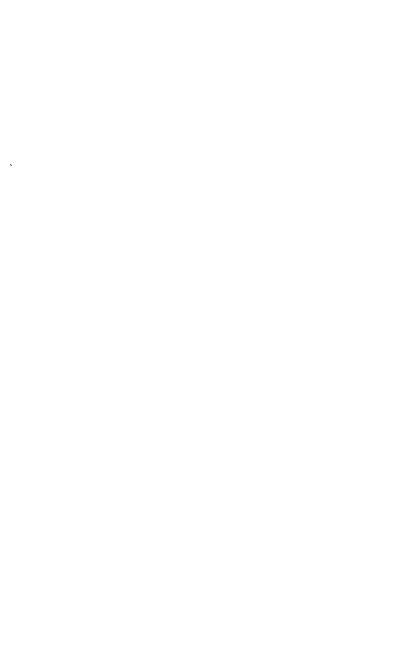Markus Miessen

# THE NIGHTMARE OF PARTICIPATION

**(Crossbench Praxis as a Mode of Criticality)**

# Markus Miessen
# The Nightmare of Participation

*"One of the most disgusting things is when what you secretly dream about is brutally imposed on you from the outside. We have a nice name for a realized dream: it is called a nightmare."*[1]

—Slavoj Žižek

1.  Slavoj Žižek, interview by Georg Diez and Christopher Roth, in *What Happened? The 80*81 *Book Collection: Part One* (Zurich: Edition Patrick Frey, 2010), 60.

*...[O]nce a thing is encouraged too much, in a way it becomes respectful, and soon after that, it becomes socialized—not in the sense of politics, but it becomes a right of everyone. That's what is messing up interactive television, which is almost seen as a right. Or these awful radio programmes in which you're invited to ring in with your views, which makes for rather cheap radio but very dull listening for the rest of the population. I don't want to hear what forty-five random people who have been asked to ring up the radio station think about this or that! Because it has been unofficially recognized by the powers that be, and has been grabbed onto by those who realize that it's a cheap form of television or radio, it's almost as if everything is justified because the audience can participate. And therefore you get bad theatre, bad films, bad radio, bad television..."* [2]

—Cedric Price

2. Cedric Price quoted in *Cedric Price – Hans Ulrich Obrist in Conversation (The Conversation Series* 21*)* (Cologne: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2010), 53–53.

# Contents

# The Paradox of Collaboration

Eyal Weizman

At the horizon of the concept of participation—its very absolute extreme—is that of collaboration. Collaboration might be thought of as the tendency for forcefully or willingly aligning one's actions with the aims of power, be it political, military, economic, or a combination thereof. The historical allusions are clear. This alignment is usually justified as a commonsensical, if tragic, solution to a problem of limits. The dilemma of participation/collaboration implies a closed system in which the options available for choice, and those who present them, cannot be challenged. Seeking to force the subject into compliance, a set of alternatives might thus be posed in such a way that "free-subjects," choosing for their interests in moderating harm, would end up serving the aims of this power. Participation thus tends to raise a number of political and ethical dilemmas that demand a clear-headed study of the alignment of powers around the arena where it is called for.

The paradox of participation impacts most independent non-governmental organizations that make up the ecology of contemporary crisis. It operates by creating upon a common ground where activists must cooperate with the very states, armies, or militias they originally sought to confront. Thus, for example, a military officer attempting to administer

life in an "enlightened" manner might seek the collaboration of humanitarian agents who need military permission for providing life substances and medical help. The logic of this participation might somewhat obscure the fundamental moral differences between these groups.

At the core of the paradoxes of participation is a tactical compromise that often deteriorates into a structural impossibility—one that entangles the state and its opposition in a mutual embrace, making non-state organizations de facto participants in a diffused system of government in which the state outsources its ethical self-consciousness to a non-governmental ethical agency, and this agency delegates its claim to effectiveness in the state.

Between refusal and tactical embrace the difficulty of the problem of participation is equally in practicing and in avoiding it. There is, of course, no general formula to address this dilemma, but the deliberation of a political thought-practice might insist on an orientation of political patterns and on the constant expansion of the limits of the problem in both space and time. The former by seeking to identify more extended and intricate political connections, by studying and analyzing the force field around and outside the dilemma; and the latter by looking further into the future.

The ancient Greeks thought of dilemmas as one of the elements of tragedy. Each option that a "tragic hero" faced necessarily led to different forms of terrifying suffering, and the dilemma was presented as a choice between the two horns of an angry bull.

But the dilemma, if we are still to think in its terms, must not only be about which of the horns to choose, but whether to accept the terms of the question and choose at all. Robert Pirsig suggested several ways to subvert this complicity of the opposites: one can "refuse to enter the arena," "throw sand in the bull's eyes," or "sing the bull to sleep."

Political and spatial activists will always be within an arena of struggles in compromising situations, but these forms of practice must look for ways to challenge the truth claims, and thus the basis of the authority of the powers with which they both co-operate and confront—the very people who placed their bulls before us and then asked us to choose the lesser of their two horns.

When this is impossible, refusal might still be regarded as one effective form of political action. But this option must be reserved for those who can and otherwise will act.

# What Is at Stake?

The little book in front of you attempts to outline a hypothesis: Sometimes, all-inclusive democracy has to be avoided at all cost. In order to make decisions within any given collaborative structure, network, or institution, conflicts can ultimately only be overcome and turned into practice if someone assumes responsibility.

I will argue this by proposing a post-consensual practice, one that no longer relies on the often ill-defined modes of operating within politically complex and consensus-driven parties or similar constructs, but instead formulates a necessity to undo the innocence of participation.

At the moment, participation is at a point of transition within politics, within the Left, within spatial practices, and within architecture, which is its most visible and clearly defined product. Both historically and in terms of political agency, participation is often read through romantic notions of negotiation, inclusion, and democratic decision-making. However, it is precisely this often-unquestioned mode of inclusion (used by politicians as never-ending campaigns for retail politics) that does not produce significant results, as criticality is challenged by the concept of the majority. Instead, this work promotes a conflictual reading of participation as a mode of practice, one that opposes the brainwave of the democratic facilitator, one that, at times, has to assume non-physical

violence and singular decision-making in order to produce frameworks for change.

*The Nightmare of Participation* wants to go beyond the idea that people generally have good intentions. Conventional models of participation are based on inclusion and assume that it goes hand in hand with the social-democratic protocol of everyone's voice having an equal weight within egalitarian society. Usually, in the simple act of proposing a structure or situation in which this bottom-up inclusion is promoted, the political actor or agency that proposes it will most likely be understood as a "gooddoer." Interestingly, the model of the "curator," for example, is based on the practice of making decisions and therefore eliminating choice. Participation, especially in times of crisis, has been celebrated as the savior from all evil. Such a soft form of politics needs to be questioned.

I will put forward a concept of participation as a way to enter politics (forcing oneself into existing power relations) instead of a "politically motivated model of pseudo-participation" (a proposition to let others contribute to the decision-making process), which is habitually stirred by the craving for political legitimization. I do not propose this out of a disbelief in democratic principles, but rather out of a sheer interest in critical and productive change.

One could argue that this model inhabits a certain opportunism. It challenges the widespread understanding that majority equals smartness, while arguing for a proactive citizenship in which the individual outsider (to a given inbred political structure)

can become a driving force for change by forcefully entering an existing discourse rather than opening it up to the floor. Remaining within the arena of "the democratic," I will bastardize participation into a form of violent, non-democratic practice, an opportunistic model of interventionism, which allows for a post-consensual practice that is disassociated from integrated modes of decision-making, and that prepares the ground for productive internal struggle. I will eventually label this practical model the "cross-bench practitioner."

This is an ongoing project that concentrates on participation as the object of repair. It attempts to open up a new language and practice, a field of operation rather than confronting an existing one. While it comprises multiple modes of writing, it essentially presents a book on architectural thinking as method.

Within this framework, I am unleashing a series of experiments that have been conducted over the last three years, each of which was directed in one way or another toward the above-mentioned undoing of innocence. Some of these experiments are text-based; others are set within the art world; and again others are urban interventions, institutional models, or specific physical architectural projects—small-scale, local testing grounds for potential change.

Each one of the coming chapters can be understood as a galactic model, in which planets circulate around an empty void. This void will hopefully be loaded with a model for practice by the end of this publication. The model will present and open questions in a way that is neither hierarchically organized nor

in a field, but rather in the form of a galaxy: a relational model. You will find various attempts to tackle this non-hierarchical model, and attack particular issues and problematics in order to open up the potential for a more diffused form of work.

Within a series of recently conducted case studies, this is the third title within a trilogy that attempts to question existing notions of participatory practice, resulting in gradients of disillusionment. The first one simply questioned it: *Did Someone Say Participate? An Atlas of Spatial Practice*.[1] The second one kicked it: *The Violence of Participation*.[2] And this one proposes an alternative, and tries to tackle and open up the question of how one can write about a process or an ongoing body of work today.

It is a theory of how to participate from outside clearly defined and existing power structures, rather than from the inside out. Whereas traditionally participation is understood as a bottom-up practice, I try to sidestep the democratic invitation process and enter the conversation halfway through, from the side, so to speak.

I will use the setting of this book instrumentally, without necessarily benefiting from it as a prosthetic space, or an accumulation and digestion of existing knowledge, but as an interiority machine that brings together and substantiates the practices and projects

1.    Markus Miessen and Shumon Basar, eds., *Did Someone Say Participate? An Atlas of Spatial Practice* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006).

2.    Markus Miessen, ed., *The Violence of Participation* (Berlin and New York: Sternberg Press, 2007).

at hand. This allows for a position in which one can deliver critique without having to tolerate academic life defining practice. Instead of studying a topic, I will inquire a problematic: the traps and potential dead ends of participation.

Each one of the above-mentioned planets is a robust attempt to crack open a series of underlying questions. What is/are the alternative(s) to conventional confrontation based on the nostalgic notion of the barricade? How can one propose an alternative practice engaging in spatial projects that deal with social and political realities? What could such a polyphonic practice potentially be? What is the relevance of such work, and does it always necessitate urgency?

This substantiated mode of a scattered practice will put life as practice into a format that uses the will to act without mandate as its starting point. Such self-initiated practice outside of the existing economies in which there is a clear distinction between client and service-provider may enter and in fact produce an alien discourse or field of knowledge.

These questions and potential modes of practice will be put into the context of a larger project, a digested format that aims to breed an orbit of self-generated and applied case studies and models of intervention. Apart from reflecting on the tripartite structure of the so-called "participation experiment," I will also present a series of projects, such as the Winter School Middle East and the European Kunsthalle, which are meant to serve as de facto cases in which some of the issues addressed here have been

scrutinized in a respective local context. These cases exemplify a mode of practice toward the building up of independent, small-scale institutions, which foster alternatives to the public art institution and the franchise of the regionalized academy. These are informed by contrasting experiences during which I institutionalized myself in formal political settings on a governmental scale, both through a project commissioned by the Government of Slovenia during Slovenia's presidency of the European Council in ("East Coast Europe"[3]) and a research project and publication commissioned by the Dubai government think tank Moutamarat that resulted in the publication *With/Without—Spatial Products, Politics and Practices in the Middle East*[4] in 2007.

The majority of material, research, and knowledge collated in this publication are not the result of endless weeks in libraries and archives, but an attempt to produce knowledge through practice. To a certain extent, this material is a log or file of the last five years of wrestling with fields that, on the one hand, define my practice, and on the other, delineate my reading of it. One of the motivations for starting this project was the apparent lack of material that questioned these issues. I therefore decided that such an archive of material had to be generated. I have, for example, been interested in the writings of Belgian

3. Markus Miessen, ed., *East Coast Europe* (Berlin and New York: Sternberg Press, 2008).
4. Shumon Basar, Antonia Carver, and Markus Miessen, eds., *With/Without: Spatial Products, Practices and Politics in the Middle East* (New York: Bidoun; Dubai: Moutamarat, 2007).

political theorist Chantal Mouffe for a long time, but was always missing a concretized form of, or specific approach toward, the issue of direct engagement, inclusion versus exclusion, and how to become an actor in a force field of existing power relations. I therefore decided to speak with Chantal Mouffe directly rather than re-read her books or simply move on. This resulted in a three-year-long conversation that tries to tease out a series of assumptions and provocations about participation per se. An edited version of this conversation is published in chapter 6.

More generally speaking, the interview format has allowed me to easily test some of my hypotheses in a direct and hands-on manner. I set up a web of respondents and conversation partners in order to have them help me think through these terms. In this context, interviews are understood and presented as bibliography. Self-generated dictionaries become bibliography; literature written or commissioned becomes bibliography; architectural projects become bibliography; fieldwork and project-work with institutions become bibliography; publications, exhibitions, and editorial works become bibliography.

Some of the individuals with whom I've spoken, who have helped to generate this book's content, are Chantal Mouffe; German labor-icon Erhard Eppler; American linguist and philosopher Noam Chomsky; British artist Liam Gillick; Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas; the Slovenian art collective IRWIN Group; Dutch theorist Roemer van Toorn; German curator Felix Vogel; Slovenian dramaturge, curator, and writer Eda Cufer, Israeli architect Eyal

Weizman; Iranian curator Ashkan Sepahvand; and American urbanist and writer Keller Easterling.

I am also particularly thankful to Hans Ulrich Obrist, with whom I have spent many hours discussing the ins and outs of modes of practice. During my years in London and the earlier phase of this inquiry, especially during *Did Someone Say Participate?*, I worked closely with Shumon Basar, whose insights and humor I thoroughly enjoy. Lately, most of the content discussed in this book was tested and developed in and through conversations with Canadian artist Patricia Reed, Swedish architect Magnus Nilsson, and Italian curator Tina DiCarlo. I would also like to thank Franz von Stauffenberg, with whom I had a particularly inspiring dinner conversation that influenced my thinking on the issue of romantic nostalgia.

How can one propose an alternative practice that engages with spatial projects of social and political realities? What could a polyphonic spatial practice potentially be? Spatial planning is often considered the management of spatial conflicts. The city and the progressive institution exist as social and spatial conflict zones, renegotiating their limits through constant transformation. 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 fostering micro-political participation in the production of space, and ask how one can contribute to alien fields of knowledge, professions, or discourses

from the point of view of "space." 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 conflict between often-delineated fields of knowledge. A set of case studies serves as a testing ground for how one might be able to intervene.

According to Hans Ulrich Obrist, there is an ever-increasing need to consider the "breaking of the consensus machine."[5] Taking this notion seriously, one should attempt to understand and illustrate the importance of critical engagement in alien fields of knowledge—to use spatial conditions as means for a cultural investigation. As this ongoing work aims to investigate both the role of the architect and the role and remit of the contemporary institution, existing models of participation are reviewed, both in terms of the culture of consensus and the ethos of compromise; these examples illustrate how contemporary institutions could be structured.

I will present and discuss today's need for actors operating from outside existing networks and clearly defined milieus, leaving behind circles of conventional expertise attempting to overlap with other post-disciplinary realities. An alternative model of participation within spatial practice will be rendered, one that takes an understanding of participation

5.  Hans Ulrich Obrist, roundtable discussion at the Architectural Association, London, March 10, 2006.

beyond models of consensus as a starting point. Instead of aiming for synchronization, such a model could be based on participation through critical distance and the conscious implementation of zones of conflict. Within such zones, one could imagine the dismantling of existing situations for the benefit of strategically isolating components that could be (mis)used to stir friction. Such a practice would help to understand the effects of soft design components —political, economic, and social.

Furthermore, I will investigate how to set up institutions that engage in conflicting areas of expertise, tackled from within the professional background of a spatial organization. Using the architect's education and skill of mapping out fields of conflict, this inquiry is meant to provoke an archipelago of questions that try to uncover the relevance of spatial and architectural expertise; how, in the remit of institutions, these can generate an alternative knowledge production.

Rather than delivering a recipe, I will lay out a field of potential departures, projective voices from a critical distance that might allow us 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 approaches of other fields of knowledge? In chapter 8, "Learning from the Market," I juxtapose the practice that I refer to as the "uninvited outsider" (and later as the "crossbench practitioner") with a classical, market-driven consultancy methodology; through a critical reflection on

Jamshid Gharajedaghi's systems architecture, this introduces one of the contributors to the development of the third generation of systems thinking, where iterative design is the core of systems methodology. Such moving and acting in a different interior than one is used to can be difficult, and the question as to how one gains credibility and legitimacy in order to operate in such an extended environment emerges.

Furthermore, my interest in the phenomenon of participation can be read through a series of goggles related to the respective and diversified angles of observation: In regard to political science, the core relevant arguments of Chantal Mouffe are put into conflict with the UK's New Labour, as well as the Dutch Polder models. Within the larger remit of late twentieth-century philosophy, the writings of Jacques Rancière and Edward Said are (mis)used in order to lead a virtual conversation, most specifically Said's *Representations of the Intellectual*.[6] Concerning spatial practices, I investigate soft thinking in architecture through the work of Keller Easterling and Eyal Weizman, drawing from texts by Florian Schneider to open up the field of critical discourse in the realm of collaboration. I have hijacked German politician Joschka Fischer's biography as a case study to illustrate the intricacies of Gramsci's "slow march through the institutions." You can also find an example of a large-scale, German, state-funded project that anticipates what would, in politically

6. Edward Said, *Representations of the Intellectual: The 1993 Reith Lectures* (New York: Random House, 1996).

correct, grant-application terminology, be titled a participatory project, and how this can be used as a priceless example of why to violently oppose pseudo-democratic frameworks.

It is my hope that this invented methodology will constitute evidence for my inquiry. However, the question remains as to what type of species of work this presents. The material constitutes neither a historic survey nor a report from the front lines of activism, but a self-generated concoction of diverse support-structures for my argument. The way that I use projects, material, and writings in order to develop a theory of conflictual participation could be compared to the way certain archives are structured; not like a library, but an accumulation of different species of knowledge and matter congregated in a single (physical) container.

Further questions are raised as to what constitutes its turf in the larger discourse, an opposite of conventional processes of participation, and a theory vis-à-vis its own rigor. I hope that this technique will result in a concentrated voice that allows existing discourses to be further differentiated, while also stimulating a heated debate in which parallels can be drawn between my work and practices of political activism, critical spatial practice, artistic production, and recent writings.

I have attempted to do all this from the (sometimes hidden) perspective of an architect who works in a diverse set of contextual realities. Almost by default, this position starts to question the conditions in which the profession—if this terminology

can be used at all—operates. Architectural thinking becomes interesting, and probably most relevant, the moment one exits the realm of the profession. In my view, architecture is always an individual act based on a moment of rupture: a decision to advance an existing reality.

I am aware that the methodology at play is the ultimate nightmare for any academic, as most of the material that I work with here is neither approved in some historical canon nor available in a public library. But this is precisely the point to produce this volume. In its place, I am interested in the conditions of politics: to consider things before they exist. Rather than research, it is an inquiry.

In many ways, the autocratic model that I put up for discussion should not be understood as a blueprint for practice, but a model of departure, which creates the necessary friction to both stir debate and advance practice per se. If this book had one single objective, it would be to develop a common understanding and starting point where, in Mouffian terms, we can start to disagree. It is a theory of how to participate without squinting at constituencies or voters, but instead instigating critical change. There are two arguments here: one is polemical, and the other is conceptually constructive. At times, these are developed through concrete situations and projects, which Simon Critchley would call a "situated universality." [7]

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7. Simon Critchley, *Indefinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment. Politics of Resistance* (London: Verso, 2007), 42.

# Spatial Practice Beyond the Romantic

Historically, architecture is often understood as the profession of designing buildings and environments with consideration to their aesthetic effect—dealing with the principles of design and construction. These traditional practices most likely concentrate on formal agenda, spectacle, commodity, infrastructure, or context. By making such a claim, I am not attempting to make a judgment in regard to value, but rather to make an observation of the way in which architecture at large seems to operate. In this economy, the architect is forced to operate 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 such a rendering of an erstwhile practice, the architect is portrayed as the one who designs and supervises the construction of a building, the person in charge who propels an *über*vision, and who brings along a personal lifestyle that allows for the piece of "architecture" to emerge as a unique product. The great ideal Renaissance man was the polymath, a person of great and varied learning. In those days, architecture would go from an unwritten state, as it was "practical" practice (you do!), to a framework

of knowledge and intellectual exercise (you think!). The nineteenth-century gentlemen would emerge as a derivation of such a rendering of the Renaissance man. In the context of spatial practices, one could argue that this understanding of architecture as a blend of practices—spanning building, pure theory, and a whole diverse universe of practices in between these two extremes—presented a key moment: It would allow, for the first time, for an understanding of a proto-conceptual architecture liberated from the impulse 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 contemporary capitalist market system, the polymath has undoubtedly become highly expendable. 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 more original design alongside increasing efficiency, improved detailing, and profit gains, the architect is left to juggle with outdated regulations, corrupt builders, and diminutive remuneration. Today's architect is facing the paradox of the need for greater security assurance accompanied by the desire for more creativity and innovation. This evolution is without 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 are limited to just delivering form—a perilous progress, since most developers can do it either cheaper or faster, 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 as an impotent monkey in a red Fez hat who is taught to dance when the music comes on. In this scenario, the architect—often no longer needed—has been reduced to the one who places ornamental cherries on top of the finished cake.

In order to be able to unmark these common formats of architectural conception, it might be helpful to think of architecture as a post-disciplinary force field of knowledge, a practice concerned with spatial realities and their becoming. It seems that today we are in vital need of a reevaluation of spatial production beyond traditional definitions, acknowledging the possibility of an "architecture of knowledge" that is being built up by actively participating in space. The understanding, production, and altering of spatial conditions presents us with a prerequisite of identifying the broader reaches of political reality. Today's spatial practices not only utilize experimental research related to the transient conditions of urban society, but also apply physical and non-physical structures in order to change and alter specific settings. While the differences engendered may appear marginal, it has an undeniable asset: that of an operative optimism coupled with concrete impact.

This, of course, is not only an optimistic endeavor (as opposed to the pessimism and unilateral

prognosis about public space that, particularly in the U.S. urban and spatial theory of the 1980s and early 90s, dominated discursive knowledge production— as put forward, for example, by Sharon Zukin, Mike Davis, or Michael Sorkin[1]), but it also illustrates the complexity of the everyday environments we inhabit. Such practices strengthen our perception of the realities of micro-political struggle. If one wants to understand the 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. This is not to say that one needs to drop any kind of critical sight, but rather, to enjoy and 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, one could witness an increasing interest among architects and urban planners in issues of participatory projects and public-planning processes. Most of these projects and discourses were centered around the notion of systems designed for user contribution.

1. For example, Michael Sorkin, ed., *Variations on a Theme Park: The New American City and the End of Public Space* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1992).

Throughout the history of twentieth-century architecture, one can witness numerous attempts to critically engage with traditional practice from a point of view of participation. Nevertheless, most of these did not manage to establish more than a formulation of resistance—marginally executed. In contrast to the randomness of the Surrealists and the ideological assembly of the Situationists, there have been other examples of formulations of resistance. In the 1960s, when Team 10 advocated the use of concepts such as mobility, patterns of everyday life, and incremental urban growth as the basis for city planning, social change (previously imposed from the top down by an avant-garde that assumed an agency of architecture a priori) was then seen as emerging from the bottom up, from society's own internal processes, which architecture and planning were to manage. 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, Yona Friedman—whose work is based on principles of unpredictability—investigated issues of reconstruction such as the acute housing shortage and urban rebuilding, which he turned into the subject of public exposure. He proposed gigantic structures in which residents could build their own dwellings, and developed simple manuals in the form of comic books, which enabled people to make decisions about the design of their own living environment. In England, Cedric Price was simultaneously propagating the architecture of "calculated uncer-

tainty." His lateral approach to architecture and time-based urban interventions has ensured that his work has an enduring influence on contemporary alternative practice. Similar to the work of Swiss-born sociologist and economist Lucius Burckhardt —who was particularly interested in planning methodologies and alternatives models of participatory urbanism, with a focus on new lessons for all roles involved in planning processes[2]—Price's approach was used as a parallel investigation during the IKAS conferences in the 1980s.[3] More than two hundred participants from forty countries discussed the social task of architecture, rather than its formal or constructive aspects, which were the subject of parallel postmodern discourses. These conferences investigated themes such as democratization, user participation, construction in continuity, and the use of architecture over time. These models are often based on an understanding of participation that presupposes consensus and social engagement as the driving force of practice.

Similar to the recent over saturation and use of the word participation in the world of architecture and planning, there have previously been similar developments in the art world, such as Nicolas

2.  See also Jesko Fezer and Marin Schmitz, eds., *Lucius Burckhardt: Wer plant die Planung?: Architektur, Politik und Mensch* (Berlin: Martin Schmitz Verlag, 2005); and Markus Ritter and Martin Schmitz, eds., *Warum ist Landschaft schön? Die Spaziergangswissenschaft* (Berlin: Martin Schmitz Verlag, 2006).

3.  International Congress for Architecture and Urban Planning, 1982–1989.

Bourriaud's 1990s term "relational aesthetics,"[4] in which an artwork is judged on the basis of "human interactions and its social context, rather than the assertion of an independent and private symbolic space."[5] In contrast to the majority of production in the 1980s and early 90s, the relational aspect focused less on the object, and more on site-specificity and performative events that explicitly relied upon audience interaction and participation. Claire Bishop's recent publication, titled *Participation*, investigates this practice of moving viewers out of the role of observers and into the role of producers, as a means to produce new social relationships.[6]

The increasing use of the term participation also contains a number of issues in which an ideological framework is being turned into a practice. 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 their overuse, "participation," "community," and "sustainability" have become more or less meaningless. These words create a veneer of worthiness; but if you scratch the surface, critical in-terrogations of what is at stake are strikingly absent. Participation

4.  Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* (Dijon: Les presses du réel, 1998).

5.  Ibid., 14.

6.  Claire Bishop, ed., *Participation* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006).

too often becomes an expedient method of placation rather than a real process of transformation." [7]

*The following text is a short conversation with the Vancouver-based artist Sabine Bitter about a large-scale urban research project funded by the Federal German Government through the Federal Cultural Foundation. Sabine Bitter and her professional partner, Helmut Weber, work on projects concerned with urban geography and visual politics under the title "Bitter Weber."*

MARKUS MIESSEN—Sabine, we have talked about the Caracas Case project many times in the past. It would be great if you can share a short informal introduction to the project.

SABINE BITTER — The Caracas Case project was a six-month research project on the "culture" of the informal city in 2003. The focus was on the effects of the informal and chaotic parts of the city [Caracas, Venezuela], like barrios, street vending, informal economies, and traffic jams, which are considered an illness—ever growing and out of control—and effect the formal concepts and regulations of city planning and urban design.

MM — Working alongside your partner, Helmut Weber, what was your contribution to the project?

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

sb — The project was based on a research grant by the German Cultural Foundation [Kulturstiftung des Bundes] and the Caracas Urban Think Tank. Invited as visual artists, we were supposed to document the phenomenology of a city "out of control." Yet we shifted our focus from simply picturing and illustrating the situations to researching in-depth the historical and recent social and political conditions that led to these contested forms of urbanization. In our projects—such as the videos *Living Megastructures* or *Super Citizens*—we recognized forms of a "transformative urbanism" based on these residents, who aimed to change the social relations, and depending on the point of view, not to merely improve their forms of living and working in the city.

> mm — How was the structure of the project initially set up?

sb — The structure of the project was set up like an office on urban design, mixed with a partially academic approach to research and analysis regarding various experts or disciplines.

> mm — Who organized it?

sb — It was organized by a group, which at the time was called Caracas Urban Think Tank. As mentioned earlier, it was financed by the German Cultural Foundation as its very first project in a series of projects on cities. Universities and other institutions served as strategic partners of the project. Two architects

based in Caracas at the time headed the think tank
—Alfredo Brillembourg and Hubert Klumpner.

> MM — What were your experiences concerning
> the organization of the project?

SB — It was organized like an architecture office with
an approach to foreground research and theory.

> MM — To which capacity were Brillembourg
> and Klumpner involved in the organization and
> carrying out of the project and its results?

SB — They were functioning as the directors of the
office and the think tank, considering themselves as
the responsible and "natural" authority of the project.

> MM — For me, this project is particularly inter-
> esting in the context of the misuse of modes and
> narratives of participation and social engage-
> ment, which are often used primarily as modes
> of economy. This is of course fine if commu-
> nicated in this way. But it is often deliberately
> promoted in a nebulous manner. I heard some
> rumors about the way in which the financing
> was handled. Is it true that the money disap-
> peared to an offshore bank account?

SB — We had to wait for months until the first rate was
transferred into our account, which was really an-
noying. Helmut Weber and I, as well as all the other
participants involved, had to pay for our studios in

Vienna and the respective hometowns of others. For the project, we also had to rent a flat in Caracas, from which we could work locally. Concerning the rumors: there was an offshore account once visible when we traced the transfer of the money. However, it did not disappear, but was more of a "belated" transfer, which of course caused a lot of stress and rumors. It seems to be a common practice for the upper class in Venezuela to transfer money out of the country. We also had to pay our rent into an account in Miami.

> MM — How did your participation in the project alter your understanding and thinking about the notion of participation in art and architecture and particularly that which is often described as a "social project"?

SB — The general outline of the project was never formulated as a social project—the move within the participants toward social and political conditions made the "urbanist approach" seemingly blunt—and finally raised some critical consciousness in the final output of the project. There had been heavy discussions with Brillembourg and Klumpner about the "not-political" status of an urban research project. Many times, this caused consuming and uncomfortable situations within the development of the project. In particular, it really hindered the focus of some participants on the articulation of social, political, and formal aspects within the urban fabric of the city.

MM — As an outsider to the project, it seems that it generated almost an antidote to the notion of what one could call the "social project," and replaced it with the market-driven notion of "participation as shadow tactics to create an economy." What is your take on this?

SB — This is exactly what we encountered, and also what we tried to challenge with and within our contributions.

MM — Could you please describe how you challenged this process?

SB — In our own project, we saw an opportunity based on the politics of the representation of space: We produced an image of the barrio 23 de Enero, constructed from the entirety of the new Bolivarian Constitution. Our idea was to link the particular history and very politicized present of 23 de Enero with the current national politics of social transformation via participatory democracy. We installed the image in one of the "cultural niches" of the Bellas Artes metro station. This was possible because of the cooperation of the people who were in charge of those niches at that point—two women who were from 23 de Enero. They agreed to the project within five minutes, as they felt that places like 23 de Enero and the people who live there never had representation in a space like the Bellas Artes metro station. We also screened the video we did on 23 de Enero, *Living Megastructures*, in the station. As artists, we had the

means to produce large-scale images, and we had access to public space (thanks to those wonderful women at the office of the metro who recognized that even an image of the urban is political). In this way, we were not engaging in the production of an economy, but reflecting on, in a critical way, the actually existing economic relations, and—hopefully—the struggle for economic and spatial justice in Caracas.

We also went into this project with an understanding that we would be learning from the people in the barrios (as one title of a work we did said directly "Learning from La Vega") rather than a notion that we were experts from abroad who could drop in and solve a spatial/social problem. This is not to fetishize the knowledge of those who have historically been marginalized, but to recognize a more democratic idea of literacy—spatial literacy, social literacy, and cultural literacy.

# Undoing the Innocence of Participation

*Why is nice bad? What kind of a sick society
are we living in when nice is bad?*[1]
—George Costanza

*The pressure of responsibility that democracy itself
is superimposing on those who believe in it becomes
unbearable when this belief is interrogated by
the reality of images and the doubt of the infidel.
It cannot be what it 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 Jörg Haider would never have existed
as a political public figure, if there would have been
a democracy in Austria that was led by representa-
tives who complied with the basic principles of
this very democracy.*[2]
—Josef Bierbichler

Participation is often stipulated and promoted as a
false nostalgic desire. Modes of participation can also

1.  Quoted from "The Café," *Seinfeld*, episode 7, season 3, November 6,
    1991.

be populist, and be used in this manner. Referenda, for example, can not only strengthen democracy, it can also erode it. Within the current ideological crisis, referenda have become popular with established parties that fear making unpopular decisions. The "liability-mentality" is now part of politics in the form of outsourcing the decision-making process. Through a referendum, politicians and elected representatives, who are supposed to make decisions for the population that gave them the power to decide, postpone the moment of assuming responsibility for their own actions. When they ask everyone, they need no vision or idea themselves. Unfortunately, a referendum will not generate ideas either. It simply traces the relationship between majority and minority. The erosion of democracy emerges from the inside, fueled by a false consensus. Such dilution of the democratic model is highly dangerous as it enables and—to a certain extent—promotes the rise of political extremism.

An interesting example of this is the recent public vote regarding the ban on minarets in Switzerland.

2.    Josef Bierbichler, *Verfluchtes Fleisch* (Frankfurt: Verlag der Autoren, 2001), 93, translated by the author: "Der Druck der Verantwortung ist groß, den Demokratie ausübt auf die, die an sie noch glauben, und wird unerträglich, wenn der Glaube hinterfragt wird von der Wirklichkeit der Bilder und dem Zweifel eines Ungläubigen. Es kann nicht sein, was nicht sein darf und die, die Verantwortung mittragen wollen, merken den Betrug nicht mehr, der täglich an ihnen verübt wird von führenden Vertretern der Demokratie. Da prügeln sie den Boten. Besseres kann dem Betrug, zu dem Demokratie von Demokraten gemacht wurde, gar nicht passieren. Man darf doch davon ausgehen, dass es einen Haider gar nicht geben würde, wenn es in Österreich wirklich eine Demokratie gegeben hätte, mit Repräsentanten an der Spitze, die sich ihren Grundlagen unterworfen hätten."

Essentially, what happened was that the SVP (Schweizerische Volkspartei/ Swiss People's Party) used their wide reach in a ruthless campaign, especially through boulevard media, in order to "help" people make up their minds, using participatory democracy as a tool to foster xenophobia. Populists like it this way: Only public referenda indicate the real majorities in a country or given political system. But let us not forget that usually the one who tends to the majorities is the one who can invest most heavily in campaigns. Although this does of course not hold true for every single referendum, the result is a pecuniary politics rather than the often-proclaimed form of bottom-up democracy. While 57% 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.

On the meta-level of the tool or modus operandi itself, participation is not a particular quality; nor does it mean anything. It is like saying "hammer" when in fact you want to build a house. Frankly speaking, not everyone should always be asked or invited to be included in the decision-making process. There seems to be a false and perverted sense of urgency regarding inclusion, which is most often fuelled by the fear of losing power, sustaining constituencies, and shaping and controlling stakeholders in order to be able to use them strategically. State politics are mostly 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 of forces if

one's own interest is focused on the preservation and expansion of power.[3] Participation has become a radical chic, one that is en vogue with politicians who want to make sure that, rather than producing critical content, the tool itself becomes what is supposed to be read as criticality.

In such a context, participation becomes a mode of buoyancy-production, a societal sedative, not in terms of the potential decisions that the populus can make, but in withdrawing the ground from which they can actively critique the actions of the decision-maker and representative. This leaves us with the presentiment that the notion and concept of horizontal organization can today be presented as something worthwhile, but is mostly used as political currency for those who offer it. In such an economy of participatory currency, political correctness per se 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, we are also suppose to 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 who think of themselves as critical—often simply unable to speak out because they see their meticulously sketched-out career plans endangered.

This is not to attack or criticize political correctness per se. However, participation has become the

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3. Josef Bierbichler, *Verfluchtes Fleisch*, op. cit., 9.

ultimate volition toward a practice of unconscious-
ness in which the active player who could be criticized
for decision-making becomes a representative of the
taste and decisions 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 on here—let's rethink!"

A lot of recent talk on participation assumes that
the closer you get to something or someone, the more
empathy you develop. This is a scary assumption.
Today, once we start to think about the issue, topic,
and/or problematic of participation, the first thing
that comes to mind is a growing, irritating romanti-
cism that has by now infiltrated the entire political
spectrum from the critical Left to the far Right.
But where would we end up if it were not possible to
sometimes make decisions independent of the most
popular decisions or sentiments? On a 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 give a damn.

What we have witnessed over the last decade,
which has been a decade of sympathetic and un-
questioned use of the term "participation" and its
democratic principles, is an almost fundamentalist
willingness toward inclusion that goes hand in hand
with a grotesquely uncritical mode of setting up
structures and frameworks for this so-called par-
ticipation to take place, be it on the scale of national
politics, local involvement, projects in the art world,
and so forth. It seems that in the context of such
romantic nostalgia of the good-doing, open-source

practitioner, institution, or party, we are in urgent need of an outspoken political candor. This candor needs to supersede political correctness—the kind applied to foster a certain political politeness, a protocol of consensual courtesy—and utilize a case-specific criticality that replaces cordiality with honesty, expertise, criticism, and, if need be, judgment. There is nothing worse than delayed decision-making as the result of a wrong interpretation of political correctness.

The crisis of the (over)use of the notion of participatory practice in architecture is only part of a larger crisis that the profession has been in for the last twenty years. The rapid emergence of practices all of a sudden becoming "social" throughout the 1990s is only an indicator for the economic instability of the profession. What is hardly ever being discussed in the context of participatory practice is that, in architecture, many offices have turned toward a more inclusive model of process-oriented research projects, because they could simply no longer get commissions for larger construction work. Interestingly, this economic aspect is often excluded from the debate. Towards the tail end of the 1990s and the first years of the oos, one could go to cities such as Berlin and be overwhelmed by the inclusiveness and apparent social responsibility of architectural and spatial practice. At the same time, this phenomenon was an early indicator of the larger economic crisis that we are currently in. Arguably, one could think of this social crisis in architecture as possibly the most inauthentic approach regarding participation,

as it was not often generated out of a longstanding belief in social democratic principles, or interests in direct involvement. On the contrary, it seemed to suddenly open a window of opportunity in regard to an alternative economy. When jobs for physical construction were no longer available, practitioners started to rethink their formats.

This is not to say that there hasn't been a serious interest by some practitioners to develop inclusive and engaged models of practice. The crisis in many related professions, such as architecture, urbanism, and spatial practice per se, has also led to a situation in which many interesting and relevant models of praxis have been developed and tested. As every crisis has its severe downfalls, it also, of course, has its productive and digestive potentials.

In politics, and more precisely, in a parliamentary democracy, we are constantly exposed to the building of myths. A political invitation to participation usually goes hand in hand with 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, not representative democracy, but modes of direct democracy and bottom-up processes (Joseph Beuys's "Organization for Direct Democracy through Popular Vote" [*Organisation für direkte Demokratie durch Volksabstimmung*], founded in Düsseldorf in 1971, is one such example of many). Let everyone decide! Why?

One could argue that the innocence of participation is an easy temptation. Simon Critchley criticizes the stillness and contemplation that many practitioners are expressing today: "In a world that is all too rapidly blowing itself to pieces, the passive nihilist closes his eyes and makes himself into an island."[4] It seems that we have to think through and out of 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 moral 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."[5] 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 what it means to be responsible that I am interested in.

Politics in Critchley's sense of a true democracy presents praxis in a situation that articulates an interstitial distance from the state, a "moving towards," a friction: "the creation of interstitial distance."[6] This

4. Simon Critchley, *Indefinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance* (London: Verso, 2007), 5.

5. Simon Critchley, *Indefinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance*, op. cit., 9.

6. Ibid., 13.

framework allows for the emergence of alternative and new political subjectivities. When Critchley speaks of democracy, he refers to 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 needs to be learned and nurtured. Politics is always now and multifarious.

In order to develop strategies for a post-nostalgic practice, one needs to get beyond the truism that in order to act fully democratic, everyone needs to be involved. In fact—as I said in the introduction—sometimes democracy has to be avoided at all cost. The "notion of the curatorial" by default presents us with the opposite of what one might call "the romantic participatory," as 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.

Politically correct and experienced engagement often achieves the opposite of what it is aiming at; in this context, "even the misdeed or crime gains a holy aura."[7] Such a minimization of social offense is ultimately concerned with the establishment and maintenance of societal harmony, regardless of whether or not it brings the subject or content matter forward. This sometimes goes so far that people withdraw from certain decisions only to avoid the

7. Harald Martenstein in *Zeichen 4: Engagement und Skandal*, eds. Josef Bierbichler, Christoph Schlingensief, and Harald Martenstein (Berlin: Alexander Verlag, 1998), 28.

possibility of being labeled or called conservative. From the point of view of political correctness, this could also be interpreted as not only being protective of certain values, but also advocating institutional structures. Theater actor Josef Bierbichler introduces an interesting thought regarding this matter in the context of the political when he mentions that it has become increasingly pressing today to ask not whether producing a scandal is allowed, but more urgently, whether it is even possible.[8] When Bierbichler refers to the notion of scandal, he is by no means interested in it as a superficial provocation that only produces short-lived and transient media attention, but rather the opposite: a disturbance fueled by an edged and acuminated thought that enters and penetrates a bogus societal consensus in order to debunk and unmask it.[9]

When outrage and heterogeneity have been eaten up by societal consensus instead of having disrupted it, and controversial debates can no longer take place, there is no shared space where conflicts can be played out. Sometimes, this can lead to a complete losing-face situation, in which politicians give up their stakes and beliefs in order to become as "votable" as possible. Joined with a populist claim toward participatory structures, this model of public pacification has worked very well in the past, espe-

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8. Ibid., 9.
9. Ibid., 13.
10. New Labour was coined as an alternative branding for the Labour Party in 1994. It remains in common use to distinguish modernizers from those holding to more traditional positions within the Labour Party.

cially under Tony Blair's New Labour government in the UK since 1997.[10] Blair's Third Way promoted replacing long-term goals with forms of incremental and local problem solving.

Within the remit and simplified idea of New Labour's politics, one was—and to a certain extent, still is—able to witness one of the most brilliant examples of how to use frameworks of nostalgic but hard-boiled craving for public participation as a way of outsourcing responsibility. While the UK had been at a 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, its real 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 free workers in order to achieve these targets in any way they chose. What these 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 documentary *The Trap*.[11] Here, Curtis

11. Adam Curtis, *The Trap: What Happened to Our Dream of Freedom* (BBC documentary), first aired on March 11, 2007.

demonstrates how a particular kind of politician, from both the Left (in the UK) and the Right (the neoconservatives in the United States) attempted to install individual freedom as the ultimate goal of politics. It explores the concepts of negative and positive freedom—that is, freedom from and freedom to—and presents how the Blair government and its role in achieving its vision of a stable society has in fact created the opposite of freedom in that the type of liberty it engendered wholly lacked any kind of meaning. These politicians sketched out a new world where everyone is free to choose his or her life, a utopian extravaganza, which promoted social mobility as a sort of liberation from old class divisions. But the results of this political conundrum are evidently different from their anticipated delight, and have created a paradoxical situation: The attempt to liberate has led to a rise in control management, while the so-called freedom of choice has collapsed, and class and privilege have returned. The "service" that was supposed to be delivered by the democratically elected representatives had been shifted to the population: a nostalgic transfiguration under the feint and disguise of an increase of freedom. Politicians no longer set out to change the world; instead, they saw their jobs as delivering nothing more than what those free individuals wanted. What was once envisioned and hailed as a "new" Labour party has now surrendered to a politically method-less and haphazard leader, Gordon Brown, whose affairs are out of control. He is a choleric leader, one who is unable to either generate or communicate the necessary route forward. In other words, vision was yesterday.

Participation is war. Just look at most situations in the workplace, in academia, or in cultural institutions. Any form of participation is already a form of conflict. In war, the enemy and adversary usually hold territory, which they can gain or lose, while each has a spokesman 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 that act upon that environment. In physics, a spatial vector is a concept described by scale and direction: In a field of forces, it is the individual vectors that participate in its becoming. However, if one wants to participate in any given force field, 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 participatory planning processes or user-involvement, but as a means of a consciously directed, forced entry into a territory, system, discourse, or practice that one is not usually part of.

If you look up the term "participation" on Wikipedia, you will find two major descriptions. The first one describes participation as "an umbrella term, including different means for the public to directly participate in political, economical or management decision." The second definition lays out an interesting depiction: "Participation may mean sharing something in common with others." In the context of what I would like to investigate, the latter seems to be particularly interesting 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 rising

culture concerned with what one might call a nostalgically fueled romantic participation. Such a model of participation is not only concerned with local communities, cultural and social infrastructure, and ecology, empowerment of citizen vis-à-vis local politics; it also seems to have as one of its main goals the minimization of friction. It is often the case that the design process itself becomes participatory rather than the premise of the work (as the critical starting point of engagement). In this 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? It further raises the question of whether there's 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 beginning of *Sex and the City*, Charlotte York is portrayed as the most innocent 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 disapproving friends, she explains why she wants to stay home. In order not to feel "bad" about her real motives (wanting to be pregnant and redecorate the house), she justifies her decision by stating that she wants to "volunteer at Trey's hospital and raise money for the pediatric wing." 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." In Charlotte's case, volunteering for an important social cause is portrayed as her voluntary participation in a good cause that prevents her from being judged for quitting her job—a kind of good-doing that suggests a false modality of participation (as active agent) equal to the so-called "Slacktivism" initiated and mobilized by the creation of Facebook campaigns à la vote for Nigeria.

Isn't this kind of practice precisely the modus operandi that we find in so many "socially relevant" practices today? There is an interesting similarity between this way of arguing and the way in which particular practices have hijacked the notion of participation as a positive, unquestionable means of engagement (which forms their economy). One also needs to be careful not to mistake participation with a form of social philanthropy or altruistic activities, which intend to promote good or improve the quality of life.

This book is not about charitable causes in regard to a defined objective. It attempts to understand the relationship between power structures and how to enter them as praxis without trying to become a communal stakeholder. Regarding the concept of intrusion into existing political fields of forces, for example, it may be more interesting to look at architect Eyal Weizman's work in Israel-Palestine, Edi Rama's role as the Mayor of Tirana, or alternative institutional models such as the Winter School Middle East, rather than the default public programs and social outreach projects organized by institutions such as Tate Modern. The latter is arguably not so different from

the Slacktivism of Facebook, the social awareness engineered by budget requirements, and Madonna's longing to adopt an African baby.

Now, the question is: How is it possible to participate in a given environment or situation without having to compromise one's role as an active agent who is not interested in consensus and "doing good," but in asking questions while attempting to inform practice in a particular direction. Becoming a vector in the force-field of conflicts questions how one participates without catering to pre-established needs or tasks; or from the point of view of the traditional architect, how possible it is to participate in, for example, urban micro-politics by inserting friction and asking questions rather than doing local community work through Section 106 agreements or bottom-up participation following protocols of social inclusion.[12]

In architecture, there are frequent examples of critical engagement conflicting with the realities of business interests. In 2006, London-based architect Richard Rogers was sent to New York by a number of clients who later read that he let a group of architects connected to Architects and Planners for Justice in

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12. Section 106 of the UK Town and Country Planning Act 1990 allows a local planning authority (LPA) to enter into a legally-binding agreement or planning obligation with a landowner in association with the granting of planning permission. The obligation is termed a Section 106 Agreement. 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, and affordable housing. More generally, they support the common cause.

Palestine use his office. Lord Rogers was called to the offices of the Empire State Development Corporation (which is overseeing the redesign of New York's 1.7 billion-dollar Jacob K. Javits Convention Center, which Rogers is in charge of) to explain his connection to the group, which was holding a meeting at Roger's London office on February 2, 2006. As a result, several New York officials urged that Rogers be removed from the publicly funded project. Interestingly, this case illustrates how architects are often used as a means for power structures. From the perspective of the power structure itself, however, the architect is not welcome as a participating vector or enabler, but understood as a service provider who delivers a product. As Rem Koolhaas argued in a conversation recently: "I would say that, particularly in America, the political obliviousness is considered part of the role of the architect."[13] It is this chasm that I attempt to tackle.

It may be helpful to use such a notion as a starting point for 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, but toward a model of individual action and decision-making fueled by democratic principles. One could argue that such a model would propose a reverse reading of the "social romantic" democracy promoted by the New Labour.

13. Rem Koolhaas, interview by Markus Miessen, "Rem Koolhaas with Markus Miessen," *Bidoun*, issue 8 (Fall 2006), 41–49.

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# The Grand Narratives — 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.*[1]

 —Rem Koolhaas

*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."*[2]

 —U.P.W. Nagel

*For those characters treated less sentimentally, the disease is viewed as the occasion finally to behave*

1. Rem Koolhaas, interview by Alejandro Zaera, "Finding Freedoms: Conversations with Rem Koolhaas," in *OMA/ Rem Koolhaas 1987–1998* (Madrid: El Croquis, 1999), 30.

2. U.P.W. Nagel, "U wie Universität," in *Von A bis Z, 26 Essays zu Grundbegriffen der Architektur*, ed. Maria Hohmann and Stefan Rettich, (Cologne: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2004), 127, translation by author.

*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.*[3]
            —Susan Sontag

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

### SCENE I
Aristotle arrives at the Polis.

Stoicism is founded on the universe's interconnectivity, which is administered by absolute laws. From these laws, humans are to develop their reason and moral ethic by which they are to live. The practical ethics of Stoicism emphasize 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 one's control, and living in the present without hope for, or fear of, the future.

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3.  Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor* (London: Allen Lane, 1979), 43.

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.

## SCENE 2
Creatures of Habit—*tamquam truncus stat.*[4]

Throughout history, a great number of intellectuals have been servants of power; a few of them tried to use their relative privilege to help others dismantle illegitimate institutions and practices. Arguably, the most dilettante reading of Stoicism tries to figure out where the world is going and, as a result, follows 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 inward as a therapeutic relationship with oneself—building up an inner fortress against the outside world rather than actively interrogating it in order to generate potential change—also lays bare the tendency of suppressing issues of potential significance in favor of habit. Why is it that one consciously avoids reality? Are we holding on to things that are no longer worth holding on to?

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4.  Latin phrase, translates: "He, the immovable institution,"
    (literally: [tree-] trunk/log), translation by author.

### SCENE 3
### Demythologizing the impact of the architectural gods.

Within architecture, propelled by formal experiment, 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 essentially creates physical envelopes and a discourse that concentrates on the nurturing of the ego-cult rather than participating in the sociopolitical 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 nonphysical spaces, it is the architect's responsibility to make actual space for physical and direct communication between people." [5] Yet, as reality proves, this is easier said than done.

### SCENE 4
### Beyond the logic of the Grand Narrative.

Stoicism suggests an absence of interference. In opposition, one could argue that friction, the suspen-

5.  Kazuyo Sejima, "Face to Face," in *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], ed. Jennifer Sigler, (Rotterdam: episode publishers, 2003), 407.

sion 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, 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 only feel that it is leading, more and 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 cling to the past. As modus vitae, twentieth-century architects have often followed the grand narratives of architectural history, obeying the objects of their predecessors, while worshipping the classical architectural object as a generator for change.[6] Strangely, this happened at a time when it was already evident that the city was being conditioned by forces that superseded 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

6.  Not to be mistaken with Classical architecture, but rather, the physical, formal object as architectural design.

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."[7]

It is often implied that modern materials and methods are dictating contemporary architecture's expression of form. Some people understand architecture as a result of 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 subculture rendering a spatial understanding that suspends the traditional reading of architecture as the purely spatial manifestation of built matter—object bound. Such protocols would challenge society's obedience to 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 under-

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

stand processes of uncertainty, of which the city, as the ultimately unplannable object, consists.

This major change—moving from self-referential object lust to what one might call a "relational practice"[8]—presents us with a reading of the world that is based on re-evaluated judgment according to specific situations rather than moral truism. In contrast to the "holding on to wreckage," it introduces a world in need of an optimistic and critical rendering of situational truths as opposed to moral truism.

### SCENE 5
Stoicism and Space—*ad rem publicam accedere.*[9]

*"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*

8. See Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* (Dijon: Les presses du réel, 1998).
9. Latin phrase, translates: "Turning towards the political," translation by author.

*breathe, and many say, 'We will breathe later,'*
*and most do not die, because they are already*
*dead."*[10]

If one were to engage with Stoicism in the
sense of spatial politics, one would realize 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*, which essentially describes a philosophy of
the marketplace,[11] to the urban-nostalgic rendering
of Colin Rowe,[12] 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 the implica-
tions of Stoic philosophy in spatial terms, one would
have to make sure not to mistake stoic strategies in
architecture and a Stoic architecture. Stoic architec-
ture—as in *built form*—does not exist. Rather, it is
the framework in which practitioners seem to operate
at times that could potentially be labeled "Stoic."
Although one can identify certain architectures of
detachment, bridging the gap from a purely philo-
sophical idea to the physical and aesthetic impli-
cations of built matter is not possible. Now, it also

10. Raoul Vaneigem, *The Revolution of Everyday Life*, trans.
    Donald Nicholson-Smith (London: Rebel Press, 1983), 51.
11. Robert Venturi, Steven Izenour, and Denise Scott Brown, ed.,
    *Learning from Las Vegas* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1977).
12. Colin Rowe and Fred Koetter, *Collage City* (Cambridge, MA:
    The MIT Press, 1984).

implies that one cannot lead an argument based on the question of whether or not stoical space—in the sense of ethical space—exists. 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 to outline ethical space, because ethical space in its philosophical and ideological narratives 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 sociopolitical 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 [13]—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 organizational 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

13. Not necessarily "control" in the contemporary sense (i.e., CCTV surveillance and gated communities), but rather the physical gesture that aims to control movement, space-time relationships, etc.

relationships and their vis-à-vis effects render what we call the socio-spatial construct. They are influenced by power and force, but also marginality and dissent. Therefore, space is entirely political." [14]

### SCENE 6
### Uncertainty revisited—*cabente disciplina*. [15]

Where the traditional Stoic philosopher understands the environment as a *world beyond control*, which can only be dealt with by leading an introverted life driven by virtue, the contemporary protagonist also appreciates the world 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-organizational structures, which—in regard 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

14. An Architektur, "R wie Raum," in *Von A bis Z, 26 Essays zu Grundbegriffen der Architektur*, eds. Maria Hohmann and Stefan Rettich (Cologne: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2004), 110–111, trans. by the author.

15. Latin phrase, translates: "When the ancient order started to crumble," trans. by the author.

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[16]—one is being exposed to an emerging understanding of architecture 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 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 proactive philosophy that sets the contemporary apart from the Stoic, or even Buddhist, notion that implies an extinction of desire.

## SCENE 7
### When the gods lost sight.

16. For example, the self-referential object in the landscape.

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 means of visual perspective, some contemporary projects can no longer be expressed using the same techniques. This 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 dreamed to build; rendered images of the new world signified their plans for 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 an encounter is carried by a genuine faith in progress. But the projections of architects' desires have also unraveled a distorted, hidden pleasure: The desire to build is supported by the desire for power. In their attempts to sell subjective dreams for tangible vehicles of progress, architects luxuriate in the power handed over to them by society, thereby legitimizing their social positions 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. Patronizing, 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 experience from the outside,[17] some of the emerging, politically charged protagonists are more concerned with experience from the inside; which is not to say spatial interior, but the inside of a particular, applied system. This experiential difference also points to a 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 of site-specific practice,[18] this emerging subculture 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 modernism, it is not concerned with the colonization of territory, but the fading away of the object in favor of a holistic reading of the social, political, and spatial environment upon

17. For example, formal aspects, plan arrangement, spatial quality, materiality, line of sight, light configurations, etc.

18. Artists such as Robert Smithson, Dan Graham, or Gordon Matta-Clark; and architects such as Alison and Peter Smithson, Cedric Price, etc.

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 transforms 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's 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.

### SCENE 8
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 [19] —a kind of laboratory of ideas for what would become the protagonists of the Situationist Inter-

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19. "Information Bulletin of the French Group of the Lettriste International," first published in 1954

20. A non-artistic group occurring in several modern capitalist countries united around the notion of the end 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 and responsibility: his "situation" describes a self-consciousness of existence within a specific environment; see also Guy Debord, "Report

national[20]—the current discourse is fundamentally different because it is implemented in practice. With the early exception of Constant,[21] it had—so far—remained an entirely ephemeral project. Where, based on a theory of economic exchange through sacrifice and excess, anthropologists and utopian literates were interested in the "enhancement of status through ceremonial gift-giving or festive destruction,"[22] today's spatial practice not only utilizes experimental behavior 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 nonexistent, even most of the apparently phenomenologically, socially, and politically motivated academic studios are still

on the Construction of Situations and on the Terms of Organization and Action of the International Situationist Tendency," in *Guy Debord and the Situationist International: Texts and Documents*, ed. Tom McDonough (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2002), 44.

21. Constant Nieuwenhuys was an Abstract Expressionist painter who became a member of the Surrealist group in 1947, and later, the Cobra group.

22. Simon Ford, *The Situationist International: A User's Guide* (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2005), 33.

trading on the past: the faculties and their inter-
nalized discourse are rarely more than incestuous
polemics.

In his essay "Environmental Stoicism and Place
Machismo,"[23] Michael Benedikt describes the "abil-
ity to endure or tune out places that are cheap or
neglected, depressing or demeaning, banal, uncom-
fortable, or controlling places to which people would
normally react with despair" as a typology that in
his architectural terminology could be labeled "en-
vironmental stoicism."[24] 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."[25] Although his argument concerning
the juxtaposition of these two strands is valid, his
proposed model is one that betrays an existing prac-
tice, 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,"[26] he does not acknowledge that there are
specific projects, which deal with (urban) space dif-
ferently than those practitioners he is describing. 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, in fact, one

23. Michael Benedikt, "Environmental Stoicism and Place Machismo—
    A Polemic," *Harvard Design Magazine*, no. 16 (Winter/Spring 2002).
24. Ibid., 1.
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid.

that—at least in architectural practice—has hardly any precedents. Apart from fairly recent theoretical arguments, such as Margaret Crawford's *Everyday Urbanism*[27] or Jonathan Hill's *The Illegal Architect*,[28] 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 matters. It is only within the realm of what one might call a contemporary politicized spatial enthusiasm that the issue of sociopolitical space with regards to spatial conflicts is being presented in a fashion that utilizes practical optimism fueled by opportunistic curiosity rather than theoretical pessimism. This optimism is the underlying narrative of this book, fuelled by practices of like-minded protagonists such as Eyal Weizman, John Palmesino, Celine Condorelli, Manuel Herz, Nikolaus Hirsch, Philipp Misselwitz, Jesko Fezer, Sabine Bitter, Bassam El Baroni, Teddy Cruz, Srdjan Jovanovic Weiss, or Keller Easterling, to name a few.

### SCENE 9
### Who said the gods were brave?

The image of the architect has historically often been related to the male heroic protagonist who introduces

27. John Chase, Margaret Crawford, and John Kaliski, eds.,
    *Everyday Urbanism* (New York: The Monacelli Press, 1999).
28. Jonathan Hill, *The Illegal Architect* (London: Black Dog Publishing, 1998).

to the outside an established lifestyle 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."[29] It is precisely here where one can posit the turning point in practice: the neglect of ego-centric narrative and self-referential ambition in favor of catering to 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?"[30] None of these are true. The interesting aspect that is currently being addressed is that there is no clear distinction any longer, but rather specific decision-making with regard to whether or not a particular mechanism should be applied within an individual project. The highly romanticized 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,"[31] which is essentially derived from Aristotelian idealism—is no longer valid.

29. Andrew Saint, *The Image of the Architect* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 1.

30. Ibid., 6.

31. Ibid.

When Denise Riley introduces her particular reading of Pierre Hadot's *Philosophy as a Way of Life* [32] in "What I Want Back Is What I Was," [33] she argues that Hadot's understanding of Foucault's culture of the self—an ethical model as an aesthetics of existence—is burdened with the risk of being "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." [34] Now, this reading is true to an extent—only until the person who pursues such an endeavor of self-rendering is concerned with image; one that is being assessed 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 and what one might call *post-Bilbao architecture*. [35] 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 the exteriorized image: the image of

32. Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, ed. Arnold I. Davidson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995).
33. Denise Riley, "What I Want Back Is What I Was," *Diacritics*, no. 1, vol. 32 (Spring 2002), 57.
34. Ibid.
35. Essentially, that of the star-architect.

oneself is being suspended and is no longer part of the signature equation.

## SCENE 10
### The tower of Bilbao—*salva res est*[36]

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 twentieth-century architectural superstars,[37] 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 twentieth-century Western modernism, and what the course of modernism, postmodernism, and supermodernism[38] had avoided

36. Latin phrase, translates: "For now, everything is still fine," trans. by the author.
37. Among 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 images.
38. 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 developments as symptoms of a cultural shift toward more global, neutral, and non-representational forms of art and exchange; see also Hans Ibelings, *Supermodernism: Architecture in the Age of Globalisation* (Rotterdam: NAi Publishers, 1998).

dealing with: "Modernism 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."[39] In contrast to a process of pure image production and the deliberate groundwork for the red carpet of the star-architect, the new practitioners 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-specialization, which employs the notion that essentially every 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 to that change includes job descriptions such as "spatial consultant," "urban

39. Kieran Long, "MUF: Children Dressed up as Horses Take on the Modernists," *ICON*, no. 22 (April 2005).

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 twentieth century, most recent practice has rediscovered 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 Internet. This specific kind of problem solving left behind an understanding of architecture for the sake of the "stylized object" propelled by virtuous vision. Today, if one is working on a project dealing with the West Bank or Gaza, for example, the project will most likely concentrate on this very situation: It takes into consideration an open-source involvement with its cultural and political heritage. In contrast to the late twentieth-century projects of "the diagram," which were purely modern in the sense that they attempted to deliver an almost scientific solution to a problem put forward by canceling out everything else, post-Bilbao has started to generate a discourse that acknowledges the political implications of space as something that 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 has realized that the rest of the world is burning. The political thought of the Bush Administration has gone even further toward the diagram as the drawing up of an

inflexible solution, implementing it without considering what will happen 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 played with the age-old, prevailing image of the architect as impeccable master—was only an intellectual claim. The kind of anti-stoic practice that is being described in this text operates under a different agenda, the primary one being the realization that architects are products of their time. Today, we work under a different ideological system than the modern, one that is temporary, contingent, informal, ephemeral, and that resists the notion of pure object lust.

<div align="center">

SCENE II

Formalism defeated.

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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," [40] George Orwell outlines his account of what a writer's ambitions are to follow his discipline with pride. Orwell distinguishes between four major atmospheres in which the writer lives: sheer egoism, aesthetic enthusiasm, historical

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40. George Orwell, *Why I Write* (London: Penguin Books, 2004).
41. Ibid., 4–5.

impulse, and political purpose.[41] As history is written by the victorious, such atmospheres retrospectively are 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 toward 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 realization, in which the Stoic faces the deadlock of stable harmony as the epitome of nihilism.

"The show is over. The audience gets up to leave their seats. Time to collect their coats and go home. They turn around... No more coats and no more home."[42]

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

# Consensus as Stasis

Let's start with the good news: consensus is needed. It's not always problematic, but often necessary. Without it, very little would actually get done. However, where a conflictual model is often believed to lead to a splintering of society, it is precisely the consensual model that produces just this splintering; only it does so by means of a collective passivity. Ironically, the conflictual model could be understood as the more active and participatory model. Consensus often means a decrease in interaction. No more interaction means stasis. If we didn't have mutation, we would all have to come to an equilibrium. Whether one examines state politics, critical decision-making in companies, the way that projects by non-governmental organizations are run, or the realities of many commissioned projects in the art world, these entities tend to often reach a mode of consensus too quickly.

Similar to the Dutch Polder Model, the Swiss consensus-driven democracy functions fantastically smooth when concerned with the everyday administration of the country. It fails, however, once it's faced with the task of producing challenging ideas. Consensus at the core of the state presents us with a situation in which everything will be 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 the necessary en-
thusiasm with it—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 remembers the example of New Labour,
it is not too difficult to detect a certain correlation
between an opportunistic reading of participation
and superimposed formats of consensus. In such a
context, the variables are clear and the equation is
simple: Participation minus consensus equals ma-
nipulation. And participation has become merely a
symbolic gesture. Coupled with the power of the
media, popular vote is often influenced by a strategic
utilization of fear, especially by the Right. One can-
not—and should not—introduce and incorporate
the notion of democracy as if everyone can take part
in all areas, professions, and practices. It seems
dangerous to only ever submit to democracy as the
ultimate tool for solving problems or situations in a
politically correct manner. Not every concern or af-
fair should surrender to a popular vote. The catchall
popular party has pacified the potential for the antago-
nistic execution of non-violent conflict. It seems that,
in the early twenty-first century, these parties are los-
ing more and more support, precisely because they
are no longer able to deliver agency and mediation
regarding societal and political integration, and do
not manage to communicate well between the state
and the citizen. More so, it seems that the concept of
the political party per se has lost support and encour-

agement as less and less people associate themselves with it and are decreasingly using this medium as a means of political participation.[1]

In one's head, hardly anyone is a democrat. The concept of democracy also relies and is based on a certain fiction, the grand narrative that everyone has the right to vote as well as has an equal say. A pure implementation of this concept, however, would require two essential variables in order not to return to a model of democracy that is so concerned with itself that it produces nothing else but stasis: an appropriate amount of stakeholders, who are manageable enough to be administered in this format, and an absence of exterior control; for example, the media.

Concerning the concept of consensus at the heart of national decision-making, it is significant to mention the Dutch version of Tony Blair's simplified idea of politics (aka, the kiss of death of 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, and describes the aim toward a non-conflictual mode of national debate. It is described with phrases like "a pragmatic recognition of plurality" and "co-operation despite differences." The reason this style of decision-making works so well in the Netherlands is because the supposedly unique situation created by the fact that a large part of the Netherlands consists of polders below sea level—such as dikes, reclaimed

1.   See Franz Walter, *Im Herbst der Volksparteien? Eine kleine Geschichte von Aufstieg und Rückgang politischer Massenintegration* (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2009).

land, flood plains, or marshes. 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. They would otherwise be flooded.

This notion of consensus-production is deeply embedded in the Dutch society, and goes as far as to the non-approval or acceptance of people, circumstances, or political decision-making out of the ordinary; or as someone on the train from Schiphol to Almere once told me, "Your head will be chopped off the moment you stick it out—do normal, this is already crazy enough." There is now a trend to send leading Dutch businessmen and politicians to a speaker's academy in London in order for them to relearn and train for the idea of disagreement. The Dutch consensus model has also infiltrated popular culture in that it coined the term "BNer" (*beroemde Nederlanders* [Famous Dutchman]).[2] As the term already implies, it is used for those who—in one way or the other—have achieved fame in or through the media, often for no reason other than everyone agrees with them.

It is true that "if you want to avoid enemies, you should either become a tax adviser, pharmacist, or midwife."[3] Regarding the notion of the democratic, "hatred of democracy"—as Jacques Rancière points out—is certainly nothing new.[4] Rancière describes

2.  See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Polder_Model.
3.  Marcel Reich-Ranicki, interview by Elke Heidenreich, *Woṛu Lesen?* (audiobook) (Zurich: Kein&Aber, 2005).
4.  Jacques Rancière, *Hatred of Democracy* (London: Verso, 2006).

the word "democracy" 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 borne 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."*[5]

Rancière describes democracy neither as a type of constitution nor a form of society, but as the power peculiar 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."[6] He understands a democratic society as one that is never anything but an imaginary portrayal

5.  Ibid., 8.
6.  Ibid., 47.

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."[7]

It is precisely at this point where the self-initiated mode of participation, the role of the uninvited outsider—which I will explain later—comes into play. The often-polarized situation that Rancière describes, the opposition between direct and representative democracy, needs to be transferred into a productive relationship beyond the black and white, into a parallel condition in which conflict and friction allow for the reintroduction of the notion of the adversary, as Chantal Mouffe calls it. It seems that consensus may be a huge part of the problem of many participatory projects. It is also perhaps what is at work in criticism. As Chantal Mouffe advocates in the conversation in chapter 6, there is of course a need for a consensus on democratic principles; but there should be a productive disagreement about their interpretations. In this context, one must question the default. What is at work in the majority of art criticism is just an agreement not to interpret, which is ultimately not a productive means to move forward.

In architecture, one can witness not only a very unproductive but also idyllic interpretation of why consensus is necessary: Architecture seldom embodies a space for discourse, especially for those entering from the outside. Architects are usually understood as service providers, following the default protocols

7.  Ibid., 52.

of their clients and therefore the consensus of the service industry. Compared to the supposed autonomy of the artist, the architect is often stuck within this regime. It assumes that the architect is part of a certain group that acts within and informs a stable territory. This often means stasis.

While modernism clearly defined roles and told everyone what they can and should do, we are now facing a situation in which disciplines are no longer clearly segregated, no longer stable territories; and the question remains how this field of uncertainty can be maneuvered through in the most critically productive manner.

Therefore, the basic question that is emerging is: 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 being broken up again?

# 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.*[1]
—Chantal Mouffe

*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.*[2]
—Florian Schneider

*Pity is very underrated.*
—George Costanza

Any form of participation is already a form of conflict. In order to participate in a given environment

1.  Chantal Mouffe, "Introduction," in *The Challenge of Carl Schmitt*, ed. Chantal Mouffe (London: Verso, 1999), 3.
2.  Florian Schneider, "The Dark Site of the Multitude," in *theory kit* (http://kit.kein.org/node/1), accessed Jan. 25, 2006.

or situation, one needs to understand the forces of conflict that act upon that environment. In this context, it seems urgent and necessary to promote an understanding of "conflictual participation," one that acts as an uninvited irritant, a forced entry into fields of knowledge that could arguably benefit from spatial thinking.

In the politics of participation, it is crucial to differentiate between cooperation and collaboration as pointed out by Florian Schneider.[3] 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," as an alternative way in which oppositional positions can be played out. 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. What is important in 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, it is useful to think through a concept of conflictual participation as a productive form of interventional practice.

Conflict refers to a condition of antagonism or a state of opposition between two or more groups of people. It can also be described as a clash of interests,

3. See ibid.

aims, or targets. When we look at conflict as opposed to innocent forms of participation, conflict is not to be understood as a form of protest or contrary provocation; but rather, as a micro-political practice through which the participant becomes an active agent who insists on being an actor in the force field they are facing. Thus, participation becomes a form of critical engagement.

When participation becomes conflict, conflict becomes space. Micro-political action can be as effective as traditional state political action. Such micro-political fragmentation strengthens what Hardt and Negri call the "multitude," a composite of multiple differences that carries with it the power of different positions.[4] They argue that the accelerating integration of economic, political, and cultural forces on a global scale has enabled the growth of a powerful network. The multitude is defined by its diversity rather than its commonalities. According to Hardt and Negri, this multitude is the key for future change and might strike just where it is least expected, and with maximum efficiency where the antagonism is at its peak. However, as illustrated in the conversation with Chantal Mouffe in this book, Hardt and Negri's theory of the multitude appears oversimplified when it comes to the global versus the local scale.

In the context of spatial practices and participation, probably the most interesting aspect of the notion of the multitude is its overlap with Italian writer and

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

political theorist Antonio Gramsci, who proposed a "long march through the institutions," by which he meant the appropriation of cultural institutions at large: the media, the academies, and the theaters. Gramsci, Hardt, and Negri share the rejection of the understanding that changes in culture come "after the revolution." All three of them recognize the importance of culture. Their "revolution," therefore, is understood as the establishing of counter-institutions rather than 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 emerge while appreciating culture as a living system.

In July 2006, Rem Koolhaas and Hans Ulrich Obrist interviewed more than fifty people over the course of twenty-four hours. Their first so-called "Interview Marathon" at the Serpentine Gallery in London, was set up as a model to deliver a cross-section of practitioners that, in one way or another, define what London is today. Although the event was interesting and successful in many ways, one could also sense a certain frustration among the more critically oriented audience members. Surely, one would think, if one sets out to trace some kind of cross section, that it would include a multitude of dissimilar voices. Now, in order for this not to be misunderstood, it needs to be mentioned that I am not trying to argue for 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, thinkers, or commentators or at least originated in the same cultural milieu.

Regarding collaboration as a post-consensus form of practice, I would like to argue that, in order to include the complexity of the city, one also needs to include the conflicting forces of that city. Consensus is only achieved through a relationality of powers. One could argue that if such a relationality were to brake, another kind of knowledge would be produced, one that helps us understand the composite realities of the contemporary city and the forces at play. Interestingly, one of the interviewees at the Marathon was Chantal Mouffe, who usually suffers from a severe angst of the middle-class consensus swarm. Although her interview session was more of a monologue than a conversation, it revealed probably the most important point of the event: Because today's networking culture is based on consensus rather than conflict, it merely produces multiplications, but 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."[5]

In this context, it could be useful to rethink

the concept of conflict as an enabler, a producer of a productive environment rather than as direct, physical violence. Conflict does not have to register as a physical force. A more diverse set of conflicting voices could have potentially been a risk for the turn-out of the Marathon. However, it would have allowed multiple agencies and discourse that, through the recalibration of vectorial forces by means of critical conversations, could 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."[6]

In order for any kind of participation to reach a political dimension, the engagement needs to be based on a distant critical voice. Through this kind of "conflictual participation," the exchange of knowledge in a post-disciplinary field of forces starts to produce new forms of knowledge. As a starting point for such a model of "conflictual participation," one could make use of the concept of collaboration as opposed to cooperation that Florian Schneider distinguishes in "Collaboration: The Dark Site of the Multitude":[7]

5.  Chantal Mouffe, "Introduction," in *The Challenge of Carl Schmitt*, op. cit., 4.

6.  Michel Foucault, "Two Lectures," in *Power/Knowledge*, ed. Colin Gordon (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1980), 93–94.

7.  Florian Schneider, "Collaboration: The Dark Site of the Multitude," op. cit.

"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..."[8] Since such a notion of collaboration is also based on an idea of the inside and the outside (if you're inside, you're part of an existing discourse that is to be agreed upon and fostered), it will increasingly be "the outsider" who will manage to critically add to pre-established power relations of expertise. Although the outsider will be understood as someone who does not threaten the internal system due to a lack of knowledge of its structure, it is precisely this condition that allows one to fully immerse himself in its depth in a dilettante manner. What we need today are more dilettantes who worry neither about making the wrong shift nor preventing friction between certain agents in the existing force field if necessary; we need a means to—as Claire Doherty calls it—"circumnavigate predictability."[9] It is this dilettantism that might enable us to enter more productive modes of collaborative engagement. In this sense, the 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. Through specialist

8. Ibid.
9. Claire Doherty, "The New Situationists," in *Contemporary Art—From Studio to Situation* (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2004), 11.

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; it allows for a forceful injection of external knowledge that is alien to the system one engages with.

Schneider describes the notion of teamwork as something that often fails because of often banal, internalized modes of cooperation that are characterized by the opposite of sharing knowledge: "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." [10] Schneider interestingly stresses the fact that there is increasing evidence that working together may also happen in unexpected ways. In such a regime of practice, the individual members of, for example, a work group—in which they are usually conditioned to pursue solidarity and generosity—are being exposed to a more brusque method of collaboration, a mode where "individuals are relying on each other the more they go after their own interests, mutually dependent through following their own agendas." [11] Cooperation should be understood as the process of working side by side, in agreement rather than in competition. Collaboration

10. Florian Schneider, "Collaboration: The Dark Site of the Multitude," op. cit.
11. Ibid.

is a process by 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 and modes of collaboration, Schneider introduces cooperation as a method applied between identifiable individuals within organizations, whereas collaboration articulates a more disparate relationship generated by and based on heterogeneous parts, which are defined as unpredictable singularities. In contrast to an organic model of cooperation, collaboration is being put forward as a rigorously immanent and illegitimate praxis.

This notion of course connects to the concept of the outsider, as well as the need for a more conflictual mode of participation from the point of view of self-initiated practice versus the more established model of the service provider: "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."[12] It is this collaborative structure that 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 can generate productive practices.

Collaboration often produces actors who work on projects for something other than a purely mon-

12. Ibid.

etary exchange or the accumulation of cultural capital. It can also be described as a productive learning process. In the book *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 interplay of friction and freedom, as we temporarily but frequently come into contact and enter the parochial domain of others.[13] It points to the fact that, if you set up a situation in which people can produce what they believe in, this condition can produce a set of relationships and productivities that take the situation further than the conventional understanding of disciplinary or interdisciplinary practices. The logic of change is always based on the notion of exception, while unpredictable acting is the enabler for something "new" to emerge. One could argue that the autonomy of the art world produces an infrastructure for this. In such a context, opposition can be read as affirmation, and whether boundaries retract or expand, they set up the limits of potentialities.

The concept of using conflict as a generator of critical and productive collaboration was first introduced in conflict theory. There are very formalized political, transnational, and non-governmental structures and procedures in place that utilize conflict as a strategic tool, in order to both reveal realities and generate a crisis, which allow for change to occur more rapidly. The United Nations practices a number of conflict strategies in which micro-conflicts are

13. Maarten Hejer and Arnold Reijndorp, *In Search Of The New Public Domain* (Rotterdam: NAi Publishers, 2002).

superimposed onto existing situations of conflict in order to deal with the source issue. This concept of introducing other conflicts falls within what is officially called "conflict transformation theory," which is strongly influenced by Johan Galtung.[14]

To return to the notion of collaboration, it would thus not be farfetched to argue that conflict could be understood as a productive variable within collaboration. It points to the larger question of how we think of challenges and change. Conflict is not necessarily a given. It needs to emerge and needs to 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 emerges on a content and production level, a conflict played out within the remit of the democratic arena. 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

14. Galtung is currently the director of Transcend, an international peace and development network, seen as the pioneer of peace and conflict research, and founder of the International Peace Research Institute (PRIO) in Oslo. Galtung also originated the concept of Peace Journalism, increasingly influential in communications and media studies. Over the past forty years, Galtung has published ninety-five books and more than a thousand articles on the operations of conflict. Interestingly, Transcend also promotes codes such as: "Even if electoral democracy and individualist human rights are good for you, they might not be for others." This is interesting precisely because Galtung has developed the concept that is widely known as "structural violence." Here, conflict is understood not as a means of provocation, but as an idea of prompting change through the operational collision of interests that produce new meaning and practice, a means of productive and operative change.

practice. The culture of antagonistic collaboration could also be described as an urban, rather than a rural, practice. Density allows for antagonisms to emerge more naturally. The space of performativity is a space of reaction and encounter, in which there is an intrinsic relation of what Chantal Mouffe calls the adversarial, of "friendly enemies." What they have in common is that they share a symbolic space. They agree on the ethico-political principles that inform the political association, but they disagree about the interpretation of these principles, a struggle between different interpretations of shared principles. In a similar manner—excavating the dynamics between friend and enemy—Jacques Derrida, in *The Politics of Friendship*,[15] applies the use of difference to the concept of friendship. Haunted by the provocative address attributed to Aristotle—"my friends, there is no friend"—Derrida illustrates that there is a play of difference associated with the concept of friendship. He does not have to problematize 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 practice is supposed to challenge the expectation of what things should be and how they

15. Jacques Derrida, *The Politics of Friendship* (London: Verso, 1997).

should be done. Knowledge is necessarily shareable and occurs after there is a common ground, even if that shared ground is conflictual. If art is political in defining ways of being together and reshaping common ground and how it emerges, then—as Tom Keenan remarks—"art clearly can be and in fact is a mode of research in the political."[16] Art is "doing" politics not through modes of representation, but through practice. The moment of the political is when agency is assumed, when one becomes visible. Almost by default, this raises a problematic: Someone on the outside needs to recognize it as political. Therefore, the relationship between practice and distribution and the question of how to address and present, become imperative. It is important to understand that architecture can never deliver solutions. However, what it can do is visualize and spatialize the conflicts that are the reality of the very nature of its context; in fact, even more so considering that these conflicts are disappearing from our visual registers. Consequently, architecture becomes a mode of witness testimony.

One should therefore argue that, instead of breeding the next generation of facilitators and mediators, we should encourage the "uninterested outsider," the "uncalled participator" who is unaware of prerequisites and existing protocols, entering the arena with nothing but creative intellect and the will to provoke change. Running down the corridor with

16. Tom Keenan quoted from a Centre for Research Architecture round-table presentation and discussion on March 24, 2006. Goldsmiths College, London.

no fear of causing friction or destabilizing existing power relations, he opens up a space for change, one that enables "political politics." Given the increasing fragmentation of identities and the complexities of the contemporary city, we are now facing a situation in which it is crucial to think about a form of commonality, which allows for conflict as a form of productive engagement: a model of bohemian participation in the sense of an outsider's point of entry, accessing existing debates and discourses untroubled by their disapproval.

# Democracy Revisited (In Conversation with Chantal Mouffe)

*From December 2006 until the summer of 2009, Markus Miessen conducted a series of meetings and one-on-one conversations with political theorist Chantal Mouffe. In a series of ongoing discussions in London, Vienna, and Berlin, of which this chapter presents an edited volume of selected material, Miessen implicated his current investigation into conflict- and non-consensus-based forms of participation as an alternative spatial practice and point of departure to discuss democratic life and Mouffe's understanding of what she calls "conflictual consensus."*

## PART 1

MARKUS MIESSEN — Chantal, you have written extensively on the struggle of politics and the radical heart of democratic life. Could you explain the main thesis of your latest book, *On the Political*?

CHANTAL MOUFFE — My objective in *On the Political* consists of two aims: The first one is from the point of view of political theory. I am convinced that the two

dominant models in democratic political theory—
the aggregative model on one hand, and on the other,
the deliberative model, 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 which 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 in 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 terror-
ism. 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 there is a crucial
role that political theory can play in helping us to un-
derstand 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 is what we
find in Ulrich Beck and Anthony Giddens. They ar-
gue 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 of course 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 dynamics 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 Carl Schmitt?

CM — I think that the strength of Schmitt's critique of liberalism lies precisely in its 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. My main disagreement with Schmitt concerns the consequences that he draws from that. 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 the political association because it would necessarily lead to a friend and enemy struggle, and therefore to the destruction of the political association. This was really a challenge for me because, 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. This is why I developed this model that I call an "agonistic model of democracy," in which I am try-ing 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 being expressed?

CM — What I mean by this is that 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 is something that 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, there can exist between them what I call a "conflictual consensus." 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." This is how I envisage the agonistic struggle: 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 — I think it is very important to envisage the task of democracy in an agonistic form, in terms of creating institutions that will allow for conflicts, which will necessarily emerge. In other words, conflicts

that would be between adversaries, not enemies. If that agonistic form is not available, it is very likely that, when conflicts emerge, they are going to take an antagonistic form.

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

CM — I use "institution" in a very wide sense—in terms of an ensemble of practices, language games, discourses. But also traditional institutions as parties, as well as 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" and what you call "forms of construction of a 'we/they' compatible with a pluralistic order"?

CM — The institutional aspect that Hardt and Negri put forward in *Empire*, and later in *Multitude*, is something with which I disagree. Theirs is a very anti-institutional view. 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. They do not realize the importance of the passions, what Freud calls the "libidinal investment" [an attachment of strong, intense emotional energies to an issue, person, or concept], which are mobilized in 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 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 the possibility of an "absolute democracy," a democracy beyond any form of institution. It is even difficult for me to imagine what this could be. There is a messianic tone in their view. They think it is possible to reach a perfect democracy in which there will no longer be any relation of power—no more conflict, no more antagonism. It goes 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 has definitely been overcome.

> MM — Is there someone in this context that you feel more sympathetic with than Hardt and Negri?

CM — When I think of democracy, 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 in which we can say that democracy has been realized.

> MM — While Hardt and Negri are waiting for this to happen.

CM — The moment we say democracy has been realized, we pretend to be in a situation in which we can say: What exists at the moment is a perfect democracy. Such a democracy would have ceased to be pluralistic because there would no longer be any possibility for discussion or conflict. This is an idea that is absolutely contrary to my idea of an agonistic democracy. For me, there is democracy as long as there is conflict, and if existing arrangements can be contested. If we arrive at a point where we say, "This is the end point, 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 Deleuze and 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 contradiction of Empire will bring about the reign of the multitude. All the crucial and fundamental questions for politics are automatically evacuated. To give you an example, they see the alter-globalization

movement as one of the manifestations of the power of the multitude. I also think it's an interesting movement, but the problem with this movement is that it is very heterogeneous. Within the alter-globalization movement, 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, how to make them converge into a movement that presents some form of unity. This is, of course, something that Hardt and Negri disagree with completely. They believe that the very heterogeneity of the movement is its force. They argue that, these groups within the movement 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 towards 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 they have 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 recuperate 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, they 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 [Fernando de la Rúa, President of Argentina from December 10, 1999 to December 21, 2001]. Their main slogan was "Que se vayan todos" [They must all go, we do not want anything to do with politicians]. 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 [Carlos Menem, President of Argentina from July 8, 1989 to December 10, 1999, representing the Justicialist Party] and Kirchner [Néstor Kirchner, President of Argentina from May 25, 2003 to December 10, 2007]. 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 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, I mean it will be a conflictual consensus, you see? 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 suggests that we are working together towards a common aim. This 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 knowledge spaces here.

CM — The essential differences and conflicts are going to remain, but there is at least articulation. In regards to Hardt and Negri, what needs to be put into question is the idea of a necessary process. I am not sure whether capitalism is its own gravedigger. This is what they claim and this is 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 film 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?" And Negri answers, "Wait and be patient." And Hardt's answer was, "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." This is not the way in which we can envisage radical politics today. 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 — According to me, what is really necessary today is to create an agonistic public space, an agonistic type of politics. This is really what is missing. We are living in a situation that, in *On the Political*, I call "post-political," 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 center, in which there is really no possibility for an alternative. We are told that, given the state of globalization, there is nothing we can do. And this is why most Socialist-parties or Labor parties have moved so much towards the center. What they offer is really not fundamentally different from what Center-Right parties offer. There is now a general consensus that there is no alternative, which I think is extremely dangerous. In my view, such a situation has created the terrain for the rise of right-wing populism 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, I don't think it is 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 understand the reasons for the success of these parties to be able to provide an adequate answer.

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

CM — I think that what is important is to subvert the consensus that exists in so many areas, and to re-establish a dynamic of conflictuality. And so, from that point of view, I can see that what you call "the outsider" could play a role. Personally, I would put it differently, because this is more the person who disagrees, who will have another point of view. It is not necessarily an outsider. It could be somebody from within the community who is not part of the prevailing consensus, who will allow people to see things differently.

> MM — Yes, but is this not precisely the outside voice that is entering 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 are not taking into account." So, yes, it can be an outsider, but it need not be an outsider. There are also some voices within communities that have been silenced. But I agree, you could say that it is an outsider to the consensus. I think 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 that has not yet emerged, because the whole culture of consensus simply does not allow for people to envisage that things could be different. This is what I like in the slogan of the alter-globalization movement: "Another world is possible." I think 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. In the creation of what I call an agonistic public space, there are many different voices and people that all play a role. For instance, I think this is definitely an area where artists, architects, or people who are engaged in the entire field of culture at large, play an incredibly important role, because they provide different forms of subjectivities from the ones that exist at the moment.

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 "socially relevant" practices today? It is interesting how particular practices have hijacked the notion of participation as an unquestionably positive, user-driven means of engagement. In this context, it could be useful to think in terms of "conflictual participation" as a productive form of interventional practice.

CM — I think that is an important point. Today, we are in a phase that I call the post-Washington consensus phase. Of course, the Washington consensus is still in place. It is fortunately more and more challenged, particularly in Latin America, where what is happening is quite interesting. More and more countries simply say that they no longer want to obey the IMF or the World Bank, but instead organize things in their own ways. 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, but actively contribute to the consensus; but they accept the consensus. And this is why 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 LSE [London School of Economics] where there were 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 to the table their different experiences. 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 there is the same vocabulary 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 conflictual participation, as you call it, 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 in which some agreement is presupposed. 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 — Any form of participation is already a

form of conflict. 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 what you call micro-political, macro-political, and geo-political, because I think that this dimension of the political is something that can manifest itself at all levels. It is important not to believe that there are some levels that are more important than others. In a way, it is coming back to what I have said before in regards to Hardt and Negri. When we began to organize the European Social Forum, they were against this idea, because they were saying the struggle should be at a global level. 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: cities, regions, nations— all these levels and scales are very important. The agonistic struggle should take place on a multiplicity of levels, and should not privilege either the geo-political or the micro-political, but instead realize that the political dimension is something that cannot be localized in a privileged space. It is a dimension that can manifest itself in all kinds of social relations,

whatever the specific space may be. As many recent geographers have insisted, space is always something that is, to use an expression that Deleuze and Guattari criticized, striated. What they were thinking of was a smooth and homogeneous space, while Doreen Massey argues that every form of space is always some configuration of power relations. It means that what I would call the hegemonic struggle, or the political struggle, needs to take place on all these levels. There is a multiplicity of levels where the agonistic struggle needs to be launched. This is why I think that there is a potential for politization 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

CHANTAL MOUFFE — Since our first discussion about participation, I have developed this issue in other directions, which I would like to discuss. I was already kind of critical or skeptical about the notion of participation last time. I think one of problems I have with this notion 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, then consensus could be reached and full democracy realized. There is also usually some kind of opposition

between the ideas of participatory and representative democracies—a valorization of participatory democracy, participation in general, and other things that indicate that, in fact, representative democracy is something that 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 — I think there are in fact two ways in which this issue of the political is being addressed in different theories today. The first could be called the associative view of the political. The second, the dissociative view of the political. The associative view understands politics as acting in concert. It is, for instance, the view that one finds in Hannah Arendt, as well as in many thinkers who are influenced by Arendt. It is when we all act in concert, and I think it is what participation indicates. The dissociative view of the political, which is the one that 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 — What is at stake is how you understand pluralism. And here again, we have two positions. There

is the liberal view of pluralism, which is based on the idea that pluralism has to do with multiplicity—with the recognition of plurality. It is what I call a pluralism without antagonism, in the sense that it acknowledges that there are 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 Hannah Arendt's work. For example, when she advocates the use of 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 — There is another conception of pluralism—the one that I identify with—which we find, for instance, in Max Weber or Friedrich Nietzsche. It is an idea that pluralism necessarily implies antagonism, because all these different and multiple views cannot be reconciled. Some of them require the negation of other views. 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, that cannot be reconciled. In fact, this is exactly what I understand as 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. And I think this 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. This is the view that goes together with the dissociative conception of the political. We could also address this issue from the point of view of the model of democracy "We the People," 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 it mean that the people is not one? It can mean that "the people" is multiple, and this is exactly what one finds in the associative view of pluralism. You can also think of the people as not one because it is divided. This is the view of "the people" that goes with my understanding of the dissociative mode of the political, of pluralism in its conflicting mode: "The people" is divided. This is the view that we already find 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 this term "participation,"

we will need to redefine it and understand it in terms of what I will call an agonistic mode of participation.

> MM — Which is what 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. So you participate, but for you to do so, you need to have the possibility of choosing, and not simply participating in the creation of a consensus. It's necessary to have an alternative 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, can play a role.

CM — Yes, it also means—and this relates to the question of inclusion versus exclusion—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. It means that there will be some alternatives that will not be adopted, which will in fact be negated. This is something that 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 deliberation to be meaningful, 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 — When you say that participation needs choice, who produces or presents this choice?

CM — This of course depends on which level of participation we are talking about. For instance, 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 Left and Right represents a progress for democracy at all. We already touched on this issue in our last conversation.

MM — Could you, this time, relate this to third-way consensus and frameworks of participation as tools for political legitimization?

CM — Yes. 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 it is a false opposition. I know that there are many new currents on the Left that want a non-representative form of democracy—Hardt and Negri with their absolute democracy being one of them. Representative democracy is something that some people on the Left consider negative. I disagree with such a view, and I think that, 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 — Just 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 post-colonial critique is very important here. For instance, as Dipesh Chakrabarty has argued in his book *Provincializing Europe*, we should recognize that Europe's appropriation of the adjective "modern" for itself 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 that are 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, which has been elaborated on in the Western world. We should, however, be aware of the rhetorical power of the term "modern," or "modernization," and of 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 are

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. Not only in Japan, but also now in 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 — To return to participation, there is another way to think about it 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 was making a reference to the fact that, in Davos, the business elites had adopted the language of participation. This should be understood in the context of a new mode of regulating capitalism—the abandonment of the Fordist, assembly-line production, and the transition

to the new mode of organization of labor called post-Fordism. What is particularly interesting is to examine the different interpretations of this transition because it will also give us a different take on the idea of participation. I think one could use many theories, but I want to single out two approaches. One is the approach of the Italian Operaismo, or "Workerism"—the one that we find, of course, in Hardt and Negri, but also in other 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 all of a sudden there was a movement of desertion from the factories. Operaist theorists reflect on what happened in Italy in those years. The young workers did not want to remain in the factories, so it forced the capitalists to find a new mode of organizing work, which was to be more collaborative, more flexible, and more participatory. Among the Operaists, we nevertheless find 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 that, to a certain extent, this is naïve, or at least problematic?

CM — I am no the only one to think that. 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 there is another way to envisage the transition from Fordism to post-Fordism. We find it in Luc Boltanski's and Eve Chiapello's book *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, in which they 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" in reference to the strategies of the counterculture—the search for authenticity, the ideal of self-management, the anti-hierarchical exigency—was used to promote a new mode of capitalist regulation, and replace the disciplinary framework of the Fordist period. What is interesting in their approach is that 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's and Chiapello's analyses provide an example of what Gramsci calls "hegemony through neutralization," or "passive revolution."

MM — His proposition of a slow march through the institution.

CM — No, a passive revolution is not a slow march

through the institutions. It 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. I think this is a really interesting approach that chimes with my view of hegemonic struggle. It allows us to see this transformation as a hegemonic move by capital in order to neutralize demands that call its domination into question, using them to re-establish its hegemony. The aim was to create in people the feeling that their demands have been satisfied. But, in fact, it is a satisfaction that makes 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 LES, which we spoke about earlier, one woman was talking 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 indicated. They are trying to use the demand for participation in a way that will allow them to reassert their hegemony.

MM — The same way in which—on a cultural scale—capitalism appropriates any kind of dissenting subculture, and turns a tactic into a systematic strategy.

CM — There is clearly a hegemonic struggle today around the issue of participation. It depends on which meaning is going to become the one that will be accepted. 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. This is why we have to be really 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 — I think 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 to me 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. It is important that you are flexible and agile enough to react to this, to be able to pinpoint strategies, which often aim for minimal consensus to continue what they are doing. When you stay agile, you also do not risk becoming defensive, which is a very disabling mode when what you actually want to

do is be projective and, in fact, propositional. It would be interesting to see, for example what happened during the subsequent conference in Porto Alegre, what they were discussing, but I don't know, I have to read about this.

## PART 3

MARKUS MIESSEN — Maybe before we move to sustainability, it would be interesting to introduce the question about 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 the center—was still presented to the rest of Europe as the road to be followed, coupled, as it was, with the idea that there was no alternative to neoliberal globalization. This, of course, has since been shattered with the crisis of financialization.

MM — The question is: 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 even sure of this. 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 the way they were before. What was interesting, and could have opened a possible alternative, was that suddenly the state was again seen as having an important role to play, whereas before, we had been told that the market was everything. The state was demonized, and the motto was: the less state, the better. And then, suddenly, the state was really important. 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?

MM — But what will be the new role of the state?

CM — There are two possibilities for this new role to take shape. Either, and this is what I think has happened, the state intervenes to save the banks, but without forcing them to make any fundamental changes in the way they operate. Or the state could have taken 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 towards the growing social polarization. But unfortunately so far, it has not happened, and there does not seem to be any indication that it is going to happen in the near future.

MM — Let me recap a question we discussed earlier: In Frances Fox Piven's article "Obama Needs a Protest Movement," she makes a very interesting argument, which suggests that Barack Obama is not a visionary or movement leader, but became the nominee of the 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 had opened. I absolutely agree with her that it will all depend on the emergence of a social movement. It is interesting, because there are many people on the Left in the United States who are extremely sceptical of Obama—not anti-Obama, as this would probably 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 reforms 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 she was pretty confident that it could emerge. In fact, because she is 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 is referring 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, in the United States, every day now, 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 was saying that 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. This is, of course, due to the fact that Socialists and Social-Democratic parties have long been accepting the idea that there was no alternative to neoliberal globalization. I think, however, that even if we return to where we were before the crisis, what will have been undermined is the idea that everything is wonderful under neoliberal globalization. More and more people are now becoming aware of the need for an alternative.

> MM — Is this the reason why many people are surprised that in this crisis Social-Central-Democratic parties are not doing better?

CM — It is true, conservative governments seem to profit from the crisis. Amazingly, it was only in Iceland that the conservatives were ejected from power. But that did not happen in any other European country. In France, this might be due to the fact that the Socialists are 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 of people seeing that there is an alternative to the existing order. And if you do not offer this alternative, I think 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 what was interesting during the elections was that Obama managed to engage a great number of people for a certain period of time, but then it just stopped.

CM — Yes, but I do not really 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 — 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 *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. But 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 — But how do you think Obama could be pushed so that it somehow becomes more productive, so that it moves away from this kind of shallowness.

CM — Well, I am not saying that he is shallow. I am not referring to Obama. I am referring to his support as being 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 candidates, his reform was the least radical. But still, it is 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? Well, although I am not particularly qualified in this field, we could maybe talk about it briefly, as it is also 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. And 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 — I think it is interesting what you said in our conversation at Café Einstein in Berlin, that of course sustainability is not only related to ecology, but can also be related to many things, topics, phenomena, and problems. So, 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. But sustainability is really about a holistic approach, which takes long-term thinking into account. What seems interesting is that, as we have just said about the Obama phenomenon, there seems to be a very short attention span. Moreover, to come back to what you said before, this attention span is incredibly short when it comes to the financial crisis. There are already multinationals and banks that are making billions again, and it seems that, within six or eight months, all the issues of regulation that have been discussed have all of a sudden been

swiped off the table. Regarding the issue of sustainability, I am wondering whether this could be something interesting to address: different forms of economic sustainability. What are the different forms of sustainability that should be discussed? Because quite often, when people talk about sustainability, they talk about the ecological dimension only.

cm — Yes, and 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 somehow a moral awareness of the fact 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 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-sufficient products and services—and, in fact, some people are already thinking of how to make a profit out of that. Producing marketable products that represent a more ecologically friendly approach to both production and consumption, but without put-

ting into question capitalist relations of production. This is why the ecological question by itself is not necessarily an issue of the Left, and there are, in fact, ecologically thinking parties that are not Left at all.

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

CM — I think it is to offer an alternative to neoliberal globalization.

> MM — What should the center of thinking about sustainability consist of?

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 that it is not challenged at all by Left parties. Free trade is some kind of dogma: "Free trade is good and protectionism is bad—we cannot question the realities of free trade." For me, a critique of free trade should be at the center of our challenge of the existing order. For instance, there is one thing that more and more people are becoming aware of: the issue of food sovereignty. We have become increasingly aware of the food question, the fact 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 the fact 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 do not care about domestic markets any longer and this has many very negative consequences.

> MM — What does not taking care of one's domestic market imply?

CM — In the past, enterprises were producing for domestic markets, so they had to think about the conditions in which people could buy their products. They had to think about local jobs. There was no point to produce if you did not have people to buy your 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 de-localization. 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 was recently reading 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. This is why the question of food sovereignty is absolutely central for me, and why those countries cannot, and should not, focus all their attention on global exports. It is my belief that each country should at first be able to produce enough food to satisfy its own people. This is also the central claim of the La Via Campesina movement, which is an international organization of small farmers. José Bové, who you have probably heard of, is active in it. It is a way to insist on how very important it is for each country to first produce food to satisfy its own domestic demand.

> MM — Could you please elaborate on the relation of export and the destruction of local industries?

CM — I think one example of extreme destruction and desperation is that of sub-Saharan countries. What is happening in Africa 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. This, of course, is the reason why they are forced to emigrate. All these desperate people are trying to reach Europe by boat and by exposing their lives because they cannot survive in their home countries because of foreign exports. I think this is

very important for Europeans to realize: We are the ones responsible for this situation. It is the policies and the subsidies of the European Union and the United States that have caused this condition—a condition under which young people struggle for survival and are forced to emigrate. We need to realize that this cannot continue. But 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 for 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 cycle of such a mania for "the cheap": local industries are destroyed, people are becoming de-localized, and there is a dramatic rise in unemployment. It presents us with a very dangerous and vicious cycle, and the Left needs to explain to people that this cannot go on.

MM — This brings us to a topic that we are both interested in, and that I think, especially within

this context, is of immense importance: the issue of non-moralistic modes of politics. It seems that in almost every European country, the way for left-wing politics to address this question is in fact not to address it, and then to defend themselves with some kind of moralistic politics.

CM — Some people in 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 loosing their potential labor force. The way to treat this question is not to combat having limitations on immigration, or to simply open our borders, but to transform the conditions in these countries in order to allow them to develop sustainable forms of domestic economy. There is so much moralistic rhetoric about "sans-papiers" and immigrants, while what we actually need is 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. We have got 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 been for decades now. This would be

the proper political way of dealing with this question. The other one is simply a moralistic approach, which is unable to deal with the roots of the problem.

> MM — I am interested to hear from you about how such an approach can start to communicate between scales, for example the local and the global—something that we have already addressed in one of our earlier conversation.

CM — To begin with, the 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's 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 in which the question should not be addressed. In fact, I even think that a certain amount of protectionism is important. In France, Emmanuel Todd has been arguing in favor of some forms of European protectionism, which I support on the condition that it is not a national, egoistic form of protectionism in which we only think about "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, amongst ourselves, 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. It is always better to start dealing with things from a regional point of view. The problems of Sub-Saharan Africa, for example, would be better resolved if several of the countries in the region got together and thought about a common approach. Of course, the solutions are going to be different according to different areas. For Latin America, the solutions will be different than for other regions. I do not think we can really envisage a unique model. In fact, for me, 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, as well as 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. Why do we not simply start by saying the following: This is our form of democracy, which, of course, needs to be radicalized. It is very specific for the West and we should not believe that the same model could work in African 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 "trans-cultural." I would not use the term "universal" because for some people it implies the existence of one single model that is valid everywhere. Instead, I would like to propose "trans-cultural." 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 are going to 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 you talk about the European border—where, instead of actually talking about the problems that might exist in the countries where migrants come from, they discuss the issue of the physical border, and 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 seems to be: Why is responsibility so often outsourced rather than assumed?

CM — What do you mean by outsourced?

MM — What I mean by outsourced is 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 that they could participate. But from my point of view, it was merely a way for politicians to outsource their own 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. So I think 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, concerns the role of the outsider. I am referring to the outsider as someone who is not necessarily dependent on a consensus within their immediate or associated political context—within their own party, for example. An interesting example of this is the crossbench politicians in the British House of Lords who don't belong to a specific party, which you could also imagine happening in any other context, outside of politics. I am wondering, from your point of view, what is the potential of the outsider?

CM — I disagree with you concerning the potential of the crossbench politician, because, for me, this crossbench practitioner is precisely somebody who wants to avoid taking sides. I think it is important in politics to have a choice between real alternatives. But then you also need to know which camp is yours, and it seems to me that the crossbench practitioner is precisely somebody who does not want to take a stance, who 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: that the political attitude emerges from the ability and ambition to stir change by instigating real political confrontation. My point of view is that it is not necessarily about whether or not to

take sides, but rather, to be able to decide based on your instinct and real belief, to be able 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 from 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 practitioner, one can start a conversation by putting something on the table that usually does not, and does not have to, necessarily satisfy everyone.

CM — Yes, I see what you mean. I have the feeling that you are, in fact, clearly trying to theorize your own role—according to what you have told me about your different kinds of interventions.

MM — Yes.

CM — It is about your role as an outsider to some of the contexts and internal mechanisms in which you intervene. I certainly do not disagree with that. Though I do think that 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 "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 I think this is 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 necessarily always works in a restricted model or paradigm such as in parliament, which, as you mentioned, is both highly structured and defined in terms of political parties and coalitions, but also spatially in terms of it being physically autonomous. It should neither 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 interven-

tion. 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.

CM — Yes, I think this is very interesting and important.

MM — If, for example, you come in from the outside, it is important that you are not viewed as someone either 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 which are 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 from within that system, like a crossbench politician, would refuse to take sides. Maybe we can talk about the idea of party representation for a moment. I think this issue of the biased political party is really interesting because it 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 can sometimes understand that a different alternative would maybe be appropriate,

they cannot follow it because they have sub-
scribed to a certain dogmatic framework. Am I
exaggerating?

cm — Well, of course, there is always a 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 since the House
of Lords is not a particularly democratic institution
either.

mm — I am of course aware of this—and, for
me, this is 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, it
is also interesting because it is a spatial setting.
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 when you, Markus, practice—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 some kind of dynamic between them. You are neither on one side or the other for very long. So, in fact, you are not really like the crossbench practitioner either.

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

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

# Toward a Parallel Reality – The Institutionalization of the Left

In the upper-class neighborhood of Berlin Grunewald, an area famous for its sixteenth-century hunting lodges and colony of mansions, a sixty-something-year-old man walks his dog along a remote lake. He is wearing a suit, made-to-measure at Nino Cerruti's outpost at Place de la Madeleine in Paris. Calling for the dog, he strolls back to his recently renovated villa, where his thirty-two-year-old movie-producer-cum-wife—the daughter of a former member of the oppositional Democratic party of Iranian Kurdistan—is waiting for him.

These days, perhaps no one embodies the irrevocable cultural and political breakthroughs of the '68 generation as dramatically as Joschka Fischer. Born in Germany to a Hungarian family, Fischer has worked as a photographer, bookseller, and taxi driver; he was a Maoist radical, and hitchhiked from Germany to Kuwait. Never taking a course in higher education, he became an active member of the German left-wing student movement in 1967, later joined the militant group Revolutionärer Kampf (Revolutionary Struggle) in Frankfurt, and participated in (if not led) street battles with the police. Shortly after, he made his first contact with

the Palestine Liberation Organization, attending a conference and meeting with the young Yasser Arafat in Algiers. Leaping ahead (as an anticlimactic apostrophe), some forty years later, in 2007, he resigned his post as German Foreign Minister, leaving the government for a visiting professorship at Princeton.

Over the course of his controversial career, Fischer evolved from an archetypal 1960s radical into a smart political insider. Yet, arguably, his biography exemplifies the difficulties of the Gramscian Left and its embedded romanticism regarding notions of protest.

Often called the "Rebel Realist," Fischer has been a Green Party leader for nearly twenty years, helping to transform it from a street-protest movement into a mainstream political protagonist. During his term in the Red-Green coalition government of Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, from 1998 to 2005, Fischer was the most popular politician in Germany. By 2005, he was the second-longest serving foreign minister in German postwar history, becoming the politically correct yet controversial and outspoken voice of the Baby Boomer generation. One of the most challenging moments came when he was called to testify at the trial of his former friend Hans-Joachim Klein, who was accused of murder during a 1975 attack on an OPEC oil ministers' conference in Vienna.[1] During the 1970s RAF terrorist attacks, Fischer renounced violence as a productive means of political change after the

1.  Toby Helm, "Fischer's Sixties links with PLO spark new row," *The Telegraph*, June 19, 2001.

kidnapping and murder of Hanns-Martin Schleyer, the Federation of German Industries' president. When he became foreign minister, Fischer apologized for his violent youth, but he never disassociated himself from the radical movement.

While Fischer's early biography reads like a rollercoaster ride, his career is perhaps simply the result of political ambition within a given structure. Some of his early actions might seem highly unconventional for a high-ranking politician, but his later political biography reveals a surprisingly common path through the default power structures, which enabled him to slowly advance from being an independent activist, organizing, for example, fellow workers at the auto manufacturer Opel, to becoming a member of Parliament, to being named minister of foreign affairs. In Parliament, Fischer was often referred to as the "real" leader of the opposition. He then transformed his status as an "outsider" into political capital, moving the Green Party to the center of German politics, which signified the rise of a generation through slow institutionalization, as Antonio Gramsci suggested, and which resulted in a station of "relative comfort" within the political ruling class.

Considering the Fischer generation's reaction to present-day cultures of protest, it is perhaps ironic that one often hears the complaint that today's forms of protest are stagnating, that the world is witnessing a never-ending repetition and reemergence of established cultural and subcultural patterns (such as rock'n'roll, pop, punk, or techno). While most protagonists of the 1960s and 70s have fully acclimatized

themselves to cultural gentrification, purposefully institutionalized their biographies, and settled into middle- and upper-class lifestyles, they accuse younger generations of being consensus-driven and no longer critically aware. This, however, is a two-faced critique, as consensus has become this genera-tion's own status quo, especially under almost every form of European New Labour. Similarly, it is no longer sufficient to have long hair in order to render oneself a rebel. Today, such superficial "maladjust-ment" is seen as populist fashion. As Liam Gillick recently argued in *Artforum*, the year 1968 embodies an acknowledgment of *difference* more than any other year. One of the most fundamental theses on 1968— that it is possible to live differently—has succeeded in many ways (sexual liberation, civil rights, academic restructuring, the ecological, anti-war, feminist, and social movements, self-awareness, etc.), but failed to destabilize the basic structural elements of the con-sensus society.[2] Moreover, contemporary capitalism seems to absorb, market, and subsequently disable any form of protest before it manages to effect real change. Once mass media and markets start to absorb difference, that difference is already undermined. It is therefore ironic if not slightly reactionary to criticize a generation of now twenty- and thirty-somethings, who have been raised within a culture of rebellion, of being incapable of it.

While in the 1960s and early 70s the most prominent means of critique and protest were to take

2.   See Liam Gillick, "The Difference Engine," *Artforum* (May 2008), 322.

to the physical streets, today one increasingly witnesses the subversion of purely public realities into non-physical, often introverted, and more precisely chosen forms of political and cultural access via the Web, private salons, and other forms of micropolitics. While Fischer's generation is still waiting for the "new revolution"—a new social movement crowding the streets—they are so embedded in their personal histories and own registers of protest that new modes of "radicalism" might have slipped their attention. Today's "Web generation" has done such a good job of infiltrating the system invisibly rather than through open confrontation that its presence has gone almost entirely unnoticed. The only form of open uprising that still exists is based on the withdrawal from any form of protest that can be consumed by media and markets. Rather than producing the re-interpretable cultural frameworks that can be utilized and appropriated by contemporary entrepreneurs and venture capitalists (who preach economic Darwinism), those who withdraw from canonized political consumption produce new forms of criticality, authorship, and social models online, refusing to participate in authorized and policed versions of intersubjectivity. These effects are evident way beyond the Web. For the past decade, cultural practitioners such as writers, filmmakers, political activists, and philosophers have quietly decided to deal with the issues at stake— borders, spatial politics, abortion rights—as *outsiders*, by moving to the margins and using hyper-faceted networks of commonality, including peer-to-peer groups, open source, NGOs,

and YouTube to register their positions. While these formats can also be seen as platforms for individual opportunism, they also generate a parallel reality and operative framework rather than a purely aesthetic unitary realm that can be assumed, followed, copied, and/or appropriated (bought and sold).[3] The rhizomatic, hyperlinked, and non-physical structure of the Web is the new agora—an accelerated, co-authored system of shared and co-edited knowledges that sidesteps the need to slowly infiltrate institutions, creating instead constantly shifting parallel realities to those offered by mainstream culture and media. Infiltration of a system no longer means to physically move through it. Rather, the Web generation is now generating alternatives at various scales, in various media (new media), and often in entirely hyper-real terms. These alternatives no longer compete with authorized, concrete realities but rather create their own parallel, virtual worlds.

In most cases, Gramsci's proposal for a "long march through the institutions" ended up in conventional frameworks, established protocols, and default consensus practice. Gramsci's reading of hegemony, developed through the construction of languages and power, operates in a diffused way throughout the social body. 1968 is a revolution against traditional leftist politics in Europe, presenting a level of simplifications in Marxism: What we need to do is to open the struggle into struggles, top-down rule into

3. By now, however, even these formats have—at least partially—been taken over by the establishment, as evident in the 2008 U.S. election campaign.

a plurality of diffused issues such as participation, environment, anti-racism, and feminism.

Today, however, a new march in a parallel reality has begun. As previously mentioned, like Gramsci, Michael Hardt, and Antonio Negri reject the idea that changes in culture can only occur *after* revolution. Through the expression of differences, the unexpected will be able to rise, while appreciating culture as a living system. While this is nothing new (as art has always functioned in part as "revolutionary" mise-en-scène), what is new is the virtual and viral focus of networked worlds.

It is becoming more and more evident today that the world no longer needs to slowly venture through structures or institutions in order to actualize visionary potential and produce new realities; that is, in countries where highly structured governmental and civic institutions have existed for a long time. The generation of those born in the 1970s and 80s started to sidestep those outmoded expectations, in essence rebelling against "rebellion," and producing revolutionary parallel realities here and now.

While the '68 generation tried to actualize their political beliefs through the appropriation of already established institutions, as Gramsci recommended, they had to pay the price of *Realpolitik*, having arrived at, and catered to, the center of society, thinking of it as the only possibility for effecting change. The "grown-up" Left has now progressed through an intellectual revolution, today arguing that power should be used to protect human rights. But at the end of the day, this also means that even leftist

protagonists of Fischer's generation became mainstream politicians—most of them alpha males with an interventionist streak. Conversely, when it comes to mainstream German foreign policy, Fischer is the last remaining visionary. The advantageous crux of visionary potential is that it can remain visionary, a potential, without ever being actualized—something that Sibylle Krause-Burger, in her biography of Fischer, calls "The March through the Illusions."[4] Today, Joschka Fischer has altered and refined his definition of what it means to be left of center as "the conviction to hold onto an egalitarian model of society," against all odds, and in pursuit of a classless *Gesamtkunstwerk*.[5] But the cultural change that his generation still defines as an intellectual, long-term deliverable is now arguably being produced through horizontal differentiation and alternative forms of access to institutions and individuals, even by individuals sitting at home, immersed in the Web. The '68 generation desperately attempted to challenge democratic rules in order to appropriate them. Given that generation's shifts in the intervening years, those early efforts may have been an indication that—at times—saying no is not too far from saying yes.

4.  Sibylle Krause-Burger, Joschka Fischer: *Der Marsch durch die Illusionen* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 2000).
5.  Interview with Joschka Fischer by Hanns-Bruno Kammertöns and Stephan Lebert, "Ich bin immer noch ein Linker!," *Die Zeit* 34 (August 14, 2008): 16.

# Learning from the Market

*The market is a history of missed opportunities.*
    —Tobias Meyer

*Expansion is the third millennium's entropy,*
*dilute or die.*[1]
    —Rem Koolhaas

*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 politi-*
*cal 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.*[2]
    —Hardt & Negri

*One should not refer to Hardt & Negri when*
*thinking about economic coherence; they have*
*no idea what they are talking about.*[3]
    —Joachim Hirsch

1.  Rem Koolhaas, "Junk Space," in *Content* (Cologne: Taschen, 2004), 162–171.
2.  Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*, op. cit., 106–107.

In 2006, Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello published *The New Spirit of Capitalism*,[4] which suggested exploring and addressing the crisis of anti-capitalist critique through an unprecedented analysis of management texts. In a similar manner, the following attempts to introduce a series of ideas and concepts from management theory as well as business-thinking in order to understand and develop an alternative approach to the notion of the outsider and external agent. In business terms, the concept and practice of the external consultant could be compared to and used as a useful—albeit partially problematic—example of the uninvited outsider or crossbench practitioner.

If one were to investigate the phenomenon of criticality from the point of view of the market, things would be pretty clear: Criticality tends to seep through the margins, from the outside in, and not from within the existing system itself. If a company or large institution wants to change parts of their structural organization, they most likely attempt to do so by mobilizing their internal forces and existing potential, but invite an outsider to critically reflect on what they are doing—to review, detect, and analyze the key processes, and, where needed, to propose a critical but productive alternative. Within an existing system, change is difficult to organize. Moreover,

3.   Joachim Hirsch in conversation with the author. Joachim Hirsch is Professor Emeritus in Political Science at the J.W. Goethe University, Frankfurt am Main, Germany and author of *Hegemonie und politische Alternativen* (Hamburg: VSA, 2002).

4.   Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Gregory Elliott (London: Verso, 2006).

for most actors within a given system, it is difficult to understand or predict the possible shortcomings of that system. Culture is historical. It has historic registers and taboos that one can barely relate to directly or consciously; it tends to act, behave, and design the way we do things with a sense of intimidation. In more popular words, this is the gospel truth of the monkey experiment: Several monkeys are placed in a cage with a banana hanging over a ladder. When one monkey attempts to climb the ladder, the rest are punished. The monkeys learn to attack any monkey that tries to climb the ladder. Each monkey in turn is replaced with a new monkey, which soon learns to also attack any monkey that tries to climb the ladder, until none of the monkeys have ever seen the original punishment, and yet they still have learned the behavior.[5]

What a "productive" alternative would really mean, and who would benefit from it, is, of course, a case-specific question. In any given company, an eternal consultant might argue that, in order to keep the company healthy, the board of directors needs to close down one section of the company entirely. As a result, many employees might lose their job. This text, however, does not profess to judge or value whether this particular act by an external consultant is ethically sound, but rather to question why it tends to be more productive if change is being proposed and delivered from the outside: moving from contextuality to the idea of situation.

5.  See: The Hundredth-monkey effect: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ Hundredth-monkey_effect.

Management can only be successful if it temporarily surfaces, with no intention to stay. It needs to abruptly make things visible [...] Management means seizing the opportunity and contingency of a situation, to understand how it functions, and to smuggle a means of situational potentialty into it [...] 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, whichexists beyond the reality of those who are working in its immediate context.[6]

In the commercial business milieu, there are very different notions and practices of how this external agent can or will function. The two most interesting methods in the context of critical practice are the McKinsey model and the Königswieser approach.[7] The following does not try to map their practices on an ethical or critical base; that is, it does not try to reveal their tactics, but simply illustrates their opposing approaches.

McKinsey is a globally operating, management consulting firm that focuses on solving issues of concern to senior management. Their consultants, who venture into a company as external "experts," practice through a classically analytical approach: framing, breaking, and reassembling. The external analysis is based on a catalogue of experience, a knowledge management system, which has been

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6.  Alexander Kluge, interview by Dirk Baecker, "Vom Nutzen ungelöster Probleme," in *Vom Nutzen ungelöster Probleme* (Berlin: Merve Verlag, 2003), 50.

7.  See also *www.mckinsey.com* and *www.koenigswieser.net*.

built up by McKinsey since the late 1930s. McKinsey essentially sends their consultants to work closely with companies and work based on a pyramid power structure of decision-making. 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 knowledge management system. They cling to long-standing structures of analysis and cognitive authority, an intellectual conservatism that fuels a culture of closed doors and little crossbench 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 weakens the analytical model is that it is based both on rational thinking and on the notion of consensus. But every cause may not simply have a singular effect; instead, it has multiple effects, as the classical approach may not be necessarily plausible in every context.

In contrast to the McKinsey model is the Königswieser & Network approach. Königswieser, a Vienna-based agency, is best known for what it calls Complementary Consulting. This method is fundamentally different from McKinsey, in that it establishes a long-term involvement with the company it consults, or what one might call an embedded approach. This does not necessarily mean bottom up; rather, a certain understanding of the everyday processes

and the context that one is supposed to act upon is being developed over time. Such an alternative and almost therapeutic method beyond the analytical seeks a specificity that allows for a network approach regarding problem solving 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 their performance. Instead of strategy planning, such a model promotes a process of redesigning the structure in which one works.

Arguably, the analytical approach, in terms of critical redesign, is likely to fail, as it tends to base the elements of change on the existing structure without asking wider questions. Or, as candidly noted by Arnab Chatterjee during a recent think tank in the Austrian Alps: "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." This, of course, poses questions about the boundaries that one sets and permits. An iterative design process constantly goes through a series of reframing exercises, whereby the result is very unlikely to be within the orginal framework. Furthermore,

McKinsey-style managers and consultants tend to settle on the framing very early within the process, 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. Contrarily, designers do not stop with the initial framing; they extend the boundary of the frame.

Now, if these processes of change can be stirred through a design toward conversations and productive communication, design in this context is understood as the reordering of affairs on a meta-scale. Smart design decision-making is always based on dynamic variables, and addresses and interacts with several variables at once. The network itself does not produce anything; what is crucial is the position within the network. Moreover, in a productive model of trans-disciplinary collaboration—referring to real differences between disciplines, and not simply those from the cultural milieu—one has to finally give up his or her position in order for a new knowledge to emerge.

Some of these issues were also debated in a think tank session in Linz and Mondsee, Austria, as a postproduction of the 4th International DOM Conference. The conference addressed the relevance of design methodology with respect to solving complex problems. In this context, design is understood not in the sense of arriving at an object or architecture on the premises of a complex organizational or social situation, but as an iterative learning and problem-solving protocol that any organization or profession may

employ in order to arrive at solutions beyond mere modification or optimization.[8] This perspective is related to the notion of openness in collaborative dialogues, and to learning from creating new realities. In order to develop critical models for practice, one needs to foster direct and specific engagement, an anti-formulaic approach that does not simply rely on the re-reading of existing, archived knowledge.[9]

Such a performance also breaks with the enlightenment categories of knowledge, namely with the assumption that truth exists and can be objectively discovered. It will not dictatorially tell you that something is right or wrong, but instead will provide you with hints. As opposed to systemic thinking, such a holistic approach acknowledges that whatever you know already is valuable; one just needs to add another dimension to it. Where the systemic approach could be compared to conventional medicine, the holistic and more conflictual model is more similar to complementary or alternative medicine.

In business, almost everything right now is based on the model of growth. But just because X is good, more of X is not necessarily better. Instead, a process of development is critical: "A cemetery grows, but does not develop."[10] This phenomenon could also be described as one of the reasons for the financial crisis:

8    Participants in the think tank included Jamshid Gharajedaghi, Fred Collopy, Greg Van Alstyne, Arnah Chatterjee, Alejandro Gutierrez, John Thackara, Wolfgang Schwaiger, Michael Shamiyeh, Albin Kälin, and the author.

9.   See also Michael Shamiyeh, *Creating Desired Futures: Solving Complex Business Problems With Design Thinking* (Basel: Birkhäuser, 2010).

10.  Jamshid Gharajedaghi, during DOM think tank session, op. cit.

The primary concern has been volume rather than value, while no one was prepared to claim responsibility. In contrast to the notion of growth and volume, which is about size, development is always directly concerned with content and in need of design. The primary context for such development and its critical change is a situated and holistic thinking without being directly entangled with the (power) structure that one attempts to change. In such a framework, it becomes crucial to develop mechanisms to operationalize knowledge after its invention. Without these, even the most complex set of knowledge is useless. The U.S., for example, produces more knowledge than all other countries combined, but is not very good at applying it. As a business model, this lack of possible application of course produces a conflict: growth tends to exploit, but not explore. For a company to succeed over the long run, it needs to be able to deal with both adaptability and alignment, a quality that is sometimes referred to as "ambidexterity." Derived from Latin, ambidextrous literally means "right on both sides." In business terms, such a model of ambidexterity implies that one is able to handle the oscilation between exploration and exploitation. It further implies that if you only pursue one of these, albeit successfully, you will eventually fail. If one follows the history of Apple computers or OMA (Office for Metropolitan Architecture), 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 best seller, it allows the company

to challenge and extend its own boundaries in terms of content, "wasting" billions of dollars on research and development. In a similar way, one could argue that OMA has by now—after a series of insolvencies—found a way to use certain "stealth" projects as a means to "finance" the development of interesting content, which before had always been a calculated loss.

We have learned from Chantal Mouffe more about the problems than the solutions that she proposes, which is a general problematic. How can one deal critically with the conditions that one is surrounded by or investigating, while also simultaneously turning them into a constructive and propositional discourse?

In a corporate context, what Mouffe does would be called "formulating the mess." In this case, the mess should be understood as the territory of investigation, the field of problematics, the territory of action. One formulates the mess in order to convince oneself or others that things have to change. As a method or tool, it creates, in Mouffe's terms, a joint space in which there is an agreement to disagree. For a consultant, it means that one is preparing the ground, mapping the realities that one deals with, in order to develop alternatives. For Mouffe, it denotes 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 behind the system, learn its history, and watch how it performs. Regarding historic evidence, this becomes interesting precisely when one thinks about

failures rather than successes, problems rather than solutions.

Learning history through analyzing past mistakes can be highly productive. In Japan, once former CEOs retire, they are placed on a board of experts, and act as translators between the companies' past and present, translating old problems for a new generation of employees. Equally, when Karl Marx unfurls the mess in front of the reader in *Capital*,[11] he is more concerned with the problems than in delivering solution. The primary aim of *Capital* was not to deliver ablueprint for change, but to create a need for change by formulating the mess.

Jamshid Gharajedaghi illustrates the nature of our current "mess" as an interacting system of problems, dynamics, dimensions, and governing principles, which co-define social systems of any kind. In this case, the mess acts as a tool to design structures for the future, to become propositional. It should be formulated autonomously by individuals or groups, and imperatively deal with the weakest link within the system one is investigating. In such a context, the worst situation to be confronted with as an outsider is the combination of unwillingness to take responsibility and scarcity of power and insecurity.

To put this differently: The tactic one needs to deploy in order to change things is not to "know" the right approach, but to be able to convince others that the approach presented is an important one to be

11. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Das Kapital: Kritik der politischen Ökonomie* (Hamburg: Verlag von Otto Meissner, 1867).

tested. In order to influence stakeholders, one needs to know these stakeholders' activities, interests, and objectives. In socially complex situations, rationality simply does not work as people or stakeholders will pursue their own interests in most cases. This is also, of course, one of the highly romanticized dynamics in participatory structures: Once one has established a bottom-up structure, not all of the stakeholders around the table will be equally interested in such a democratic approach. Reality indicates that when people come together, most individuals will primarily represent themselves, which makes sense, because collaboration—as the more conflictual sibling of cooperation— only works if there is a clearly distinguishable opportunity or purpose for everyone around the table.

Designing modes of shared authorship assumes that power is like wealth that cannot be shared. Having the ability "to do" things, embodies the power "to do," for example: to plan, to vote, to act within the framework in which decisions are being made. This is different from power "over" people. Decentralization is the duplication of this power. In order to arrive at a common ground—a joint understanding of the "why"—there needs to be a certain autonomy embodied within decentralized stakeholders. Moreover, these stakeholders need to agree on the basic foundation of the common ground. This common ground generates a centralized understanding of the system while decentralizing its structure, which is the duplication of power. The only way to understand this system is to design it. In the design process of

such a system, there is also a danger. 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 copping-out: to withdraw oneself from responsibility while still being technically in charge. In every system there needs to be some built-in structure of at least partial authority in order for the structure to be productive. There is a certain romanticism in a depicted world, which exists, to its nth-degree, solely on channels of self-organization, networks of networks, or movements of movements—as described by Hardt and Negri in *Multitude*.[12] Their ongoing effort to theorize the conditions and forms that democracy, from their point of view, must 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 it itself seeks to found.

To return to the corporate world, the only possibility to really involve stakeholders in a process is to include them in the design process—this is when they will implement it. And this, of course, is also the fundamental problem with what one might call the "participatory project": In order to be included in this design process, one also needs to be prepared to assume responsibility. For this possibility of design to emerge, the facilitator needs to first formulate the

12. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2004).

mess in order to not simply duplicate the existing system, as a means to prepare the ground for a redesign. Nevertheless, even in the most receptive social scenarios, change will always be exposed to the fear of change. Therefore, the arena that Mouffe describes —the equal ground, so to speak—in which one agrees to disagree, is crucial in order to create a common language that allows for one to gain knowledge about the distinct polarities of the system, and for conflicts to be played out.

Every structure has multiple functions and produces them: an institution such as the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London, Kunst-Werke (KW) in Berlin, or the New Museum in New York have certain integrated structures and histories that have been built up over years. Apple has a board, a labor union, an education system, shareholders, and customers, to name a few. Every one of these stakeholders and histories exist within a different context. These must not be ignored. However, once a mess has been laid out, in which all stakeholders are represented, the design process can start. It requires a will to immerse oneself in the situation; it is equally important, however, not to become entangled, to remain an autonomous outsider.

Designing change takes time. Designing through playing out the conflicts that exist, and by inserting certain conflicts as productive triggers from the outside, is crucial. Consensual agreements within the early phases of the design process have to be avoided. In fact, the more room a design leaves for future conflicts to be played out, 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. Socio-cultural systems are self-evolving. Conflicts replace the distorted shared image of transparency. Individual stakeholders have a tendency to define problems free of context, relating them to solutions that are already known and to a set of universal constraints such as time, money, and information. Within this register, deviations from a—or *the*—norm tend to be understood as threats. But a problem is most likely not an aggregate, but an independent and emergent property.

The outsider should have 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 in the data alibi, but driven by an intuitive and deep understanding of a situation. Critical practices and the challenging of conventional structures and truisms can only emerge from the actualities of praxis, the producing of the "next level," the extrapolation of the feedback-loops of the purely critical into the propositional, the applied—without falling into the trap of urgency, as urgency never leaves time for what's important.

Almost all situations that exist happen in space. Spatial practice could therefore be described as the melting pot of physical realities, legal and cultural frameworks, political dimensions, philosophical foundations, and everyday life. Integrated design thinking—which engages locally, but enters the conversation and situation from an outside perspective —can be applied to various areas of expertise and

performance. Always starting on a microscale, while never losing sight of the macroscale, critical spatial practitioners should utilize their repertoire of contextualizing a set of found problems into their spatial, sociopolitical, and socioeconomic context, and propose mechanisms of change that illustrate the local scale vis-à-vis its macro 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: tweaking found variables through the strategic overlap and corruption of existing knowledge to collaboratively search for and produce new methods of intellectual, structural, and physical productions. The editors of such a process must not be indifferent to risk-taking, and have to be detached enough not to fall in love with existing structures or protocols, which may disable their criticality. It is the outsiders' role to plant seeds into the system, which the insiders can then cultivate over time. After all, this is important because the design needs to be the result of a process that is grown and nurtured by the stakeholders, otherwise it would not be accepted.

Architects, designers, or artists are multipurpose animals, who are not simply preoccupied with, for example, profit. 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 the analytical approach. However, what remains interesting and pedagogical is the clear distinction

between the inside and the outside, between fields of vectorial forces and intruding external vectors. For outsiders, the strength is in the fact that they are tied to neither internal structures nor the politics of the body that they are dealing with.

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

# Risk and Failure

In his memoir *Hand to Mouth: A Chronicle of Early Failure*,[1] the American postmodern novelist Paul Auster clarifies his understanding of failure by stating that, in his late twenties and early thirties, he went through a period of several years when everything he touched turned to failure. As Colin MacCabe noted at a conference titled "The Value of Failure," in June 2005,[2] "Success has become one of the key terms by which people evaluate their own and others' lives." When MacCabe refers to failure, he posits it as a crucial component of both the development of knowledge in science and creative experimentation in the arts. He ends by asking to which degree contemporary society demands success and what happens when, in contemporary Britain (and indeed Europe), both public and private funding for projects in the cultural and educational sectors become increasingly success-oriented.

Imagine if one were to see the world through a pair of technocratic goggles of failure analysis. Backed up by the comforting environments of Structuralist certainty, this is actually pretty simple. One would start an analysis by determining both the mechanism and the root cause of failure in order to implement a corrective action. One can therefore proportionally raise the track record of "success" over time.

1.   Paul Auster, *Hand to Mouth: A Chronicle of Early Failure* (New York: Henry Holt, 1997).
2.   Conference at Tate Modern's Starr Auditorium, June 2005.

We always think of success as being good because it has become linked to prosperity. In MacCabe's words, "Success dominates because of its part in the global evaluation of the good life in terms of money." Hence, failure has become the unthinkable, the semantic confirmation of poverty. Looking at the current production of space, and indeed the art world, one contentedly realizes that creative production and failure are an inseparable pair. This, of course, may be true of almost any industry or economy, but it seems that, at least in current cultural discourse, the value of failure is being put forward as an alternative idea to success. Within such a regime of production, one might argue that the realization of "failure as the fundamental condition of surprise" is nothing new, but an interesting one to build upon. Today, the primary issue that needs to be stressed is the fact that we have moved away, at least in creative production, from the reference model of the final product. Fortunately, such a notion is often replaced by cultural laboratories in which the proto-product—in other words, the process towards X—and its failure is valued as knowledge production, and embodies precisely the laboratory for experimentation that provides challenging work. If one were to understand experimentation as a vital ingredient that contributes to the cultural gravitas of spatial production, one has to coercively admit to the value of failure. Hence, the societal norm of success as the only way forward needs to be reviewed.

Thinking about failure and conflict from the point of view of process, the most infertile situation

that can occur is to let the fear of failure lead to inaction. It is the act of production that allows us to revise, tweak, rethink, and change. Along the lines of reinventing oneself, it also opens a space of uncertainty that often produces knowledge and content by surprise. If one's priority is to resist failure at all cost, the potential of surprise is never played out. This is why the results of certain investigations and inventions in many fields and disciplines have become predictable, and the outcome of a vast majority of creative and artistic output is both conventional and mediocre. To take a risk means to be incapable of preempting the outcome of an investigation. By consciously allowing processing to fail, one opens up a window of surprise; it is the moment where conflictual involvement and non-loyal participation produce new knowledge and political politics.

# The Uninvited Outsider

In *Representations of the Intellectual*, Edward Said introduces the public role of the intellectual as an outsider, an amateur and disturber of the status quo. In his view, one task of the intellectual is to break down stereotypes as well as the reductive categories that limit human thought and communication.[1] Said speaks about intellectuals as figures whose public performance can neither be predicted nor reduced to 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."[2] For Said, an ideal intellectual works marginally, as an exile, as an amateur, and as the author of a language that tries to speak the truth to power, rather than an expert who provides objective advice for pay. This disinterested notion of what one could call the "uninvited outsider" is, in the context of this book, the most relevant of Said's ideas. It puts forward the claim that universality always comes hand in hand with taking a risk. There are no rules. There are "no gods to be worshipped and looked to for unwavering guidance."[3] In questioning

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1. Edward Said, *Representations of the Intellectual: The 1993 Reith Lectures* (New York: Random House, 1996), xi.
2. Ibid., xiii.
3. Ibid., xiv.

the default mode of operation, which is clearly that of the specialist, the insider, the one with an interested agenda, he writes of the intellectual as one who always speak to an audience, and by doing so, represent them to themselves. This mode of practice is based on the notion that one operates according to an idea that one has 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 network of social authorities in order to directly effect change (as already elaborated in chapter 8). This spirit of productive and targeted opposition, rather than accommodation, is the driving force for such a practice. To understand when to be part of something and when to be outside of it, to strategically align oneself in order to make crucial decisions, which would 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; 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."[4] The uninvited outsider is someone who has a background within a particular (taught) discipline, but ventures out of his or her milieu and immediate professional context. Using a set of soft skills required elsewhere, he or she then applies them to found situations and problematics.

4.   Ibid., xviii.

According to Said, this 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 or particular. On the one hand, it seems that there are benefits to professional boundaries, expertise, and specific knowledge. While on the other hand, 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 particularly emerge when driven by "symbolic personages marked by their unyielding distance to practical concerns,"[5] driven by a consciousness that is skeptical and engaged, and devoted to moral judgment: "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."[6] 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

5.  Ibid, 7.
6.  C. Wright Mills, *Power, Politics, and People: The Collected Essays of C. Wright Mills*, ed. Irving Louis Horowitz, (New York: Ballantine, 1963), 299.

the smooth, ever-so-accommodating confirmations of what the powerful or conventional have to say, and what they do. Not just passively unwilling, but actively willing to say so in public."[7]

In this context, it is necessary to raise a basic but crucial question: What language does one speak and whom is one addressing? From which position does one talk? There is no truth, only specific situations. There are responses to situations. One's talk or reaction should be modeled after these situations. Therefore, it is also a question of scale. It may be the case that a specific situation might lead to potential readings of larger bodies and relationships. Once the specifics are dealt with, one usually easily understands the larger ramifications. In terms of communicating one's message, it is essential to break away from one's own milieu—which often consists of people who share the same disciplinary background—in order to produce new publics and audiences that would otherwise not convene if not for one's practice. In the context of the uninvited outsider, exile can also be understood as a metaphorical condition, such as exile in other fields of expertise. Or as the saying goes: One cannot be a prophet in one's own country. This also relates to one's professional background.

Such exile can be understood as a nomadic practice, not one that is necessarily driven by territorial shifts, but one that sets a course that is never fully adjusted, "always feeling outside the chatty, familiar

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7.  Edward Said, *Representations of the Intellectual*, op. cit., 23.

world inhabited by natives."[8] According to Said, exile—as 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, an "activity that is fueled by care and affection rather than by profit and selfish, narrow specialization."[9] 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."[10] Instead of simply doing what one is supposed to do, one can inquire about reasons and protocols. Practitioners in exile are individuals who do not represent the consensus of the foreign practice, but who have doubts about it on rational, moral, and political grounds. Questioning long-established agreements and consent, these outsiders can represent and work toward a cause, which might otherwise be difficult for those entangled in the force fields, power relations, and political relations of the context that the pariah enters. What is important to realize here is that Said deliberately emphasizes the need to be in some form of contact and relationship with the audience in order to affect 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

8.  Ibid., 53.
9.  Ibid., 82.
10. Ibid.

case, there is no getting around the intellectual's relationship to them."[11]

What is at stake here is not an activation of dilettantism as the cultivation of quasi-expertise, but rather a notion of the outsider as an instrumentalized means of breaking out the tautological box of professional practice. The outsider is not necessarily a polymath or generalist—the Renaissance image and description of the architect[12]— but someone who can use a general sense of abstraction in order for his or her knowledge to fuel an alternative and necessary debate, and to decouple existing and deadlocked relationships and practices in a foreign context. One way to become active and productive as an instigator and initiator in the choreography of strategic conflicts is to appropriate the strength and potential of weak ties. Such an understanding of surplus value through otherness is essentially antithetical 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. It 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. The venturing out of both the notion of expertise and discipline is crucial in order to remain sufficiently curious toward the specialized knowledges of others. Moreover, it is important that, once in exile, one builds up what architect Teddy Cruz

11. Ibid., 83.
12. See also Andrew Saint, *The Image of the Architect* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1983).

calls a "critical proximity,"[13] 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 or known knowledges, but a framework of criticality: a discipline from the outside, a parasitic and impartial form of consulting. Knowledge and the production of knowledge is not fueled by accumulation, but 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.[14] But like "participation," "critique" itself can also become a form and force of normalization. As already elaborated in the case of Joschka Fischer (chapter 8), critique can be normalized and absorbed just as rebellion is being 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.

13. See also Teddy Cruz, interview by Sevin Yildiz, "With Teddy Cruz on 'Power' and 'Powerlessness,'" on *Archinect*, available at http://archinect.com/features/article.php?id=93919_0_23_0_M.
14. See Jorge Dávila, "Foucault's Interpretive Analytics of Power," in *Systemic Practice and Action Research*, vol. 6, no. 4 (August 1993).

*What follows is an e-mail by curator and writer Tirdad Zolghadr on the outsider as professional, which is replied to by Markus Miessen.*

Dear Markus,

Before you write me off as a mono-disciplinarian—this is the thing: we are not outsiders. We love to see ourselves as smugglers, delinquents, nomads, etc. But actually, the art world emissary dropping in for hurried pluridisciplinary sound bites has become an orthodox participatory model. So not only are we not outsiders, we're not uninvited either. As "professional amateurs," we really HAVE become professional. Our rituals of semi-knowledge are now fully institutional. This doesn't mean you cannot be experimental, playful, and brash. But you also need perseverance and patience to do that. Long-term engagements, theme by theme, all that stuff.

Deepest respect,
Tirdad

\* \* \*

Dearest Tirdad,

I am not in fact referring to a glorified notion of romantic outsiders. I am talking about a job description, a set of skills beyond discipline without profession. I am trying to move away from the notion of participation that has been surrounding

me for too long, a phoney and pseudo-social interest in democratic processes, and toward a reading of participation that is opportunistic. I am neither a philantropist, nor interested in presenting myself as a social worker, as half of the art world seems to have done since the second half of the 1990s. Although I am very fond of working on projects that are d'accord with my personal ethical positions, I am not interested in establishing yet another democratic utopia.

As you know, working across what is labeled "disciplinary borders" is not that easy. Just because a curator is a good curator does not automatically mean that he or she is also useful as an architect, or vice versa. Within my notion of crossbench practice, there is something about the need to accept limitations: without limits and edges that rub against each other, there is no productive friction.

Yes, we love to see ourselves as smugglers, delinquents, and nomads. But don't forget: I am not part of the art world as you are. And what I am writing about, referring to, and working on, is only marginally connected to the art world. I have recently read a very interesting statement of yours in *frieze* about Eyal Weizman. I agree with you on the remarkable project he is working on. The problem is that it is a great project, because it is interested in real change on an actual site, in an actual situation, and not simply in the representation of change, as so often stipulated in the art world.

For me, the art world is one of many testing grounds and arenas for ideas. For everyone inside

the art world, it is the "employer." Maybe this short paragraph, in which Brecht describes a Gramscian idea of hegemonic articulation, pointing specifically at the mechanisms of a neutralized media apparatus, partially explains my interest in the outsider:

> *As for the radio's object, I don't think it can consist merely in prettifying public life [...] radio is one-sided when it should be two-. It is purely an apparatus for distribution, for mere sharing out. So here is a positive suggestion: change this apparatus over from distribution to communication. The radio would be the finest possible communication apparatus in public life, a vast network of pipes. That is to say, it would be if it knew how to receive as well as to transmit, how to let the listener speak as well as hear, how to bring him into a relationship instead of isolating him...Whatever the radio sets out to do it must strive to combat that lack of consequences which makes such asses out of almost all our public institutions. We have a literature without consequences, which not only itself sets out to leave nowhere, but does all it can to neutralize its reader by depicting each object and situation stripped of the consequences to which they lead.*[15]

At the end of the day, the question is: What are the consequences? And more importantly: What are the consequences outside the art world? If

15.  Bertolt Brecht, "The Radio as an Apparatus of Communication," in *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*, ed. John Willett (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964), 53.

anything, this book uses my situation and desperate search for a way out of the "participation crisis" as a means to try and optimistically—and maybe naively—wrap up my current thoughts about how to act in this crisis. And if we can be professional while being outsiders, all the better!

Best wishes,
Markus

# The Future Academy — An Institution in the Making

Let's start with a hypothesis: As it seems increasingly difficult to produce meaningful content within the institutionalized structures of major universities and academies, an ethical and content-driven approach to producing new knowledge can only be achieved from the outside—through setting up small-scale frameworks that are nestled on the margins. There are, of course, countless positive examples for such an approach, but it may still be worthwhile to outline the current situation by using an actual case.

As outlined in Beshara Doumani's book *Academic Freedom after September 11*,[1] the qualities of the academy, which are often taken for granted, have been exposed to a set of difficulties specifically after the September 11 attacks in the U.S., and, as a result, were endangered by a series of policy changes signed by the Bush administration. Although this has to be understood mainly as a U.S.-specific phenomenon, it has to be acknowledged that, in many universities around the globe, academic freedom and the notion of autonomous knowledge production has succumbed to a practice in which the academic professor is increasingly understood as no longer

1. Beshara Doumani, ed., *Academic Freedom after September 11* (New York: Zone Books, 2006).

being a public intellectual, but an administrator and fund-raiser, who—through the politically correct and consensual politics of the given departments—becomes an income-generator for the university. Such an understanding fundamentally breaks from the idea of the academy as an external agent, uninterrupted by political and economic forces, and hence operating as a genuine center for intellectual production and a robust democratic public culture. It poses the question of how one can relate and intervene in complex situations today, when actually most time is being spent on administrative and fundraising purposes.

One could dismiss the following as a naïve and potentially idealistic notion, but academic freedom also includes critical perspectives on professional norms and the questioning of pre-established hierarchical power relations. The mission of higher education in this regard is also one that is focused on service for the public good; however one might want to interpret this. It seems that, as a result of the corrosive effects on the intellectual atmosphere in the academies, there needs to be a careful consideration and revision of whether turning universities into businesses is a model that sustains intellectual development, experimentation, and radical thinking. Most recently, one can trace certain practices through which a new model of academia is being rendered, one in which knowledge production is commercialized and sold as a product for the private good. In this context, the academy itself is often understood as a corporate service provider. It further raises the

question of whether critical thought is able to survive in such corporative environments.

Alan Bloom's prophetic book *The Closing of the American Mind* [2]—though now dated—proclaimed as early as that 1980s that there was too much democracy within the American education, effectively arguing that the institution was leaving its direction to the students who did not know what they did not know. In 2005, the Rotterdam-based Berlage Institute recanted the clear leadership of Alejandro Zaera-Polo in favor of what they called at the time a curatorial board. A split within the governance of the institution now delegated between Vedran Mimica (who would oversee content) and Rob Docter (who would oversee financial affairs). The split divorced architectural content from its economy, and was emblematic of what was to come.

Such a governing structure that effectively left the direction of the institution somehow between two parties not only left its direction at bay, but was also indicative of an otherwise accepted, albeit unspoken, taboo within architecture: The exploitation and non-payment of the practitioners as fund-raisers coupled with using students as service providers—what one could call an economic laundering of time—was perpetuated and propagated by the institution itself. This was exacerbated by the fact that the Berlage as a non-accredited research lab became increasingly reliant on student tuition to fund its endeavors, amidst

2. Alan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1988).

rumors that it had been denied funding from the Dutch government. Students culled from the Asian upper classes who would pay the tuition (as opposed to European students who would opt for TU Delft, for example, whose program was accredited and whose tuition was less than one third of the Berlage's) were not only at times grossly under-qualified, but also could not speak English well enough to communicate verbally—the cornerstone of an education via critique, review, and discussion. Moreover, the faculty's positions relied upon their bringing funding —i.e., a client—into the studio program. Hence, "You can teach, if you can fund" became the tagline and operating credo of the institution, which had by then been effectively turned into a corporation or a service provider for the client.

Bloom's irony came full circle when the direction of the studio course was disputed by the students. Those who not only did not know, but also could neither understand nor communicate garnered the support of the administration such that the faculty was forced to redirect the studio according to their imperatives. The non-paid faculty was undercut by the split administration to grant governance of the studio to the paying students. On two levels, content was exchanged for economy. And educational democracy, it seemed, became an unwitting culprit, collaborator, and facilitator.

That is to say, rethinking academic freedom first and foremost entails the introduction of a counterculture set against the recent processes through which the academy becomes more and more homogeneous,

consensual, and at the same time hegemonic: "The commercialization of education is producing a culture of conformity decidedly hostile to the university's traditional role as a haven for informed social criticism. In this larger context, academic freedom is becoming a luxury, not a condition of possibility for the pursuit of truth."[3] Today, more than ever before, one should base responsible (academic) practice on a skeptical approach toward professional norms. This is precisely what lies at the very heart of what it means to be an academic. It claims the academy as a bastion or island of informed, independent, and alternative perspectives, a prerogative that emerges and should be able to thrive in a specific institutional context. However, is it still possible for such a prerogative to emerge in the given frameworks of today's university structures?

There seem to be two essential difficulties that one faces in such an environment today. One is the issue of administrative and economic exploitation; the other, and less obvious, is the misunderstanding that "real" knowledge is merely produced through professional competence: "As a result, whether a given publication or presentation is considered extramural or academic can be a complex matter, especially if what starts out as extramural activity within a given vocation turns out to constitute a separate area of professional competence over time (the case of Noam Chomsky is a good one)."[4] The latter assumes that

3. Doumani, op. cit., 38.
4. Ibid., 125.

it is precisely the idea and practice of the professional that produce the most valuable results. However, the opposite seems to be the case: the most surprising results and knowledge are being produced on the margins of such professional affectation. It emerges where "things," existing and sometimes conflictual knowledge, start to overlap; not necessarily in a romantic trans-disciplinary way, but where professional, or better yet, expert thinking, collides with that of the outsider. Particularly in the U.S., the academy is recognized as a center for expertise. Sadly, such an understanding also demonstrates how, rather than being critically engaged, the academic practice is an isolated, long-term career plan.

In Paul Hirst's seminal essay "Education and the Production of Ideas," published in *AA Files* no. 29,[5] he dismantles John Major's rhetoric regarding the "cultural retreat with a defence of change." Hirst argues, "Thus change is purely technical and economic, and our success in markets defines and circumscribes our modernity." Hirst poses a relentless call for practitioners who are both willing to leave behind traditional modes of thinking and turn practice into a means of cultural and political involvement: "Above all, craft does not imply a retreat from the world, as do many of the academics who oppose the changes taking place within universities. If the university is to produce intellectuals capable of playing a role in political and cultural regeneration, it cannot afford

5.  Paul Hirst, "Education and the Production of New Ideas,"
    in *AA Files*, no. 29 (London: AA Publications, 1995).

to be cut off from the concerns of the people." The academy should be able to offer a quasi-utopian space in which uninterested reflection, commentary, and research can be pursued. Such efforts should take place in either two ways: within an existing institutional academic body that, through its reputation and standing is able to raise the necessary financial framework for the execution of the research itself, or through an oppositional educational model, which is so small that no funding will ever disappear into the black holes and untraceable institutional channels of the university. If the former model of existing university education is being pursued, then the state should also assume its political role and responsibility of funding such educational activities. Given such a claim, one could argue for the recovery of a time when universities were smaller. An institution always exists as a set of echoes, in conversation with other bodies of knowledge. If such echoes can no longer be heard or even produced, it is time to move on and produce alternative modes of formalized knowledge production.

On March 8, 2010, *e-flux journal* launched issue 14, co-edited by Irit Rogoff.[6] In it, the reader is exposed to a series of urgently needed positions and theses regarding a reevaluation of contemporary models of education, considering how forms of learning and exchange can take place within flexible, temporary, and unstable configurations.

6. Irit Rogoff (ed.), *e-flux journal*, no. 14, accessed at *http://e-flux.com/journal/issue/14*.

All around us we see a search for other languages and other modalities of knowledge production, a pursuit of other modes of entering the problematics of "education" that defy, in voice and in practice, the limitations being set up by the forces of bureaucratic pragmatism: a decade of increasing control and regulation, of market values imposed on an essential public right, and of middle-brow positivism privileged over any form of criticality—matched by a decade of unprecedented self-organization, of exceptionally creative modes of dissent, of criticality, and of individual ambitions that are challenging people to experiment with how they inhabit the field, how they inhabit knowledge.[7]

Rogoff dwells on the dangers that are inherent in a model of education in which education itself is becoming a market economy geared toward profit and revenue. She points at the fact that, within the mainstream prevailing system of education, students are increasingly being treated as paying clients, whose access and conditions have worsened considerably. One of the major forces she holds responsible for this development is the Bologna Accord, which, she claims, drives an education policy that attempts to fuse and streamline the former heterogeneous educational models and realities of the former East and the former West into one knowledge tradition, "erasing decades of other models of knowledge in the East and producing an illusion of cohesion through knowledge economies and bureaucracies."[8]

7.  Ibid., in Irit Rogoff, "Education Actualized."
8.  Ibid.

Florian Schneider, whose crucial thinking on collaboration was introduced in chapter 5, further investigates the notion of disciplinarity and the problematic circularity that such an isolating and hermetic notion fosters: "It comes as no surprise that bodies of knowledge have been called 'the disciplines.' The disciplinary institutions have organized education as a process of subjectivation that reaffirms the existing order and distribution of power in an endless loop."[9] Schneider argues for an urgent need to revaluate the concepts of institutions and their opponents: "networked environments, deinstitutionalized and deregulated spaces such as informal networks, free universities, open academies, squatted universities, night schools, or proto-academies."[10] He introduces the term "ekstitutions" to distinguish between the need for both organizing practices (ekstitutions) and un-organizing them (institution) as a means to argue for an overdue concept of exclusivity: "By its very nature, the institution has to be concerned with inclusion. It is supposed to be open to everybody who meets the standards set in advance, while in ekstitutions admission is subject to constant negotiation and renegotiation."[11]

To return to the Berlage Institute, which, under new leadership, claims to "provide the next generation of architects and urbanists with tools to better comprehend and intervene in the complexity of contemporary life."[12] But within a few years, the school

9.  Ibid. in Florian Schneider, "(Extended) Footnotes on Education."

10.  Ibid.

11.  Ibid.

has deteriorated from a once-challenging hub for critical thinking and extra-disciplinary production into what could be described as an industry-led environment in which teaching is only granted to those professors who bring in more money than they get remunerated for to teach. Such a framework is coupled with a series of double standards, which only speed up the deterioration of the institution. The highly problematic change in policy—toward a more business-friendly and corporation-supportive pedagogy—was also commented on by the Dutch government, which, as a result of the Berlage's clear lack of criticality, severely cut the institute's public funding. What is the value of a publicly funded institution that only caters to the industry, attempting to generate profit through the politics of employment? Its agenda is simple: more money. Economy is the primary concern, while pedagogy comes later.

In 2010, two of the Berlage's studios were financed by two external companies, which was at the time the way in which the two directors saw the institution moving. Such third-party funding is nothing particularly special or unheard of, especially in the U.S. However, if external funding and a severe lack of responsibility and pedagogical interest from the side of the academy mean that, consequently, students are simply being hijacked and used as free labor, then something within the sphere of education and responsibility has gone critically wrong. It becomes particularly problematic when such a development

12. See *www.berlage-institute.nl*.

goes hand in hand with an unclear goal of the studio, a lack of content in terms of education and projects, as well as an active role of the external company in the definition and formation of the program. At the Berlage Institute, this practice has gone so far as to not only jeopardize the autonomy of the academy, but also to use the students and program to fabricate products for the company. These products thereby produce a secondary economy for the client—for example, a book that can be used to promote the company to potential clients. At the academy, the company has effectively replaced the educator. They decide what has to be done, when, and how. The professor's role has been turned into that of an administrator, an institutionalized manager for the client, someone who is expected to contribute his or her personal and professional contacts, and provide a certain amount of voluntary workers. In such a context, students pay 25,000 euro for a two-year program, but are actually misused to deliver free labor to corporate clients just so the institution can secure its existence.

This evidently has an effect on the way that professors teach: Their interest is no longer in what is being produced in the studio, but in the relationships established through it. Reviews of student work are used as presentations for clients. The so-called juries are staffed with more corporate representatives than academic or otherwise critical and intellectually guided staff members. Furthermore, these presentations can no longer be used as a fruitful and highly needed intellectual and critical exchange, as the company is present and treated with white gloves in an

intellectually callous and consensus-driven manner.
If the client is happy, everybody is happy. But what
is the learning experience for the student? What is
the educator's point of engagement? What does the
institution gain apart from securing its own existence
and the replication of corporate research? Some staff
members, as well as students, were, from the begin-
ning, against such a studio model, but nevertheless
remained unheard. Moreover, the institution now
finds itself in an incomprehensible practice of promot-
ing double standards by, on the one hand, wanting to
work on "real" projects, while, on the other, refusing
to acknowledge what this entails. It goes without
saying that such protocols and concepts of education
are damaging to the institution, disrespectful toward
the educators, and unacceptable in terms of the insti-
tution's "concept of the student." A carrot-and-stick
practice is used in order to persistently increase the
studio's economic output, stringing the educators
along as long as they provide the academy with
capital; otherwise, they are dropped like a hot potato.
Educators should not be personally vested in funding
the studio they are teaching, nor should their salary be
used to provide speakers, critics, student travel, and
so forth. Interestingly, in the corporate environment,
which this school mimics, the Berlage Institute's
conduct of employment would be understood and
treated as illegal practice. Since there is no commit-
ment to professors any longer, and educators are only
ever given semester-long contracts, there is neither
security in carrying out worthwhile research projects
or inquiries, nor the possibility to really concentrate

on the work. Since educators have become exchangeable due to economic considerations, no serious and in-depth research methodologies can be developed anymore.

It seems that, out of this crisis, at least at the moment, there are only two possible ways of exiting this vicious circle. One either commits to a conventional university, which takes on the responsibility as a place for education, and is also willing and capable to economically support education—meaning that they are able to both pay for their employees as well as to simply run their everyday activities, such as lectures, seminars, or workshops. Alternatively, another possibility is to set up externalized, small-scale structures, which allow for a process of constant reform, as envisaged by Schneider's notion of the "ekstitituion." This issue of scale as a crucial mode of practice is also problematized in Nicolas Siepen's and Åsa Sonjasdotter's *e-flux* contribution "Learning by Doing: Reflections on Setting Up a New Art Academy,"[13] in which the authors distinguish two basic formats of education: state-run art institutions (or privately funded ones for that matter) and so-called self-organized structures, between "pre-existing positions to be filled, and unstructured, continuously reinvented positions."[14]

While self-organized models often question and transform the way in which their participants learn and practice, it is standard that the way in which state

13. Nicolas Siepen and Åsa Sonjasdotter, "Learning by Doing: Reflections on Setting Up a New Art Academy," in *e-flux journal*, no. 14, op. cit.

14. Ibid.

universities or privately run institutions "suffer" from under-funding is not connected to the funding of the actual content-driven studios or research undertaken within the academy, but a lack of smart decision-making when it comes to the overbearing bureaucratic structures that these institutions have put upon themselves. Their "real" problem is management and profitability: "Perversely, a self-organized institution's lack of funding is both its woe and its pride! In other words, when state institutions don't function, they shut down, while self-organized 'institutions' thrive, precisely because they 'don't function' [are not managed] to begin with."[15] However, there is, or at least should be, another clear distinction between a formalized institution and a self-organized structure. In the latter, one works for the sake of propelling research while probably being paid little or not at all. The former suggests a job description: If one is employed as a professor or educator, he or she should also be remunerated accordingly, as one is providing a clearly defined service, i.e., X amount of students per studio; X amount of lectures, tutorials, and reviews; X amount of hours per week; X amount of weeks per term. Ironically, the Berlage Institute was established as the latter: an unaccredited laboratory that was granted certain freedoms to operate outside the confines of the academy, and yet succumbed to the same pitfalls of the academy, which were paradoxically exacerbated by their somewhat unofficial status.

15. Ibid.

Given this framework, to return to the hypothesis, it seems increasingly relevant to produce other formats of educational engagement, coupled with alternative forms of learning, which still consider that institutional affiliation, prestige, and accreditation are part of what the student buys and, in all candor, needs. Structural change will most likely be achieved from the outside rather than from the inside. The small-scale frameworks nestled on the margins of state-controlled or privately funded education are more agile, flexible, and intelligent to generate content-driven approaches, and also create and participate in local projects as well as self-initiated collaborations. These are environments in which participants and contributors learn how to unlearn, critically consider the differences between practice and professionalism, develop a socio-political reading of their surrounding, and insert a criticality into the territory in which they operate. This was the driving force for me to initiate the Winter School Middle East, which will be articulated in the next chapter. Nicolas Siepen and Åsa Sonjasdotter pose the crucial question much more effectively and clearly than I ever did in the past: "For whom or what reason is this institution here?" [16]

16. Ibid.

# The Gray Zone between Criticism and Celebration: Winter School Middle East

In 2008, I initiated and eventually directed a roaming, small-scale, self-organized institution—or "ekstitution," as Florian Schneider would call it—in order to answer Siepen's and Sonjasdotter's question, which had not yet been asked: For whom or for what reason is this institution here? The school was supposed to be a first step toward a localized but nomadic engagement with critical environmental topics in the region.

At the time, the influx of U.S. and EU outsourced campuses in the United Arab Emirates, and more specifically Abu Dhabi and Dubai, had just geared up to the next level. Major U.S. universities and Ivy League schools were either already represented or on their way to opening up a campus in the Middle East. Interestingly, this was not so much the result of a sudden interest and content-specific endeavor in the region; on the contrary, it was an economic decision resulting from the September 11 attacks. After 9/11, many U.S. universities suffered from a lack of Middle Eastern graduate students, as their parents decided to no longer send them to the United States. Because of the way in which the U.S. university system is funded, such a collective decision made by a huge group of potential "clients" from the Middle East forced

universities to move to where the clients are. What resulted was a huge development of academic collaborations, cooperation, and outsourcing of campuses.

The first two years of the Winter School Middle East were executed in structural collaboration with the Architectural Association in London. It was based on the belief that, through this different, smaller but holistic scale of engagement, one could produce an alternative dimension to the large-scale educational export models that were implemented in the Middle East. Instead of bringing in teaching staff from only the West, we are interested in fostering a pool of local knowledge, driven by expertise from the wider region. In the first year, we gained local political sponsorship from the American University in Sharjah, together with the Third Line gallery in Dubai. This political sponsorship was necessary in order to carry out such a model in the UAE.

The first workshop comprised of a body of forty-four students from countries and backgrounds as diverse as Lebanon, Italy, Iran, Germany, Palestine, Egypt, the UK, Korea, Bahrain, Greece, Australia, New Zealand, Brazil, Singapore, Mexico, Iraq, Latvia, Dominican Republic, Jordan, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Malaysia. At the onset of the twenty-first century, which is characterized by rapid processes in urbanization, it seemed relevant and necessary to foster an architectural culture that went beyond the practice of developing architectural and urban proposals, and furthered a discourse that would allow for unforeseen and surprising processes to take place, for uncertainty in practices that are often described

through certainty and control, and that would generate conflicts where most practitioners would consider the solution to "problems." This was not understood as a colonial necessity of moving in, as is the case with large-scale universities and campuses, but as a way to open up critical formats and small platforms to a pool of local practitioners and educators, who share an interest in working beyond the scale of the academic institution. Instead of delivering a mere critique, the Winter School engages locally and fuels a critical practice of involvement, discussion, and a culture of debate. Without fostering any neo-colonial attitudes, we attempted to proactively tackle some of the issues that are usually critiqued. It is only through direct involvement that we can interrogate spatial realities in a serious and lasting fashion: to be political outside the realm of politics. The first Winter School dealt with the issue of migrant labor, specifically investigating Dubai's labor camps ("Learning from Dubai," January 2008); the second Winter School, which took place in January of 2009, investigated the issue of "Spaces and Scales of Knowledge."

Imagine a city without people. If Dubai's immigrant population left, this is the scenario we would be facing. Over the past three years, critics' favorite theme has been Dubai's migrant workers, and particularly those in the construction industry; in short, the men who enable the emirate to develop at such a rapid pace. When I first visited Dubai, I was struck by the way that Western journalists, thinkers, and writers would continuously criticize the city's ambitions—always falling back into the

same mode of critique. But what was often forgotten or not mentioned is that, as a city and mode of cultural production, Dubai has been forced through modernity within less than two decades. This makes it an unprecedented phenomenon and place. What took almost a century in Europe, or in the "West" at large, happened, and continues to happen, in Dubai within the span of a couple years, regardless of the recent financial crisis. This development has created situations that are often difficult and challenging, and require an incredible amount of belief, ambition, and effort to deal with them. A lot has happened in the last five years. While many journalists still criticize the treatment and conditions of the large construction labor population of Dubai, the first labor unions have been established. Although these processes do not happen over night, one could witness the changes beyond the physical envelope of the city, but also, and more interestingly, the development of what could be called a civic city and the ways in which new small-scale institutions and project spaces would, for the first time, emerge. Instead of approaching Dubai as a place that is purely read through the black goggles of pessimism, the Winter School's method was to thoroughly investigate the urban structures and frameworks of civil society, while critically proposing environmental alternatives through direct but externalized involvement.

Based on a relentless belief in architecture as the tool for modernization, the spatial ambitions of Sheikh Al Maktoum are exhilarating. The city is constantly churning out superlatives, but none of

the kind favored by the West. While Kassel's documenta 12 discussed "what is to be done?" Dubai just does it and worries later. An armada of international construction consortia has put up an archipelago of exception, ranging from the world's tallest structure to the world's largest shopping mall. The 2007 Sharjah Biennial witnessed a shift, which has taken on unprecedented social and political issues. Instead of presenting a set of self-referential objects, it addressed excessive urban development, pollution, unilateral politics, and the misuse, abuse, and exhaustion of natural resources. Here, it seems that artistic and spatial practices managed to do what politics in the region are often incapable of: outright critique. As Rem Koolhaas writes in the introduction to *Al Manakh*: "The recycling of the Disney fatwa says more about the stagnation of Western critical imagination than it does about the Gulf cities."[1] The scale and speed of urbanization, particularly in Dubai, even dwarfs similar operations in China and India. But what can be learned from the accelerated urbanism in the Gulf? It seemed urgent to understand the Gulf's transformation in a different light. Not with the goggles of pessimism, but with a genuine attempt to understand and utilize its dynamics, to take serious what is too often ridiculed.

According to Anselm Franke, the space of artistic production acts as an enabler: it is a space of possibilities and autonomy. Such a freedom creates

1.   Rem Koolhaas, "Introduction," in *Volume 12: Al Manakh*, eds. Rem Koolhaas, Rem, Ole Bouman, and Mark Wigley (New York: Columbia University GSAPP; Amsterdam: Archis, 2007).

a state of exception that inhabits a potentiality; it is confined to the individual rather than society at large. Franke criticizes Doug Aitken's call for immersive image-worlds in *Expanding the Image, Breaking the Narrative*,[2] as a longing for something that avoids direct conflict with context, social frameworks, and political protocols. He points at Aitken's book as somewhat symptomatic of a missing registration and the danger of understanding the space of artistic production as neutral, and therefore does not have to react to its contextual framework. A similar intellectual operation needs to be undertaken when trying to understand today's practices in the Middle East. We must no longer read, write, or act as if the framework didn't change. Instead of critiquing or celebrating the images that these territories offer, we must try to understand and immerse ourselves in its multifaceted accounts, and hence try to break the image and expand the narrative. This arguably naïve ambition was introduced critically in the local context of Dubai, combining our own critical networks with local and regional intelligence. The intensive, workshop-based program operated on the basis of a series of content units, each developing its own set of approaches toward the meta-agendas of "Migrant Labor and the City" (2008) and "Spaces and Scales of Knowledge" (2009). The individual, tutor-led units investigated different aspects of the emerging spatial realities of the Gulf region, with

2.   Doug Aitken, *Broken Screen: Expanding the Image, Breaking the Narrative* (D.A.P./Distributed Art Publishers, Inc., 2005).

a local focus on Dubai. Units focused on the imagery of Google Earth as a strategic tool for the city's global representation, the spatialization and location of migrant labor camps within Dubai's urban fabric, an oral history archive of immigrants ranging from Bangladeshi construction workers to Russian sex workers to Korean informal mobile phone dealers to Eastern European architects to the German cultural consultant and the Sheikh. It is this transient nature of the city that the Winter School attempted to come to terms with. Several collaborations, including those with the Third Line gallery, Traffic design gallery, and *Bidoun* magazine, ensured that the results of the workshops would not evaporate, but instead build the starting point for an ongoing debate that would, optimistically speaking, also enable and generate effects on local and regional practices in the long run.

The Winter School is the direct result of realizing that the most relevant form of participation in the politics of local educational frameworks is a small-scale nomadic institution. In many ways, its approach is the reverse of the large-scale, education export models of Western universities, where educators with little to no experience in the Middle East fly in on rolling contracts, and tend to leave after two to three years, only for their successors to arrive on the same contracts: little knowledge is left behind and little is continuously built up. The Winter School aims to critically build up momentum, which can then be claimed, taken over, and hijacked by locals in order to develop it further in their own right. This microcosm presents a starting point for alternative

modes of production. The environment of the workshop—where information and knowledge are shared, where the production of space is not driven by political or cultural hierarchies, but a genuine belief in experiment through investigation—suggests a different way and model of working and learning, one where educators often learn as much from their students as their students do from them.

It is in this fashion that the Winter School will continue its efforts. Without falling into the trap of consensus-driven politics, it attempts to create and inhabit an alternative middle ground, one that produces a discursive space for a new and productive discussion to emerge, a space that inhabits the gray area between criticism and celebration. In a new set of collaborations, the Winter School is now embarking on the next phase of workshops: in collaboration with UN Habitat, a 2010/11 school will be set up in Kuwait, and, in 2012, in Tehran.

# 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.*[1]

—Simon Critchley

*As a citizen I might feel required to say what I think. Not 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.*[2]

—Peter Zumthor

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1.  Simon Critchley, *Indefinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance* (London: Verso, 2007), 132.

Unfortunately, the above quote by Swiss architect Peter Zumthor says it all: Once you subscribe to the standard architectural project, your leeway is quite limited. However, what Zumthor neglected to think of, is that there are gray shades beyond the black and white. There is, of course, also the possibility of becoming proactive and assuming 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 with global conflict, it is difficult to believe that such a monochrome, political perspective is really as shallow as it sounds. While practitioners are increasingly seeking to respond to and come to terms with the world around them, conveying recent social and political events,[3] the message is simple: Don't wait to be invited. Otherwise, things will never happen.

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 as someone who is not concerned with the construction of building, but rather with the analysis, design, and application of frameworks. This notion is based

2.    Peter Zumthor "Wir Schweizer sind nicht so anfällig für Moden," *Spiegel* online, May 29, 2009, http://www.spiegel.de/kultur/gesellschaft/0,1518,627167,00.html), trans. by the author: "Als Staatsbürger habe ich durchaus das Bedürfnis, meine Meinung zu sagen. Als Architekt nicht unbedingt. Ein Architekt baut am Ende das, was bestellt und bezahlt wird. Da hat man nur eine Möglichkeit, sich selber einzubringen: Indem man sagt, das mache ich, oder das mache ich nicht."

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

on the concept of the external practitioner versus the peer, the marginal producer of critical realities versus the pure service provision—to locate problematics rather than wait for others to present certain issues to you. Such an approach is fundamentally active, a proactive mode of operating versus a passive approach. It relates to Edward Said's notion of the "ideal intellectual," someone who works from the margin and is not infiltrated, concerned with, and 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, and necessarily optimistic practice can benefit from an amateur naïveté, coupled with a skilled presentation of untapped clarity. It is precisely this productive optimism that allows one to be projective beyond the expected, the feared, and the conventional, which are often the simple results of the consensus-driven realities of the system one is investigating or dealing with. Such a practice from the outside 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 rather enable a situation in which critical decision-making can emerge from a conflictual and necessary debate. In this context, the notion of the "self-initiated," the independent, and the uninvited, become a driving force for breaking with the often consensus-driven relationship between architect and client. As a starting point, the question of scale is critical. In contrast

to running riot on meta-agendas, the scale of the local can act as a bridge to tap into specific and constructive questions. Further, the scale of the question should be considered and developed in response to the audience and how the specific discourse of the project can be distributed beyond its own milieu. Venturing outside its own milieu may help to create a multiplicator of criticality, opening up the discourse to others, who may not be involved, and therefore inhabit a very different position and perspective toward the issue at hand.

Such a practice could be exercised by the "para-architect," which does not necessarily imply a parasitic practice, rather paranormal, in so far as it allows a productive position to be adopted within spatial practice, one that moves away from the notion of a developed discipline. It is something that is always on the move, on the margins, and that repositions itself according to its surroundings and hosts: it develops alongside the work that it produces. Hence, it is no longer a discipline, but a praxis.

Based on past projects, such as "Spaces of Production" for the European Kunsthalle, in collaboration with Nikolaus Hirsch, Philipp Misselwitz, and Matthias Görlich; the ongoing Winter School Middle East; the recent consulting project for the recalibration of the Dutch art institution SKOR, in collaboration with Andrea Phillips; or the "East Coast Europe" consultancy for the Slovenian Government, in collaboration with the School of Missing Studies and Srdjan Jovanovic Weiss and Katherine Carl, which, in many ways, was the most direct

translation of an outsider asking questions; one could start to think of such models of praxis as beginning to think about idealized scalar and temporal frameworks for critical engagement. Spatial frameworks can be understood as an obvious starting point, since it is physical and therefore visible and perceptible. But it seems that a critical scale of engagement is one that functions on a micro-level, but that is always in conversation with a context on a broader scale. Such micro-levels can be interpreted in the way people interact socially; they can be based on the way policy has been written and implemented; they can be influenced by the programming and soft architecture of an institution or otherwise social structure; and they can deal temporally, not physically, with the present and future more than the past. This agility of the non-historic is particularly important when it comes to the ambition and willingness to become projective rather than staying within the realm of the analytical.

If one always ponders what has already been there, it is very difficult to change the way in which things work. As mentioned earlier in chapter 8, if these processes of change can be stirred by a design toward conversations and productive communication, design can therefore be understood as the reordering of affairs on a different scale. Decision-making should always be based on a set of dynamic variables, and should address and interact with more than one layer, or several variables at once. The project "Spaces of Production" for the European Kunsthalle was particularly sensitive to a local network. Yet, it did not incite chauvinism or nationalism, as it was

distributed so well locally. The project showed how there is no one local space or spatial organization that does the job, but a content-driven approach that requires the development and production of varying frameworks. With regards to critical and contextualized practice as a way to work politically as a spatial practitioner, it seems that in order to see what distributions of power are at play within a situation, one needs a manageable focus with a local and specific radius. This is another reason why the Winter School Middle East is presented as a scalar model that frequently, but not regularly, emerges as a short, concentrated, and annual occurrence. In the case of Dubai, by meeting for such a short period, the "school" somehow slides under the radar of the benevolent political dictatorship in charge. Such an approach ultimately suggests that one can work within a given system, while also enabling a subversive potential.

Coming back to the temporality of critical engagement through the projective, such an approach is also connected to the potentialities outlined by Chantal Mouffe, more specifically her ideas on democracy, universality, and hegemony. Mouffe disagrees on what democracy "looks like," but agrees that it simultaneously and always needs to remain a social and political horizon, a place—whose end point is neither exactly known nor reachable—even though one may disagree about how to get there.

To such an extent, such a reading complies with the advocacy of a contestatory conception of politics

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

put forth by Bonnie Honig.[4] Honig's agonistic approach to political theory develops this notion through a set of critiques, yet remains, as is the case with Mouffe, a theoretical, untested construct, which is interested in the emancipatory potential of contestation and the disruption of settled practices. She argues that politics can neither be reduced to modes of consensus nor to simple contestation, as both are essential aspects of politics. In short, democracy will always be "in the making." The striving and disagreement about it is what ultimately matters. What is crucial within this formulaic calculation is that dissensus is understood and is being enabled as a productive possibility. The Winter School project is attracted to the school form within the remit of a laboratory-type space, a series of think tanks for and about pedagogical processes and venues—precisely because it is space that opens up an arena for dissensus and speculation. A democracy always needs spaces in which it can be thought through and imagined. These spaces, however, may not always be democratically legitimated. Democracy is a levitating governmentality, which has to constantly rearticulate and recondition its constraints. Democratic decision-making will always rely on a space for disagreement, a space in which people, as Mouffe claims, agree to disagree: "Democratic legitimation aims at the will to act [*Handlung*], the diversification and transformation of the existing."[5]

5.  Christoph Möllers, *Demokratie—Zumutungen und Versprechen* (Berlin: Verlag Klaus Wagenbach, 2009), 55, trans. by the author.

This is the expression of a communal praxis. The difficulty in terms of such a praxis is always allowing for possibilities rather than limitations, using 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 on which one is acting—the art world, for example, exists as a construct of many different professions and discipline, yet could be described as a singular milieu.

A more specific example with regard to an alternative model of spatial practice might be the case of the European Kunsthalle project "Spaces of Production" in Cologne, as introduced above. The project started as a reaction to a loss, a lack, a physical violence executed by the city government of Cologne. Local authorities knocked down the historic Kunsthalle building in Cologne with the promise that a new one would be built in return. Once the existing building had been eliminated, the city suddenly claimed that there was no money for a new one. As a result, a grassroots initiative of local and regional artists, activists, and cultural producers, Das Loch e.V., was founded, and later posed a series of questions: What can be done? What needs to be considered in an ongoing discourse about the institution, 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 "European Kunsthalle" was born. Instead of trying to find immedi-

ate solutions, such as raising money to build a new space, or accept alternatives, such as a multi-purpose development proposed by the city, which entailed the cooperation of a real-estate developer, the initiative decided for a more rocky path and investigated the conflicts and problematics of the institutional typology itself: Given the contemporary realities, what does a Kunsthalle in Europe constitute today? The existing conflict was used to plant another one, and thus productively use the lack of consensus at a particular moment. The result was the founding of an interim institution. In this case, consensus would have been much easier, and would have led to a tangible result. Instead, what the European Kunsthalle was interested in was rethinking a model that was already in place through the strategic introduction of friction, one that would enable discourse rather than produce place.

As tools, modes of participation are the most constructive when understood as means to proactively take part in something, rather than as necessarily bottom-up democratic processes. This was one of the reasons why the approach of Nicolaus Schafhausen, who was the founding director for the European Kunsthalle, intended to expose acute shortages in the current discourse on the role that institutions can play in politics on a local scale. Participation is most operative if its framework is crystal clear: If there is an explicit audience that one addresses, if the project has an unmistakable framework to pursue. 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 and be aware of, but not an expert on, its context and what scale to operate on. It suggests that micro-political struggle is arguably more effective than the simple articulation of macro-political ambition. This concept partially disagrees with the simultaneity approach of scales as propagated by, for example, Mouffe, who argues for change mainly on the scale of governments, while simultaneously tackling the regional and microscales. On the microscale, however—the institutional or local scale—effects of conflict can often be felt directly, and can therefore act as a testing ground for larger societal conflicts. The importance of the microscale lies in its ability to be highly localized, and therefore specific to generating change; it can be tangible through the articulation of very specific aims and targets, which can be quickly tested against reality. This is not to mention the global approach of Hardt and Negri, as they believe that belonging to specific places is something that should be overcome and a cosmopolitan view should replace the notion of belonging to specificities.

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 rather as a means of acting "without mandate," forcing oneself into discourses, projects, or realities that arguably benefit from external and structurally uninterested involvement, as outlined in chapter 10. This does not mean

that there will not or cannot be shared authorship, but simply that the conventional model of the facilitator or good-doer is replaced by a model of a proactive, rather than purely benevolent, 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 of collating conflicting voices and perspectives on issues to which one wishes to have access in order 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.*[1]
>      —Senator Charles F. Meachum

> *I relate my approach to homeopathy, which puts*
> *poison in the system in order to generate energy*
> *to defeat the weakness.*[2]
>      —Gustav Metzger

As Simon Critchley argues, philosophy always begins with disappointment.[3] Nihilism is the breakdown of the order of meaning, in which everything that we have previously imagined as a sound basis for moral judgment becomes meaningless. According to Critchley, philosophical activity, by which he means the free movement of thought and the possibility for critical reflection, "is defined by militant resistance to nihilism."[4] In order to remain at least borderline optimistic within the current sociopolitical climate

1. Played by Ned Beatty in *Shooter*, directed by Antoine Fuqua, Paramount Pictures, 2007.
2. Gustav Meztger, interview by Mark Godfrey, "Protest and Survive," *frieze*, no. 108 (Jun–Aug 2007): available at *http://www.frieze.com/ issue/article/protest_and_survive/*.
3. Simon Critchley, *Indefinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance* (London: Verso, 2007), 1.
4. Ibid., 2.

of practice, one needs to generate a turf in which it seems possible to overcome the constant lamenting, pessimism, and black writing about and toward the contemporary condition. As Peter Sloterdijk contends, the individual designer needs to attempt to mount a certain universe of competency, a territory in which one can exist as a sovereign individual, not in the sense of relative specialization, but rather, the reverse: The contemporary "expert" needs to become not a more specified master of a singular terrain, but an incompetent master navigating the ocean of practices. For Sloterdijk, design is the skillful mastering of incompetence.[5] Skillful incompetence enables a type of neutral gear, a parallel reality, in which practice, even in the presence of those who attempt to render themselves unconscious, can be sustained in an optimistic mode of production.

Free movement of thought necessarily implies not always clinging to what is known and perceived as functional and "right," what has been practiced or experienced previously. Working from the outside, like a non-institutionalized free agent—who is, to a certain extent, comparable to an external consultant[6]—also means actively performing a certain marginality. The isolation of such marginality can only be overcome by a relentless will for collaboration, a commitment and willingness to change things—beyond intellectual aspirations, but through

5.  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.
6.  See also chapter 9, "*Learning from the Market.*"

significant distance that produces a mode of critical-
ity, a distance that an insider cannot offer and does not
possess. In this model of practice, which strives for
change through commitment, complicity connotes
the death of a project. Such a model needs to be driven
by a result-oriented praxis whose potential for mo-
dalities can only ever be tested in reality. Rather than
simply regurgitating its theoretical potential over
and over again, these results can be critiqued, altered,
tweaked, edited, or even dismissed. The key phrase
here is "constructive critical productivity." One
should rather attempt to produce ten critical realities
in a year and repeatedly learn from the potential mis-
takes, and then develop a singular practice. Testing
allows for agility. Such testing needs to be carried out
in the relevant context, in collaboration with others,
and across cultural milieus in order to avoid self-
stimulation, vanity, and the comfortable and passive
nestling behind walls of egocentric practice, which
are all highly uncritical and vastly unproductive:

> *There is the danger that theater is turning into
> solely a simulation of itself. Like a cleaning lady
> who swabs the floor of the stage, and while observ-
> ing her own reflection in the window, realizes how
> she likes the movement of her ass while scrubbing
> the floor. It no longer seems to matter whether the
> floor is actually being cleaned, because the move-
> ment of her ass is the only 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.*[7]

To use Martin Wuttke's analogy, it seems crucial to find a way to position oneself, in an agile manner, within the context of current practices and the contemporary condition, 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 who navigates through the cultural-political terrain in a deaf/dumb/blind-like manner, which Diedrich Diederichsen calls "surrogate-democratic participation,"[8] and presents nothing more than a depoliticization of the individual beyond serious modes of engagement. In the current climate, it is necessary to separate oneself from magic buzz-words—sustainability, participation, democracy, or the multitude—which were propagated at the tail end of the 1990s. Instead of using them as simple billpostings for political one-liners, one must tackle their underlying motives through contextualized practice. These buzzwords were only a few of the terminologies that were used in order to move attention from the micro to the macro scale. This was happening across the board, beyond political alliances, whether on the Left or the Right.[9] At some point, it became sexy to subscribe to these terminologies. Whether one was convinced by its content or possible future potentials was a secondary question. It was a

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7. Martin Wuttke in Stephan Suschke (ed.), *Nahaufnahme: Martin Wuttke – Theaterarbeit mit Schleef, Müller, Castorf, Pollesch* (Berlin: Alexander Verlag, 2010), trans. by the author.

8. Diedrich Diederichsen, *Eigenblutdoping – Selbstverwertung, Künstler-romantik, Partizipation* (Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 2008), 279.

9. Ibid., 49.

mainstream trend, across disciplines, across political beliefs. The whole point about cultural praxis is that it presupposes and assumes possible futures, that it speculates on what might be possible through a series of critical theories and practices that, for society at large, are still too abstract.[10]

One could claim, however, that the real value is hidden in an approach in which there is no evidence in the result of either fully rational decision-making or consensus. One could argue that the crossbench politician in 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 that is designed to leave space for those who want to remain disassociated in order to provoke, motivate, and eventually stir change. The crossbench politician is essentially an independent practitioner who 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 player, potentially even without a clear stance, 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 have an undoubtedly political stance and opinion, they do not subscribe to the nailed-down membership books or party platforms of other consolidated politicians. This is also reflected in the crossbencher's spatial arrangement and positioning

10. Ibid., 184.

within the house, where Labour sits on one side and conservatives on the other; the crossbenchers are in the middle, slightly retracted toward the back of the room.

By now, participation is part of the neoliberal project, and ultimately serves the preservation of the system. Real questions of power are no longer being negotiated. Within the remit of such "directed participation" and highly controlled political engagement, one should promote a practice of the autonomous practitioner as a means to master conflict as an enabling, rather than disabling, force. It calls for a new interpretation of both the late 1990s romantic use of "participation" as a mode or operation, as well as the function and responsibility of the crossbencher: a mode of conflictual participation, which no longer perpetuates and relies on a process by which others are invited in, but instead acts without consensual mandate as a disinterested productive irritant.

In participation, there are often too many potential decision-makers; but there aren't enough people who take on the responsibility, risk, and courage to turn these decisions into reality, to move things forward. Any political practice must, of course, always opt to remain within the territory and be grounded on the basic rules of the democratic arena. Nevertheless, there is a potential danger in always using majority as a way to generate democratic decision-making. The dilemma with democracy is that, the moment you have a room full of idiots, they will vote for an idiotic government; or, in the case of the recent Swiss referendum regarding the subsistence of the country's

mosques, if one has sufficient financial resources to mobilize the idiots, it is possible to make 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 seriously read the British *Sun*, the *New York Post*, or the German *Bild Zeitung* just simply because they are the newspapers with the biggest audiences and print runs? The question at hand and the development of the last decade's notion of the participatory project actually point to a far greater danger: the problem and helplessness of the Left. If all one can do in order to make decisions 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 appears to get things done. It developed irony to perfection, a lunge that has rendered the Right almost invulnerable: "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."[11]

What can the architect's role be in all of this today? As a contemporary architect, one confronts the dilemma of a profession that no longer really exists. There is no such thing as a core competence, which, as we learned from Peter Sloterdijk earlier, may

actually be an advantage rather than a disadvantage. Core competences—such as Sony = miniaturization, Honda = combustion engine, 3M = everything you stick together—also mean that you may be very good at doing one thing, but the demand simply vanishes. Everyone who joins one of these companies needs to understand that such competencies are only valuable when they can be applied in different fields; they should have an understanding about how to design this transfer and why this is desirable. Until recently, most architects did not know how to do this. Over the decades, they unlearned this skill, which was even part of architectural education for a long time. In the Renaissance, the Polymath and generalist was the role model for such a practitioner; he was a reflexive, educated individual capable of lateral thinking. Different times have identified different primary dimensions, but it becomes interesting when one allows these dimensions to become transparent and understood as interdependent.

Rather than mourn the good old days, this can also be understood as a challenge and potential. Architects have at times been very prolific in exploiting the potential of existing in a parasitic relationship to the discipline that actually produces architecture, which is the discipline of building. The natural disillusionment with the way in which decisions that have already been made are often not carried through by those who should materialize them has equipped

11. Stanley Fish, "Intellectual Diversity: The Trojan Horse of a Dark Design," *The Chronicle of Higher Education/The Chronicle Review*, February 13, 2004.

architects with a healthy amount of skepticism. Over the last decades, what used to be known as the profession of architecture has disintegrated into a plethora of practices. This change from a profession or clearly outlined discipline into a series of practices was fuelled and mobilized by a certain politicization, which emerged in the mid-1990s.[12] These practices are trying to achieve many disparate aims, but might be united by a singular quality that is the possibility and skill of the imagination, formulation, and design of strategic frameworks that enable things to happen. The problem, however, is that this abstract quality is continuously applied in the same old field and turf, which failed architects in the first place. This raises the question of positioning and how one situates him or herself 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 cultural sphere, 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 of sorts, a strategic manual for choreographing futures. Cynics might argue that the architectural project per se is simply a more baggy type of storytelling. And there may even be a certain accuracy in this. Nevertheless, one needs to be pretty good at telling the story.

Such a polyphonic practice opens up a new role not only for the architect, but for critical practices in

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12. As described in the chapter 4, "The Grand Narratives: Life after Bilbao."

general: To go beyond conventional physical construction and venture into the construction of realities, not in order to follow existing protocols, but to proactively generate them. It embodies a plea for the non-academic intellectual, with a wide diffusion beyond the academy, although most of it may have been nurtured inside it.[13] Even more so, the cross-bench 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. Unlike the academy, its impact might affect an entire practice or social body rather than only a student body. This is not to sound megalomaniac, but rather 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."[14] In this regard, Edward Said proactively summarized 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

13. As described in chapter 12, "The Future Academy."
14. Edward Said, *Representations of the Intellectual: The* 1993 *Reith Lectures* (New York: Random House, 1996), 110.
15. Ibid., 121.

or method."[15] In Said's opinion, the significance is to never forget that you have the choice. And choice is what inhabits strength and power, even from the point of view of the individual.

Political space entails the practice of decision-making and judging; judgment means to introduce a system of hierarchies. Such curatorial practice includes at its core the act of strategizing and destruction: making choices to determine what to eliminate. In the given context of critical spatial practice, the architect as curator could be understood as an instigator, who—through the introduction of zones of conflict —transforms the cultural landscape, which is the result of an unstable society that consists of many distinct and often conflicting individuals, institutions, and spaces. One could therefore argue that instead of breeding the next generation of facilitators and mediators, we should aim for the encouragement of a disinterested outsider who exists at the margins, only waiting for the relevant moment to produce ruptures in the 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 or destabilizing existing power relations, this outsider opens up a space for change, one that enables "political politics."

The question remains whether this is all to be understood as an opportunistic endeavor, trying to simply describe one's own role within a plethora of differentiated practices, or whether it has some qualities

or use-value beyond the individual. Crossbench praxis could be described precisely as acting without a clearly defined mandate, but proactively seeking engagement: 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 the notion of practice rather than through discipline or profession. Here, skills and a core competence replace the traditional notion of discipline and professionalism. Here, participation produces an alternative and parallel reality, which is activated and driven by self-motivation, political agenda, collaborative willingness, and the fearlessness to exclude, rather than thrive in unquestioned inclusion. Such an agenda of critical manipulation must not take anything for granted and must never take final sides; in other words, not to cop out of responsibility, but to stay flexible, agile, and critical beyond the 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, hence maybe in danger of missing the bigger picture, or having trouble seeing over long time spans.

The clique of the art and architecture worlds as practice rather than pure critique have, in this regard, lost touch—apart from a relatively small circle of practitioners. Many practices in the art world rarely produce more than one-liners and postings, 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 an almost entire de-politicization. What is needed now is a re-introduction of critcal interrogation in regard to the value, positions, and temporal nature of political engagement, being raised in and against the institutional interior. Along this path, an alternative rendering of participation and the relational should be delineated, one that moves from performer to proactive enabler, beyond the event-driven realities of a certain artistic production around social situations, toward a direct and personal engagement and stimulation of specific future realities. This can only be achieved by avoiding the trap of getting stuck in one milieu, such as the art world, or a singular political project; humans have feet in order to move and not get stuck. Otherwise, we would be trees. 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 be able to re-enter it differently. It should allow for an ambiguity that assumes responsibility while moving from pedigree to bastard. This practitioner will be a co-author rather than a participant—as participants are usually confronted with superimposed structures. Although the "free radical" does not exist and nothing is clean—rather, everything is ambivalent —such a practice needs to work toward an ambition that is immune to complicity. Such complicity can be overcome by assuming three positions with which modes of proactive participation can become meaningful: attitude, relevance, and responsibility. Unfortunately, these are missing.

Space is the result of *Handlung*.[16] It is impossible to generate change through the passive mode of reacting. Practice always needs to go beyond absorption and become projective; it must inject itself into contextual realities and make itself visible in order to instrumentalize. In a time when participation has become nothing but a rendering of tokenistic political correctness, such a propositional, rather than a purely reflective, notion of practice offers a hideout for agonistic commitment.

Most subcultural developments of the last fifty years obliged themselves more toward the military logic of the avant-gardes than to 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.[17] 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."[18]

16. See also Martina Löw, *Raumsoziologie*, (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2001).

17. Tobias Rapp, *Lost and Sound* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2009), 49, trans. by the author.

18. Marcel Reich-Ranicki quoted in Uwe Wittstock, *Marcel Reich-Ranicki: Geschichte eines Lebens* (Munich: Karl Blessing Verlag, 2005), 192, trans. by the author.

# Postscript

Jeremy Beaudry and Bassam El Baroni

A nightmare is an iconic representation created by your mind. The idea of the icon is that it visualizes a situation that you cannot, in your conscious mind, imagine to be worse or more powerful. In sleep, the subconscious shows you something that your waking mind cannot elaborate on; it cannot construct a more difficult, horrific icon. The familiar and the plausible is often taken to such an extreme as to be terrifying, or problems that have no solution are presented. You become trapped in an endless cycle.

To wake up from a nightmare is to reach the threshold of realizing that you are in fact dreaming. You cannot escape the nightmare from within the logic of the dream itself; you must exit the dream world. Crossing the threshold of realization, you begin to understand that you are a character performing a role within a staged play—the dream—that you are watching. You observe this character, who is you, doing that which only a moment ago was natural and inevitable according to the logic of the nightmare. Escaping this logic, your conscious mind moves out of the dreamscape and into consciousness as the artificiality of the scene is revealed... the lights, the cameras, the props, the other actors, the monster who is not real, but rather, merely a huge animatronic puppet.

In the nightmare of participation, political subjects become caught in the logic of an iconic participation, a representative participation that has been exaggerated to the point of hollowness. The power of this participation is the power of the mesmerizing icon: It sustains the nightmare that we cannot wake up from, and it compels us to go on playing our assigned roles. Why has participation become a nightmare? The history is longer than we can tell here. Start looking a few decades back, to the 1980s, when the Western political model of participation as a legitimizing force emerged—a significant step in the evolution of late capitalism's political theater. It is participation as instrumentalized political practice. Participation becomes a scripted scenario of liberal democracy, into which you insert the necessary actors, props, lighting, cameras, and mechanized monsters. Wake up!

A Worst-case Scripted Scenario of Participation! Imagine: the United Nations decides to build a new headquarters for the twenty-first century and beyond, a structure that truly can reflect the diversity of cultures and nations that comprise the global community. They invite architects, designers, and theorists from literally every corner of the world in order to participate in a design charrette to envision this pinnacle of world architecture. We might circumscribe the nightmare of participation in this scenario with the following: What is expected from the non-Western participants, such as the architect from Mozambique, or the interior designer from Oman? What are they supposed

to contribute? Their heritage? Where does the premise for *their* participation come from?

Does the fact of their being from these places mean that they will actually think in terms related to where they are from? Is their otherness embodied so neatly, so simply? Or is difference not so evident as it used to be, and what if it were? What if they were so different that there was no common ground at all?

If these eager participants do represent a non-Western, non-modernist sphere, will they actually be acknowledged or seriously considered? Will anyone give a damn about their contributions if their alterity doesn't meet the standards of acceptable difference?

Surely, many voices are represented—it is the UN afterall!—but what happens next? Representation is iconic and the icon can only deliver substance to a subconscious. What happens next? Nothing happens because no one wants anything to happen. We must want something to happen, and then state it in clear terms. We don't want a representation; we want the thing itself. To wake up from the nightmare, a mechanism needs to be devised that does not function iconically, but practically. There is plenty of antagonism preloaded into the scenario above by reason of the nature of constructed difference. Difference was and is constructed by humans, but to get over difference we must construct a mechanism that exists in the world of consciousness, one that can reckon with the complexity of life. We need to leave antagonism behind for the sake of antagonism and move toward constructing solutions. Antagonism is a criticality applied from outside of the system, a

criticality that is pessimistic and does not reciprocate. It only listens in order to consume and circulate that feedback within its own critical machine. Wake up!

The nightmare of participation can only end when we wake up to a strange world where we have accepted an order that is not predicated on the same measurement of things. Perhaps this is exactly why we don't want to wake up from this nightmare. Perhaps to wake up to this strange world where we are truly disoriented is the nightmare we dread the most, and that is why we prefer to live in this recurring nightmare of participation, which we at least know and are familiar with.

In the present volume, the author—as well as his collaborators—has earnestly elaborated on the nightmare of participation in order to propose a series of countermeasures to a "politically motivated model of pseudo-participation." The tactics suggested are drawn from diverse disciplines and knowledge bases, and they appear in several guises: the uninvited outsider, the crossbench practitioner, the management consultant / systems designer, to recall a few. And while our language here may veer more into the domain of the imaginative for metaphorical effect than Miessen's, we understand the objective of this project to be a mechanism that moves us closer to the threshold of realization, the line at which we see the nightmare of participation for what it is and find agency to escape the grasp of its iconic power. The call to arms is clear: wake up!

# Architecture with a Big "A"

Interview with Hans Ulrich Obrist

HANS ULRICH OBRIST — I wanted to ask you to begin at the beginning. Who are your heroes in architecture?

MARKUS MIESSEN — Cedric Price.

HUO — That's something we share. Cedric Price has also been one of my heroes. I met him with Richard Hamilton in 1998 when we did "Cities on the Move," and then had almost weekly meetings with him until the end of his life. I think we can say today that very few architects have actually changed the history of architecture as Cedric did. With very few drawings, buildings, and texts, he introduced *time* into architecture, while also pioneering great cultural institutions for the twenty-first century. I'm thinking about his Fun Palace, which still resonates as a utopian, trans-disciplinary device, but also about his amazing Potteries Thinkbelt, a school on the move, which becomes more relevant everyday. For me, coming from the field of curating, institutions like the Fun Palace and the Potteries Thinkbelt, and considerations like

The original, abbreviated version of this interview was first published in *Kaleidoscope*, issue 5, February 2010.

time in exhibitions have been very important. How has Cedric been a toolbox for you as an architect?

> MM — I've always been interested in the temporal nature of Cedric's projects. There has been an increasing obsession with formalism in architecture over the past decade, especially the kind that is based on nonsensical arguments and computer-generated excuses. Many buildings that have been built over the past decade have become more and more like self-referential objects. Somehow, many architects have misunderstood the notion of architecture as some kind of sculpturesque artistic endeavour. I love the fact that architects are always ten years behind other discourses. I think one of Cedric's great and most valuable notions, which could almost be described as his essential paradigm, is the idea that a building does not have to be an object. It does not necessarily have to be physical. Cedric very smartly asked: "If technology is the answer, what was the question?" Architecture is really something that happens over time. That has been the nature of many of his projects, and right now, in the midst of the financial crisis, this notion is more topical and relevant than ever. I would love to ask many so-called contemporaries in architecture: "If parametric urbanism and scripting is the answer, what was the question?"

HUO — Cedric, however, also built things. The other day I saw a marvelous desk that he made for the

Robert Fraser Gallery in London in the 1960s. There is also the London Zoo Aviary, which is one of his great masterpieces and one of my favorite spots in London: an aviary on the move, it changes according to the direction of the wind. To what extent was the "built" Cedric Price influential for you?

> MM — His built work most often had, and still has, the quality of a stage, a stage set of sorts, a space of uncertainty and potentiality in which things can emerge and take place. So whatever happened in the physical space was something staged, and when you look at the way in which Cedric was dealing with the question of authorship, the most relevant tool and component within the equation of each project was the way in which the protocols for use, the strategic frameworks, or the projects were designed. Price understood himself in a subtle and humble way as a service provider for content in order to generate space. That, for me, is totally inspiring.

HUO — A last question on heroes, before we move on: For Cedric's last project for New York City [a proposal for development on Manhattan's West Side], he developed a sort of lung, a free zone that injected oxygen into the city. What, besides Cedric, is oxygen for you—art, architecture, other things in life?

> MM — I draw a lot from educational structures, social hubs in which knowledge is exchanged and produced. This is something I thoroughly

enjoy. Many of the projects that I have been working on over the last couple of years have to do with the issue of education, especially in smaller or self-generated institutions, like, for example, a project I initiated and direct in the Middle East called "Winter School Middle East." For the first two years, the School was placed in Dubai, in collaboration with London's Architectural Association, where I was teaching at the time. At first, it functioned like a satellite school to the AA, but in 2010, I will launch the first independent Winter School, which is now taking place in Kuwait in collaboration with UN Habitat, IFA, and a couple of other local and regional institutions. The next one will hopefully take place in Tehran, although the Kuwait model is a more long-term and sustainable engagement. The idea is that the school will move through the Middle East as a roaming institution, bringing in regional knowledge and helping to facilitate a structure that can be built upon once the Winter School has moved elsewhere. The interesting aspect for me is to rethink educational activities in architecture and urbanism through applied, small-scale institutions, rather than by jumping onto existing models—at least in the Middle East. Apart from my interest in education, I am working on several research projects and am writing quite a lot. It is very important for me to be able to constantly swap subjects and activities, to remain agile and curious and to not

get bored and stuck. Then, of course, there is a second reality, which is my private life, which I keep totally autonomous from my professional life. It functions like a sanctuary. When I get burned out, Dinosaur Jr and Neu usually work as a reliable treatment. I would also describe Alexander Kluge and the theater actor Martin Wuttke as great sources of oxygen.

HUO — That leads us right to geography. Rather than belonging to a specific geography, you seem to be between geographies. Your office [nOffice] moved from London to Berlin. I wonder if you can talk a bit about these two cities.

MM — Of course. We—my two partners Magnus Nilsson and Ralf Pflugfelder and myself—are all very fond of London. I personally had an amazing time in London, living there for seven years, first studying and then teaching at the AA. But there is always a point when things need to move on. I found it quite difficult to believe that I was going to stay in London forever. Also, at some point, we had to decide if staying in London was sustainable for nOffice. This decision to move was made before the financial crisis hit, when London was still a very expensive place—and we thought it made sense for us to go somewhere, where our monthly overheads are lower, where we could therefore experiment in a different way, beyond the economic pressure of London. Within this framework, Berlin

works really well—especially as a base. Usually, I am only in Berlin two to three days per week anyway.

HUO — I wonder if you can tell me a bit about the range of projects nOffice is working on. You just inaugurated a space in New York for Performa, a hub that is both a performance space and, related to Cedric Price, a magnet.

MM — Yes, Performa Hub, commissioned by RoseLee Goldberg, was a great opportunity and challenge. Performa Biennial approached us in the Summer of 2008, because they were interested in our involvement. However, at this point, there was no budget in place and there was also no dedicated site. So for a long time we were working in a kind of vacuum. We were interested in the possibility of spatially archiving the content that Performa produces, while at the same time building a physical hub that can act as a focal point of their activities. Eventually, Performa was offered a space [the ground floor of the new Cooper Union building] and we were assigned a very limited budget. The challenge then was to deal with a 250 sqm space, with a budget of 14,000 U.S. dollars, and a production time of seven days, as they only told us about the space two weeks before the opening night of the Biennial. So we decided to use the cheapest material possible to produce a large-scale, homogeneous interior space. The structure is essentially

a massive wall that has several pockets in which certain fixed programs are located, or others can emerge spontaneously. It is a programmatic bastard typology. There is also a small amphitheater, which is used as the backdrop for the entire undefined space that becomes a massive stage every night during the Biennial's events.

HUO — What else is in the making?

MM — Right now, we're working on something similar in Berlin, a project called Archive Kabinett, a space in Kreuzberg, which is a bastard typology between a lecture space, a gallery, and an archive, commissioned by Chiara Figone who runs *Archive Journal*. We are also working on a library and mediateque in Brazil, which is part of a larger project, a coastal project in the Northeast, which will generate a cultural hub that is strongly interlinked with existing local communities. What's interesting about the overall project is that—instead of commissioning one architect to come up with a meta-vision—the client invited a cross-section of spatial practitioners from diverse backgrounds and with differing agendas to contribute to the project. So there are, on the one hand, people like Oscar Niemeyer involved, but then also much younger and more critical architects. For this project, I am also working on a more long-term research project, together with Tina DiCarlo. The project, at some point, was linked to a research institute we set up at the Berlage

Institute in Rotterdam, where we worked as visiting professors with ten students, who joined us on several field trips to Brazil. Right now, nOffice is also working on a residency for an art collector in Berlin as well as a gallery.

HUO — One thing I ask in all my interviews is the question of unrealized projects, those that were too big or too small to be realized.

MM — This question brings the two of us together. The most interesting unrealized project is one that nOffice has been working on with you for the last three years. It is based on the idea of making your private archive and library publicly accessible. At some point in 2008, the project became very specific as we even had a site in the Engadin [Switzerland] and funding in place. But unfortunately, the responsible canton decided against one of the buildings, as part of one of the sites, which was located in the Swiss National Park. We are now searching for alternatives. This project in particular—as an archive, but also a library that can become a public space in which other activities and programs such as a Summer Academy, exhibitions, and artist residencies can emerge—is something that we are very interested in and that we all have the will power to realize in the long-term. As a first step toward the realization of this project, we are currently working on an archival investigation of the Cedric Price section of your archive. This

is done in collaboration with Armin Linke at the HfG in Karlsruhe, where—within the remit of my professorship there—we are working with six students on digitizing all video material. More generally speaking, the notion of structuring content spatially has also interestingly become a kind of modus operandi of our practice, as we have developed an obsession for archives and libraries and many of our projects are now dealing with this typology and subject matter in one way or another.

HUO — You are always working on books, from your anthology of twenty-first-century participation to your polyphonic portrait of Europe. What is cooking in your book machine?

MM — There's a couple of book projects currently in production. One is a long-term project together with Joseph Grima that is happening under the umbrella of a Harvard fellowship. It is dealing with current spatial perceptions of the Middle East. We're looking at the Middle East, and in particular Kuwait, as a self-contained island of critical practice, and rethinking formats for conferences that are about content production rather than simply the distribution of knowledge.

HUO — I'm interested in how you see your own generation of architects. Who are the people you connect with? Are you part of a movement?

MM — The people I tend to admire greatly are people from other areas of knowledge. In architecture, it is a problematic question, as this movement that you are always referring to does not really exist in my generation. The only interest I can detect with many contemporaries is the obsession with parametric form generation and scripting; but I honestly think that this is a dead end. Also, most of the practitioners that are going down this route have totally isolated themselves from the world around them. Part of the problem, to address your question, could also be that "my generation" is simply too young to build. I am thirty-two. Many architects only start building in there forties. I am not saying this as an excuse, but there are very few people my age that have built interesting projects. The architects I tend to work with share an interest in investigation as a driver for both content and the production of space. For example, I regularly work with Joseph Grima. I also admire the work of Celine Condorelli, Jesko Fezer, and Eyal Weizman, although they don't really fit into this category of "my generation," as they are older. I am very fond of their methodologies and the fact that they don't make huge formal claims. For me, what is interesting about their work is that it is simply inspiring, regardless of whether it is always problematizing built space or not. This is very different to, for example, the way in which other younger practitioners such as Bjarke Ingels or Julien DeSmedt are position-

ing themselves. They are trying to mimic the repertoire and human-resource framework that OMA has built up over two decades, but are trying to capitalize on it within two or three years. Rather, what we are interested in is building up a small repertoire through the content that we engage with anyway, through different modes of cultural production. This means that in ten years from now, for example, we may not have built twenty projects in ten different countries all based on massive budgets, but instead developed an agenda toward a specific spatial practice, be it archives, libraries, or institutional space. If I can say one thing about architecture today, it's that certain role models are changing. What's frustrating about architecture is that it is a practice of continuous delay and that the issues being discussed are usually ten years behind those that were discussed, for example, in the art world. This is something that has changed partially within my generation, because what used to be called the profession is no longer understood as something that is totally segregated. Instead, it's something that is much more flexible, agile, and has porous borders. Many of us are not actually producing economy in architecture, but we are working as and consider ourselves architects.

HUO — You mentioned earlier your work as a teacher. What is your advice to an architecture student in 2009?

MM — Consider your role! Right now, there are more unemployed architects than ever before. Students now have to ask themselves whether a) architecture or urbanism is really what they want to focus on as a means of professional backdrop, and b) who are their role models within this changing profession? Please don't misunderstand these role models as heroes—it is simply meant as a guiding principle of a "kind" of practice. Architecture with a big "A" almost does not exist anymore. There is no more money, and most large projects have been eaten up by multinational developers. I think if we remain within the role models of the twentieth century, which is essentially architecture with a big "A," then architecture is and architects are bound to fail. In the last twenty years, there's been a totally new wave of developers and other people in the building industry, who have taken over the grounds that were previously covered and inhabited by architects. So it is now the most pressing challenge for architects to carve out new spaces in which their alternative practice can emerge. Someone like Rem Koolhaas has done amazing things in terms of practice with OMA, but once Rem is gone, his paradigm and scale will no longer exist. Also, the OMA, Zaha Hadid, or Frank Gehry-type of offices are not something that interests me structurally, as it pre-supposes a massive administrative structure, which can often become a disabling force that makes you inflexible. For students, I would

say, it is more important than ever to ask questions regarding the way we tend to practice and use this crisis, which is both an economic as well as a content-production crisis, as an opportunity to develop new models of practice.

# Epilogue

Carson Chan

The little book in front of you attempts to outline a hypothesis: Sometimes, we must remain skeptical of what we read at all cost. This sentiment stayed with me after going through a preliminary draft of Markus Miessen's *The Nightmare of Participation*. For the text did not elicit Miessen's intended delivery—that of a whole-cloth revamp of architectural praxis into agonistic systems—but instead delivered a stronger, more poignant, epiphenomenal sense of active distrust in establishments, paired with a bullish confidence in the self. Miessen employs a particular way of arguing that is more insistent than rhetorical. Claims are laid, positions are held, though external means of theoretical validation in the form of quotes and citations are too often presented as self-affirming platitudes rather than as an index of intellectual becoming. In chapter 2, Miessen needlessly provides a citation of Nicolas Bourriaud's 1998 book, *Relational Aesthetics*, for the words "relational aesthetics," yet in chapter 3, no date or source was given for a statistic from a survey of relative xenophobia in European countries. At key moments, footnotes lead us to other chapters in the book, or texts by Miessen published elsewhere. As alternate forms of spatial practices, Miessen refers the reader to his own past projects (Winter School Middle East, European Kunsthalle,

East Coast Europe). Oddly absent from the book is any mention of the potential for the largest agonistic forum in the world, the Internet.

So how to interpret Miessen's *Nightmare*? Where do we make the first cut? Nothing gets us reading, and reading with more fervor, than ideas that raise eyebrows. As the third in a series of titles dealing with participation, it is perhaps only this one that actively engages us, apophatically, by instilling a sense of doubt. The skepticism for existing institutions and hierarchies that Miessen wears on his sleeve rubs off on the reader as she becomes wary of the author's methods. Indeed, he preemptively states in the introduction that "the material, research, and knowledge collated in this publication is not the result of endless weeks in libraries and archives." The proclaimed non-academic approach to writing a book—which was also submitted as a Ph.D. dissertation—will surely challenge scholars as to the discursive value of the text. In fact, several of Miessen's proposals seem designed expressly to provoke: In chapter 8, "Learning from the Market," we're told that the management consultant, or external interlocutor, is to be seen as a viable role model for the architect or designer; like consultants, architects are "oppositional animals" whose outsider status allows them to plant seeds of change within preexisting systems. While framing each project as a set of conditions to be challenged rather than fixed givens will inevitably redirect the dynamics of the design profession—an industry that has transformed rather sorrowfully into a service organ of the financial elite—the imitation the

methods of the financial market's players, of those who have worked to make the architect's work into a commodity, seems deluded. I would contend that the "desolate situation of the profession" and the "love of the idea of never-ending economic opportunities to build," which is harbored by many architects, is born from the very logic of opportunistic intervention that Miessen suggests as a viable path to disciplinary renewal. In any case, both McKinsey and Königswieser already hire architecture students straight out of school.

Unresolved ideas like the one above are amplified particularly because Miessen's critique of consensus is largely adopted from Chantal Mouffe's construction of agonistic relations—along with all its problems. Consensus breeds stasis, yes, but to the extent that consensus is ever met. But when is consensus ever achieved? The agonistic model was devised primarily to offer an alternate framework to the dominant one in democratic political theory. It is a critique of the deliberative model of democracy proposed by philosophers like Jürgen Habermas and John Rawls, which, by upholding modern democracy as a tool for rational consensus, ignores the plurality of contemporary politics—which, Mouffe argues, can find no reconciliation. For my taste, the difference between agonistic pluralism and deliberative democracy is one of emphasis, of dialect. They are both critiques of the so-called aggregate model of democracy, which addresses the need for parties to represent collective desires; they both celebrate the individual—the deliberative model through morals,

and the agonistic one through rights; and they both insist on the plurality of values. But before stating the obvious difference between the deliberative and the agonistic models—namely the value of consensus—Mouffe has stated several times that her first objection to Rawls's and Habermas's attempts is their neglect of the central role that emotions and passions play in the decision-making process.[1] By coming to terms with the role of power, as constituted through passions rather than rationality, Mouffe posits agonism as a conflict between adversaries, not enemies. She also claims that agonistic confrontation is not so much a matter to be implemented, but is already one of democracy's preexisting conditions. As opposed to deliberative democracy, which aims to reach an agreement—if not consensus—agonism advocates the continued expression of adversarial passions so as to recognize modern democracy's plurality of values.

Mouffe has addressed the paradox of modern liberal democracy, namely its limits to popular sovereignty in the name of liberty;[2] but she has less directly addressed the apparent paradox in agonistic democracy: Nurturing an environment for dissensual interaction requires more than a collective agreement to disagree—it requires nothing less than consensus. To wit, agonism's claim that consensus systematizes stasis applies equally to itself. Agonism compels all its participating adversaries to recognize

1.   See Chantal Mouffe, "Deliberative Democracy or Agonistic Pluralism," *Political Science Series* 72 (Vienna: Institute for Advanced Studies, 2000).
2.   Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox* (London: Verso, 2005), 4.

the productivity of irreconcilable confrontation over consensus. The institutions or players that sponsor agonistic relations must be univocally in support for it to be actualized. Unfortunately, rejecting or disagreeing with the fundaments of agonism is not recuperated by its definition of contesting pluralities. With this perspective, it is unclear how the various hegemonic systems constantly at play in society can be "disarticulated and transformed as a result of agonistic struggle,"[3] specially when agonistic democracy is itself one of the hegemonic systems. Mouffe has acknowledged that "the terrain in which hegemonic interventions take place," the social grounding on which power is perceived, "is always the outcome of previous hegemonic practices."[4]

If Miessen's point is to celebrate non-consensual forms of generating knowledge, the contributing voices in the book seem to suggest the opposite. Far from fostering a venue for plural agendas to play out their differences, *Nightmare* includes contributions from Hans Ulrich Obrist (Miessen's friend and sounding board), Eyal Weizman (Miessen's thesis advisor), Chantal Mouffe (Miessen's inspiration) and Jeremy Beaudry and Bassam El Baroni (two curators of Manifesta 8 who hired Miessen and his colleagues to design one of the exhibition's venues). Buttressed by a wealth of support—particularly in the interview with Mouffe, where the interviewer

3.   Mouffe, "Art and Democracy: Art as an Agonistic Intervention in Public Space," in *Open: Art as a Public*, no. 14 (Rotterdam: NAi Publishers, 2008), 9.

4.   Ibid., 9–10.

and interviewee appear, ironically, in mutual agreement—the book proves to be more of an exercise in consensus-making than a treatise on the generative powers of disagreement. Consternating to critics of this double standard—which is also the true beauty of Miessen's argument—is that any dissenting voice can be neutralized as validation for agonistic politics at work. One can venture to say that suggesting the irrelevance of concord is tantamount to eradicating the perspective needed for critique. In other words, if the status quo were already oppositional, it would categorically be impossible to be oppositional *otherwise*. That I criticize, confront, and oppose in fact endorses and actualizes the book as a place of agonistic relations.

The crux of the book comes at the end of Miessen's interview with Mouffe. When Miessen evoked the crossbencher of the British House of Lords as a model for independent, non-partisan action, Mouffe observes that the author is, in fact, most interested in theorizing his own position. That Miessen sees crossbenchers—the House members who sit squarely between the Left and the Right, both physically and politically, in the parliament—as analogous agents to himself reveals the underlying dependency, regardless of one's self-perceived independence, on established systems. As it was rightly noted in the interview, the crossbencher's freedom as such is manifest only within the consensually established confines of the British legislature. For Miessen, the role of the individual agent, glorified in the text as a self-propelled, self-motivated juggernaut—armed

with "serious interest," "healthy curiosity," and an "intuitive but deep understanding"—who is readily assailable on any project from healthcare infrastructure to education to architecture and design, has worked well for him as a professional modus operandi. But how exactly does this translate for the rest of us "spatial practitioners"? Could Miessen's method work for everyone else? Can a society of individuals be imbued with collective values? Furthermore, practicing architects will share Robert Miklitsch's critique of Mouffe's post-Marxism, which, in theorizing the political, evacuates the materiality of the institutions of culture—materials and their contingent economies are of primary interest to architects who intend to build, rather than discuss, architecture. Alas, most architecture students still enroll into architecture school with the intention to design buildings when they graduate. Even if we were to take at face value the recommendations supplied by agonistic democracy and outlined in *Nightmare of Participation*, it goes without saying that they're only operable in the parts of the world where democracy is seen as a legitimate polity—an area restricted to the Western world.

Skepticism is the dominant mode in Miessen's book. From the opening sentence of his introduction, which asks us to cast doubt on democracy, to his gloomy appraisal of the current state of affairs within professional architecture, to his call for self-initiated, forced intervention into existing social institutions, Miessen's persistent distrust of establishments sponsors the reader's own distrust of Miessen's writing. As

previously mentioned, the non-academic approach of his argument presents challenges to the thoughtful reader. How are claims verified? What does Miessen mean by "critical"? Freely citing both Nazi apologist Carl Schmitt and Jewish literary critic and Holocaust survivor Marcel Reich-Ranicki, Miessen assembles a complexly befuddling worldview that, outstripping his thesis in distinctiveness, ultimately stands as the key identity, the protagonist of the book.

The air of doubt thickly circulates between the author and the reader, but this seems, surreptitiously so, exactly how Miessen wants it. Like a cartoon thought bubble that reveals a parallel stream of thought, our questions for Miessen shape us into active participants of the text. In short, he makes us into his "individual outsider." In chapter 3, Miessen evokes the Stoics, and by proxy, the image of the Sage, but the parallel thoughts of doubt—the third text activated in the reader—reminds me of an earlier figure in ancient philosophy: that of the midwife, introduced in Plato's recounting of a dialogue between Socrates and Theaetetus. In it, Socrates approaches the young orphan Theaetetus and asks him for a simple definition of knowledge. Confused by his question, Socrates explains to the boy that just as women in labor employ midwives to help birth babies, he could help with the birthing of ideas. Pace Miessen, the Socratic midwife is one who is intellectually barren, but nonetheless able to produce knowledge through bringing it forth in others. Like Miessen's uninvited outsider, the non-expert interlocutor armed only with "serious interest" and

a "healthy curiosity," Socrates produced knowledge through actively locating venues for dialogue and intervention. Thus, our pangs of doubts are simply intellectual labor pains.

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Zolghadr, Tirdad

BASSAM EL BARONI lives and works in Alexandria, Egypt. He is a curator, art critic, and co-founder and director of Alexandria Contemporary Arts Forum (ACAF), a collectively run, non-profit art space, which has been in operation since 2005. Baroni's recent curatorial projects include "You, Me and the Trajectories of a Post-Everything Era," at PROGR Bern, Switzerland and ACAF 2005–2006; Cleotronica 08, Alexandria's first international media art festival, 2008; "Trapped in Amber: Angst for a Re-enacted Decade," co-curated with Helga-Marie Nordby at UKS, Oslo, Norway, 2009; and A.K.A. Education, which took place in Alexandria in 2009. Baroni is the curator of ACAF's contribution to Manifesta 8, along with associate curator Jeremy Beaudry. Manifesta 8 (Murcia, Spain, 2010) is collaboratively curated by ACAF, together with the Chamber of Public Secrets and tranzit.org. Alongside his curatorial projects, Baroni has most recently turned his attention to developing and performing a series of dramatized lectures, entitled FOXP2, the latest of which is FOXP2 New York, where he delivered his text to the sound of musical beats made by the New York-based beat-boxer Kenny Muhammad.

*acafspace.org*

JEREMY BEAUDRY is an artist, designer, and educator from Philadelphia, U.S., where he is a professor in multimedia at the University of the Arts. Since 2006, he has been the Director of the Department for the Investigation of Meaning in the Think Tank that

has yet to be named, an artist collective that initiates site-specific conversations, performative actions, and educational projects that interrogate contemporary urban issues. Working both individually and collaboratively, he has presented a range of projects in national and international venues, including Hyde Park Art Center in Chicago, Artivistic 2007 in Montreal, and ISEA2009 in Belfast. In 2008, he was artist-in-residence at Alexandria Contemporary Arts Forum in Alexandria, Egypt, which was part of the U.S. Department of State Cultural Envoy program. He is working with Bassam El Baroni on the Alexandria Contemporary Arts Forum curatorial team, one of three collectives curating Manifesta 8, the European Biennial of Contemporary Art.

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CARSON CHAN is an architecture writer and curator. He is the co-director of PROGRAM, a Berlin-based, non-for-profit initiative for art and architecture collaborations. He holds a B.Arch. from Cornell University and a Master in Design Studies in the History and Theory of Architecture from Harvard University. In Berlin, he has worked for Barkow Leibinger Architects, as well as the Neue Nationalgalerie's architecture department, culminating in the 2008 panel discussions with leading artists, architects, and curators to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the Mies van der Rohe building. Chan is a regular writer for serveral cultural publications, including *032c* (Berlin), where he is also a contributing editor. He is an active advisor to several cultural institutions,

including DLD '08 (Munich), Europan Denmark '10, and the Premio Furla VIII (Milan). He is currently working toward a series of extended essays on the curating and display of architectural ideas.

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CHANTAL MOUFFE is a political theorist and Professor of Political Theory at the University of Westminster. She has taught at many universities in Europe, North America, and Latin America, and has held research positions at Harvard, Cornell, the University of California, the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton, and the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique in Paris. Between 1989 and 1995, she was Directrice de Programme at the Collège International de Philosophie in Paris. She is the editor of *Gramsci and Marxist Theory* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979), *Dimensions of Radical Democracy: Pluralism, Citizenship, Community* (Verso, 1992), *Deconstruction and Pragmatism* (Routledge, 1996), and *The Challenge of Carl Schmitt* (Verso, 1999); co-author (with Ernesto Laclau) of *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (Verso, 1985); and author of *The Return of the Political* (Verso, 1993), *The Democratic Paradox* (Verso, 2000), and *On the Political* (Routledge, 2005). Mouffe is currently working on a non-rationalist approach to political theory, formulating an "agonistic" model of democracy, and engaging in research projects on the rise of right-wing populism in Europe, as well as on the place of Europe in a multi-polar world order.

HANS ULRICH OBRIST was born in Zurich in May 1968. He became Co-director of Exhibitions and Programmes and Director of International Projects at the Serpentine Gallery in 2006. Prior to this, he was Curator of the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris since 2000, as well as Curator of museum in progress, Vienna from 1993 to 2000. Obrist has curated and co-curated over two-hundred solo and group exhibitions and biennales internationally since 1991, including: Manifesta 1, 1996; "Laboratorium," 1999; "Cities on the Move," 1997; 1st Berlin Biennale, 1998; "Utopia Station," 2003; 2nd Guangzhou Triennale, 2005; Dakar Biennale, 2004; 1st and 2nd Moscow Biennale, 2005 and 2007; Lyon Biennale, 2007; and Yokohama Triennale, 2008. In 2007, he co-curated "Il Tempo del Postino" with Philippe Parreno for the Manchester International Festival. In the same year, the Van Alen Institute awarded him the New York Prize Senior Fellowship for 2007–2008. The "Marathon" series was conceived by Obrist in Stuttgart in 2005. The first of such events at the Serpentine Gallery, the "Interview Marathon," 2006, involved interviews with leading figures in contemporary culture over the course of twenty-four hours, conducted by Obrist and architect Rem Koolhaas. Recent publications include *A Brief History of Curating*, JRP Ringier; *Gerhard Richter Text*, Walther König and Thames & Hudson; *Ai Wei Wei: Ways Beyond Art*, Ivory Press; *The Conversation Series*, vol. 1–20, Walther König. Obrist is contributing editor of *Abitare*, *Artforum*, *Paradis*, and *032c*. In 2009, he was made an Honorary Fellow of the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA).

EYAL WEIZMAN is an architect and Director of the Centre for Research Architecture at Goldsmiths, University of London. He studied architecture at the Architectural Association in London and completed his Ph.D. at the London Consortium/ Birkbeck College. Since 2007, he is a member of the architectural collective "decolonizing architecture" in Beit Sahour/Palestine. Since 2008, he is a member of B'Tselem board of directors. Weizman has taught, lectured, curated, and organized conferences in many institutions worldwide. His books include *The Lesser Evil* (Nottetempo, 2009), *Hollow Land* (Verso, 2007), *A Civilian Occupation* (Verso, 2003), the series *Territories* (1, 2, and 3), *Yellow Rhythms*, and many articles in journals, magazines, and edited books. Weizman is a regular contributor and an editorial board member for several journals and magazines, including *Humanity*, *Cabinet*, and *Inflexions*. Weizman is the recipient of the James Stirling Memorial Lecture Prize for 2006–2007, and was chosen to deliver the Edward Said Memorial Lecture at Warwick 2010.

*decolonizing.ps*
*btselem.org*

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MARKUS MIESSEN (*1978) is an architect, consultant, educator, and writer. In 2002, he set up Studio Miessen, a collaborative agency for spatial practice and cultural inquiry, and in 2007, he co-founded the Berlin-based architectural practice nOffice. In various collaborations, Miessen has published: *Institution Building: Artists, Curators, Architects in the Struggle for Institutional Space* (Sternberg Press, 2009), *When Economies Become Form* (Berlage Institute, 2009), *East Coast Europe* (Sternberg Press, 2008), *The Violence of Participation* (Sternberg Press, 2007), *With/Without: Spatial Products, Practices, and Politics in the Middle East* (Bidoun,

2007), *Did Someone Say Participate? An Atlas of Spatial Practice* (MIT Press, 2006), and *Spaces of Uncertainty* (Müller+Busmann, 2002). In 2008, *The Independent* listed *Did Someone Say Participate?* as one of the ten best architecture books of all time. Miessen frequently contributes to international magazines and journals, such as *Artforum*, *Log*, *032c*, *Bidoun*, *Volume*, and *Kaleidoscope*. His work has been published and exhibited widely, including at the Lyon, Venice, Performa (NY), Manifesta (Murcia), and Shenzhen Biennials. He has taught and lectured at the Architectural Association, London (2004–08), the Berlage Institute, Rotterdam (2009–10), Columbia University, and MIT. He has consulted the Slovenian Government during Slovenia's presidency of the EU council, the European Kunsthalle, the Serpentine Gallery, the Dutch organization SKOR, and the Swiss think tank *W.I.R.E.* In 2008, he founded the Winter School Middle East (Dubai, Kuwait, Iran). Miessen works as a Harvard Fellow on a research project in Kuwait, is a professor for architecture and curatorial practice at the Hochschule für Gestaltung (Karlsruhe), a Ph.D. candidate at the Centre for Research Architecture (Goldsmiths, London), and an editor of *Archive Journal* (Berlin/Turin).

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"Markus Miessen has looked at current modes of form creation, and found them frozen in a near Soviet-style political ice age of pseudo democracy and pseudo participation. He sees the early twenty-first-century design process as one in which cynical globalized Muppets, drained of all joy, enact outdated hollow rituals grounded in unquestioned capitalism, zombie-style political correctness, and poll-driven mock democracy.

One might quickly sense a potential whiff of Ayn Rand or crypto-fascism here, but as a means of escape, and with the goal of creating critical and productive change, Miessen instead advocates vigorous cross-disciplinary intrusions—a universe of butting in where one isn't necessarily invited—to willfully generate alien and unexpected new spaces and ideas. He advocates individuals to become crossbench practitioners, 'uninvited outsiders' who actively seek out conflict, despising the stillborn texture of today's culture, a world whose default design mode is one of reflexive consensus.

What could have been a career-trashing minefield of a thesis is instead a strikingly intelligent, profoundly well-considered Way Forward that feels both futuristic and correct. It's not a simple read, but this book has earned every nuance of its complexity."

—Douglas Coupland

*With contributions by and conversation with*
CHANTAL MOUFFE, EYAL WEIZMAN, HANS ULRICH OBRIST,
BASSAM EL BARONI, JEREMY BEAUDRY, *and* CARSON CHAN.
*Design:* Z.A.K.

*Sternberg Press*