the spatial typologies of archives, libraries and hubs as cultural centers, which can be bastardized into new spatial and productive configurations. Do you believe that the physical format of the book will remain as is or will have to deal also with an increasing change from physical to virtual storage? Where are we in terms of other content formats of interest?

CC: I remember asking someone that question a few years ago, when Skype was booming and Google was like the oracle, and I just couldn't leave Wikipedia alone. He then replied pointing out that one of the most successful Internet sites had been the steadily growing Amazon, used to, well, buy and sell books. I just love how reality always exceeds our expectations of it, and how clueless we are in predicting the consequences of any technological advances. What do you think the future of books is?

MM: Books will always be books. And yes, sure, other forms of knowledge transfer have always existed, will continue to emerge, and will probably change the way and speed in which we communicate. There is something really handy about tools such as smartphones as well as applications that allow you to read work virtually. But it is heavily connected to issues of anticipated duration, speed of reading, and content: news-applications work brilliantly in this way. Nevertheless, there is something about the physicality of books that cannot be negated, both in terms of how one can work with them, and in the way in which they create a physical archive that one can engage with in space.

A Refusal of Obligatory Extravagances

(In conversation with Rem Koolhaas, 2006, published in *Bidoun*)

In its June 2006 issue, Vanity Fair devoted 20 full pages to what they called the emirate jewel on the Persian Gulf. In bold letters, the cover communicated "Dubai: The richest, craziest, biggest little kingdom on earth". While the city-emirate's strategic location between Europe and the Indian subcontinent guarantees constant influx of business trekkers, Dubai is growing at phenomenal speed. One in six of the world's cranes are here. An estimated 500 skyscrapers are currently under construction. Such magnitude does not only attract those that know how to turn Dollars quickly, but, most recently, the culturally savvy Dutch architect and Pritzker Prize winner Rem Koolhaas, who, together with his Office for Metropolitan Architecture (OMA) and its research studio and think tank AMO have recently started a number of investigations and projects in the Middle East, including two master plans in Dubai, a master plan in Kuwait and one in Ras-Al-Khaimah. To accommodate a wide range and diversity of projects throughout the world, OMA maintains offices in Europe (OMA Rotterdam), North America (OMA New York) and Asia (OMA Beijing). OMA Beijing is responsible for OMA's largest project to date, the 575,000 m2 China Central Television Headquarters CCTV and Television Cultural Center TVCC, currently under construction in Beijing and due for completion in 2008.

In July 2006, one day after the large-scale evacuation of U.S. and European civilians from Lebanon's urban areas started, I met up with Rem Koolhaas to discuss the future of Middle Eastern cities, the "kinetic elite" and the changing nature and role of spatial practitioners acting upon the global production of space. Here, Koolhaas for the first time in public talks about OMA's third brand, "Generics".

MARKUS MIESSEN: Rem, you have recently been involved in a growing number of master-planning projects in the Middle East. Can you tell me about

the nature of those projects?

REM KOOLHAAS: We were, for the first time, invited to the Middle East by Dubai Properties to participate in a competition for a project in a central district called Business Bay. This was the first occasion to visit the Middle East in August 2005. That visit really triggered a whole series of considerations. It started with the realization that there was an ongoing effort to downgrade Dubai and, by implication, the Middle East in general. Similar to how Singapore had been ridiculed in the previous decades. Not Disneyland death penalty but Disneyland boredom. And, just out of contrariness to that, I began to take it very seriously. We actively started to pursue a number of opportunities in such a way that we would get a real sense of the Middle East and the Persian Gulf. We are now working in Kuwait on the completion of a project that started as a shopping centre and that will now turn into a significant part of the city. In Qatar, where we are working on a new campus where Arata Isozaki has also done a number of buildings, we are doing a library and headquarter of the Qatar Foundation. It is not really a masterplan, but an architectural intervention. We are also doing the Renaissance [a 300-meter-high revolving building conceived for an island in the center of Dubai] but we do it in a different site. We lost the competition to Zaha [Hadid], but we are doing it somewhere else.

MM: So it's happening? Is it still a revolving slab?

RK: Yes, it's happening. And it's actually really interesting, because it is based on some unattractive masterplan. Zaha is going there now, but now ours [OMA's design] moved over to a beautiful point, where all the motorways convert. It is in a central reserve, where, now that everything moves around it, it doesn't have to move anymore. And it is very close to a bird reserve, so we have a very beautiful image where you see it, against the backdrop of flamingos. So the Renaissance is happening, then we are doing a masterplan in that same business bay and at Dubai Land [an entertainment complex under development which is expected to see completion some time between 2006 and 2007], and we are doing two buildings for Porsche, Porsche One

and Porsche Two. We started looking at a masterplan of somebody else, Halcrow [British, globally operating consultant engineering firm]. It's very interesting: a country like this is not very big, but it has a number of invisible masterplans everywhere and those masterplans are the products of Australian and British offices, one of them is called Halcrow and it is creating long and unsustainable things. The client asked us to look at the whole thing. That is almost an entire Emirate. We looked at the statistics of how, in Dubai, advertising is only using something like 21% of the human race in terms of input. So there is an incredible irony, because there is an unbelievable amount of pink-skin advertising while the city is getting darker and darker.

MM:Is the issue of demographics something that you have been investigating for the Dutch pavilion at this year's Venice Biennale?

RK: In Rotterdam we are currently working on a documentation of the entire transformation of this coastline. So in a way, it is an accelerated engagement with the entire territory of the Middle East. What we are also trying to do for Venice is to really analyze that office [Halcrow]. Nobody has ever heard of them. They are 6,000 people strong. They have a base in Australia and in England and there is another office called Atkins, which also nobody has ever heard about. And what they do is that they create architecture that is so extravagant that in my idea, and this is a private opinion, it will soon be very difficult for top-rate architects to be distinguishable from them. That is a serious problem in general. What we looked at is to simply densify it and how one could reduce it so that it all fits in a band. What we are doing is consulting for the entire Emirate to improve their situation. Then, in Dubai, we were asked to look at a masterplan in which that building was supposed to fit; we made an extension of it, which probably is going to happen, where we tried to introduce seriousness. You could say that all these efforts are somehow happening under the heading of introducing seriousness in a condition that seemingly, or according to the current discourse, doesn't except seriousness.

MM: Can you explain what you mean by seriousness?

RK: Well, of course it's very difficult to answer this question. What is seriousness? During the first visit to the Middle East we went to a massive real estate fair. It has a very ironic name: Cityscape. It really brought home the unbelievable vastness of the efforts there and the completely unknown quality of many of the people involved: the offices, the clients, a totally different world. Seriousness was in a way defined simply as non-participation in a quest for extravagance, either in a formal or thematic sense. And seriousness also forced us to look at issues like sustainability, shape, and continuity.

MM: How does one face the local realities on the ground when dealing with projects on such scale?

RK: Maybe I should say that I feel that this engagement can have the same intensity, or actually at this moment, has the same intensity as our engagement ten years ago with China [at Harvard], where we also really made a concerted effort to understand a new culture, a political culture, an economic culture as we were preparing ourselves to intervene. Here, we are intervening so it isn't just an a priori investigation. But, at the same time, I surprised myself. I thought that Asia, probably because I have lived there, would have the advantage of familiarity. But somehow here I find it much more familiar and accessible, partly because everyone speaks English, but also many of the people involved are educated in America or in Europe. And that is actually a very nice part of it. In China, there is not a common language, which is exciting in itself, but in the Middle East there are languages in common. We have been working with people with very mixed backgrounds. At Dubai Properties we talk mostly to a smart Syrian engineer, in Kuwait we talk to somebody with a Harvard MBA and somebody who studied at Columbia. In Ras-Al-Khaimah we talk to a Swiss person who has lived all his life in the Middle East as well as to the Sheik. So it's very mixed. We also talk to women; it's not only the male bastion that one might think it is.

MM: In a time when even Hollywood investigates oil depletion and *Syriana* receives an Academy Award, it is no longer a secret that oil dependency is

not sustainable in the long term and desires to break away from American economic dependence can only be built upon by re-investing profits into holistic, long-term infrastructures and democratic reforms. How can an entity such as AMO help in terms of achieving long-term goals that outlive the age of oil-dependency in the Middle East?

RK: This is, of course, an ulterior motive. We are trying to commit ourselves to an effort, which is based on a model where there will be a number of regular conferences, one centering on design and another one on politics. So, we have announced that intention and we are looking for opportunities. I think our contribution in Venice [Biennale] will be a first, preliminary investigation.

MM: It seems that the Arab world is increasingly waking up to the fact that they need to provide an intellectual infrastructure for some of the things that are happening. For example, in a place like Dubai, it is evident that one needs to investigate urban curatorial strategies that go beyond the idea of the theme park and take on a certain political and social dimension to avoid that the city is being perceived as nothing but an agglomeration of copies. How can think tanks like AMO make use of this development?

RK: That's what we are doing. But I think that so far we have simply done it as architects, rather than in the format of a think tank. The situation in Dubai is, in a way, more susceptible for a practical administration than a theoretical framework. I am sure that eventually we will get there, but not yet. We had to start from the bottom, like everybody else. I imagine that at some point an all-encompassing project falls in our lap.

MM: Do you feel like you are already plugging into an existing infrastructure of like-minded people, people thinking along the same lines?

RK: I cannot say that we are meeting people that are thinking along the same lines. But we encounter people that have sympathy for what we are doing and for our arguments. The people that we have met so far are all embedded in the business world so therefore that really dictates their perspective. I think

that obviously we need to try to meet the political people; but that will happen sooner or later.

MM: Based on the term "kinetic elite", coined by the German philosopher Peter Sloterdijk, you have described an international population whose personal lives are entirely subordinated to business demands, who travel hundreds of thousands of miles every year, who need not a home, but a home base. Do you think that Dubai might contain the qualities for such temporal nesting?

RK: (laughs) It's bizarre, because I like it a lot. For eight months of the year it's incredibly nice, in terms of climate, and for four months of the year it's incredibly harsh, like 50C, which I like. It's not a problem for me, but other people experience it as a serious obstacle. I am not sure yet whether it is Dubai or other entities in the Middle East that have some of the same qualities, maybe slightly more history and slightly more depth. For instance, what we have discovered is that in the early 70s each of these cities experienced outbursts of Modernity, connected to the first moments when they found oil. As a result of that, there have also been sudden occurrences of interesting architecture, very smart architecture, also smart in terms of the climate. In Kuwait we met a gallerist in her eighties, who was Andy Warhol's gallerist and Andy Warhol has been in Kuwait 13 times during that time and had an Arab boyfriend.

MM: If such nesting base constitutes a transit zone only, how important is program and content?

RK: I think that at some point it was of course a more rhetorical take on the situation. At this point it was important to me to introduce a different position vis-à-vis the importance of centers, cities and architectural excellence. But now, it's 12 years later and I have to say that in practice I have become rather stable. For instance, I live in Holland for three weeks and then travel for one and a half weeks. So, the kinetic elite now changed into some kind of kinetic acceleration once a month.

MM: Looking at Dubai's urban growth, it becomes clear that the construction industry has left architects on the sidelines. Within the realities of the recent hyper-development, accepted architectural values have become meaningless. Is this the end of architecture as we know it?

RK: It very well could be, but of course there is always a way of articulating a particular position. I think it is definitely a battlefield where this question will be determined and of course we are trying to deploy a number of strategies to be launched in that context. One of them is to launch a department of the office, which is called Generics. So, that is simply characterized by a refusal of, on one hand, an obligatory extravagance, but on the other hand also a serious effort to see whether we could align ourselves with the building industry. And that is actually also part of the critical notion of the Renaissance: a building that is generated out of an elevator shaft. So, yes, on a very workman-like, but also on a sublime level, I think that you could devise strategies to regain initiative. And also, they are definitely not the recognized ends of architecture. They think it's some kind of apotheosis of architecture. I don't think that we should define our terms so negatively that you collaborate with contempt or with a kind of Mike Davis effect.

MM: So, optimistically speaking, it's an opportunity.

RK: Yes, it's an opportunity and an obligation to be really intelligent and really fast, but also very experimental. That is one thing that it offers without any doubt: an incredible field for experimentation.

MM: Planners in Dubai and China out-build their American counterparts by 4,000 percent each year. Is there still space for uncertainty?

RK: (laughs) You mean for doubt? Do you imply that the situation in Dubai, for example, suggests some kind of certainty? Because in my experience it's actually the reverse; you are building so much, one is building so much, a country is building so much that perfection is receding and there is a sense

that you can make mistakes and out of every eight projects maybe one or two are ok and the rest is somehow a mistake. So, I think it's different from doubt but on the other hand it's not all based on rigor or self-confidence.

MM: Let's maybe look at it in urban terms. What about the effect of it? Let's say that if one constantly churns out new buildings that, at some point, create an overwhelming growth of physical mass but leave very little space for micro-political urban space in the sense of space for conflict, space where social contracts still need to be negotiated.

RK: I think that the urban effect is really interesting. The language, the rhetoric, the aesthetic, and the practice, and that is a very important shift. Today, we are not building cities; we are building resorts. The resort has become the dominant DNA in a certain way. That is also why there is this incredible quantity of Anglo-Saxon architects with their fundamental hostility to the city. It's more an anti-city than a city and that effect is already very noticeable.

MM: I have never been to Dubai. In my head, it's kind of interesting because, for example, I have been to China a couple of times, and it seems possible to just about grasp the complexity of its urbanism, which, in many ways, is not too dissimilar to certain forms of Western informal urbanism. But then, if I think of Dubai, I only have this imagery of the towers and so on, and I never think of city life as it were. I suppose where I am trying to get at with the aspect of uncertainty is to understand that, if there is urban culture, there is also necessarily space for processes that cannot be planned.

RK: There is an old part of the city; there are also nice parts of the city that are definitely urban. There is the boulevard with the skyscrapers and there are the resorts. We are now building some large complexes and hopefully, some of them in the end will turn out to produce urban space. That's what we are trying. So it's definitely a confrontation zone between these two possible outcomes.

MM: In terms of the kind of improvisational urbanism you encountered during your research project in Lagos, do you believe that Dubai is lacking what one might call an urban corruption or deliberate zones of conflict?

RK: There are definitely zones of conflict and there is urban life, albeit of a fairly repressed nature. There is an enormous population of builders that live in camps and you get a sense that inside these camps life is far from pleasant. There are all kinds of uprisings. There are conflicts between different nationalities. But I think what is the totally unique thing about Dubai is that currently out of a population of 2.7 Million only 200,000 people are from Dubai. So the expat is the main inhabitant. It's in that sense utterly fabricated by a huge sum of people who have a limited commitment to the city but who all bring their own taste and cultures. It's the most incredible amalgamation; even in Kuwait it's 50/50. It's really drastic how the expat is the founder of activity. What about Lagos?

MM: I think that the juxtaposition of the two could be interesting.

RK: I am finishing Lagos right now. It took a long time before I knew how to do it. It's only recently that I understood what I have to do. A very important part of the book [the forthcoming publication on the Lagos project] is about Lagos when it was new: Lagos in the 70s. When American, Japanese, Yugoslav, Chinese, Italian and other architects really built all the apparatus of a modern society. So, in a way, there are also some ironic similarities between Dubai and Lagos. The early descriptions of Lagos as a city-port being clogged by tankers full of cement is sounding totally like the Chinese condition, for example how Beijing is being prepared for a new future right now. So it's a blueprint you still recognize. That has now become the key of the book and so the book will be written as Modernity going in reverse.

MM: Does Dubai have a soul?

RK: Clearly. It's not particularly soulful, but there is definitely a sensibility. For instance, one of the noticeable facts of a city of expats is that it creates an

incredible permanence. The kindness also comes from a city that is inhabited by people from Azerbaijan, Pakistan, India, Iran, all these people living close together. It creates very nice warmth.

MM: Do you think that the recent events in Israel and Lebanon will have an effect on the nature of your projects in the region?

RK: It's too early to tell. But, I would like to reverse it and say that one of the reasons to take the region seriously is to try to work on that whole issue and to find confidence in the Arab World to address it.

MM: You have said that the market economy has corrupted our political consciousness; in regards to such consciousness, how do you personally deal with a project in a place like Dubai, where literally everything is available for money while migrant construction workers are living in shielded-off ghettos, being held hostage from the views of tourists?

RK: Partly because it's in the Middle East, it's very politically inspiring and educational to be there. It feels very political being there, operating on a day-to-day basis, meeting people and so forth. It is, of course, an extreme version of the market economy. Being deeply engaged in the political future of the entire area makes our involvement politically intense. I don't know whether you have seen it, but, at some point, we claimed that it's actually great that America has its own preoccupations, because it introduces a new phase in globalization, which enables all the other parties to be much more themselves and to find their own, relative independence. For the next 20 years, the issue will really be about how you approach Russia, China, India and the Middle East. We have to find new ways of communication and that means inevitably that we have to renegotiate what Human Rights mean, what copyright means and what democracy means. There is a whole series of issues that, at this point, neither side is in possession of definitive models or keys, so that's a very interesting part. We are trying to address some of those issues.

MM: Do you think that architects *should* have a social or political conscience?

RK: Why do you ask? I think nobody would say no.

MM: I suppose nobody would say no, but you could also argue that a lot of architects have used their relative position of power to play the game.

RK: I think you can play certain games and still maintain consciousness. You have heard that Richard Rogers was sent to New York by a number of clients, who had read that he let his office be used by a group of architects that were connected to Architects and Planners for Justice in Palestine [British architect Lord Richard Rogers was recently summoned to the offices of the Empire State Development Corporation–who are overseeing the re-design of New York's 1.7-billion Dollar Jacob K. Javits Convention Centre that Rogers is in charge of–to explain his connection to a UK-based group called Architects and Planners for Justice in Palestine, who were holding a meeting at Roger's London office on February 2, 2006. Several New York officials have urged that Rogers be removed from the publicly funded project]. I would say that particularly in America the political obliviousness is considered part of the role of the architect.

MM: How does building in autocratic States differ from working in democratic regimes?

RK: It's a question where you would expect a fairly easy answer, but I really don't have an easy answer, because in all conditions it is about communication, conviction, negotiation, and compromise. Perhaps the greatest difference is that–theoretically–in dictatorial states you could get away with projects of a much more radical emptiness or lifelessness, let's say. But that has never been a temptation. In China, for example, there is absolutely no ability or ambition of the state to ram something down people's throats. The friction or resistance with the city and the population has been stronger than anywhere else. In a way, this is not what you expect and it totally reverses your thinking. That's why, right now, it is very hard to generalize about these kinds of questions.

MM: In 1974, you wrote a script together with Rene Daalder in which you told the story of a group of wealthy Arabs buying up the Hollywood film archive to build a computer through which any celebrity can be re-invented on screen. How about your re-invention of the Arab World?

RK: I think the word re-invention is the key word of today. I think also this is what we are trying to do with the 24-hour Interview Marathons at the Serpentine Gallery in London. It's a word that I have always cherished, more than invention. I don't know why, but out of a profound sense of history I guess. One is always part of a chain.

MM: Sometimes *not* building is the right answer. AMO's expertise could be described in that which *is* or *remains* unbuild. Could today's role of the architect be portrayed as an enquirer of hidden relationships, a space invader that ventures into territories that lie beyond conventional disciplinary delineations of knowledge?

RK: I think it's important to comment on the role of the architect, because 10 or maybe 20 years ago, I was really skeptical about it. It seemed crazy to address contemporary issues with knowledge that, in many cases, was more than 3,000 years old. But I think with a kind of subsequent flattening of almost every discipline, the architectural education is one of the surviving dinosaurs of accumulating many different kinds of knowledge in the same profession. By default, we have the benefit of an awkward combination that gives us the strength and the confidence to invade territories of knowledge that we are not familiar with. Right now, few professions have that; it's a fluke, but that is very beneficial.

MM: Architects are always too late when it comes to responding to a given condition. There seems to be an immense discrepancy between the acceleration of culture and the continuing slowness of architecture. How do you feel about patience in architecture?

RK: One cannot rate it highly enough. It is, for architects, an absolutely crucial aspect not only in terms of the scale and the duration of a particular building, but also in terms of how long it might take, through never-ending series of aborted efforts, in order to achieve something. It's a crucial part of architecture and, like the kinetic elite was a rhetorical ploy at a certain moment, I think that the whole notion of acceleration is actually much less dramatic, because you can read everything as transforming continuously and recognizably, but you can also see repetitions and almost stagnation. The discovery of Lagos' condition in the 70s and Beijing's condition today is a good example for that.

MM: You have argued that, in order to participate intelligently in development, one needs to abandon traditional architectural values. Attempting to create alternative program often takes rhetoric that reveals the contradictions contained in existing spatial organizations. In how far do you think that re-programming–like you did with the Serpentine Gallery in London this summer–can be applied to larger, urban scales?

RK: What do you think?

MM: I think it can.

RK: I think so, too. And what is interesting is that by simply doing masterplanning it was also a way to reconnect with one significant part of our own past. It seemed that the ability of the unbuilt to structure conditions might be superior to the ability of the built. I think it's not exactly that, but the re-programming of public space, for instance, is a vast enterprise right now. And it is an enterprise that, interestingly, we are also working on in Dubai. I gave a lecture in Holland recently where I didn't start with Dubai or with China, but I started with America and Europe, basically showing how incredibly distorted our public realms have become. In that context, Dubai doesn't look like an acceleration, but simply like a version of the same aberration. I think it will be highly interesting to look at the urban domain as a re-programming effort.

MM: How are you trying to achieve that in the Middle East?

RK: By eliminating themes and by introducing a variety of different strategies.

MM: Is bigger better?

RK: No. And it has never been for me. Sorry (laughs).

MM: If you could only fly three more times in your life, where would you go?

RK: By flying, you mean going far away?

MM: You can also take the train back to Rotterdam if you like.

RK: I would probably go to Africa…Africa, Russia, in terms of unfinished business perhaps, in terms of where I would like to be engaged. Africa and Russia, that's it.

MM: What do you consider the most controversial decision of the 21st Century so far?

RK: 9/11 and the reaction to it, to declare the War on Terror. It's actually two complimentary decisions.

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