

THE OCCUPIED SYNTAGMA SQUARE

This issue takes a focused look at questions of organizing from below for political, artistic, social and economic change.

The contributions in this issue come from those who directly or indirectly partook in a two-day summit in Athens between 21 and 22 October, 2017, titled, **HOW Assemblies Matter?**

For more information on **HOW Assemblies Matter?** See: www.assembliesummit.tumblr.com

My interest in the form of the assembly starts with my experiences in the Greek occupation of the parliament square in Athens, Syntagma, in May 2011, which led to long-term artistic research on the potential of assembling practices as political forms. Against the background of a deepening crisis of political representation due to the gradual shifting of power from legislative organs to democratically non-legitimated economic and financialized agents, and given the decline of the strategies of the left, the occupied Syntagma Square became, for me, an occasion to reflect on the potentialities of what could be called post-representative politics. These are practices that cannot be addressed by the given apparatuses of political representation, since they materialize in practice, have effects on the level of experiences in the everyday, and are carried out by informal agents that are difficult

to identify and thus to represent. The following essay is a collage of three moments of the Syntagma occupation narrated through the artworks that were produced during my artistic research. It touches on the potential of social transformation in non-representative media and democratic practices, its effects on subjectivities, and the question of the form of democracy in today's neoliberal conditions.

Moment 1: Noise of the Plebs

WE WILL NEVER PAY – WE WILL NEVER PAY – – TAKE THE BAILOUT PROGRAM UP YOUR ASS, AND TAKE IT WHOLE, TAKE IT WHOLE – – THE BROTHEL, THE PARLIAMENT SHALL BURN – – I FUCK THE IMW, I FUCK THE IMF – – I FUCK ALSO THE EURO – – YOU ARE TRAITORS, SOON WE WILL HANG YOU – – TAKE OUR BALLS WE DON'T HAVE EUROS – – POLI-

TICIANS WE ARE HUNGRY, COME DOWN AND WE WILL EAT YOU UP – – IF I DON'T BURN MYSELF, IF YOU DON'T BURN YOURSELF, HOW SHALL THE PARLIAMENT, THE BROTHEL, BURN?

I recorded this collection of threatening and insulting slogans in June 2011 on the occupied square in front of the Greek parliament and used them for a performance titled 'Noise of the Plebs'. I was shocked but also fascinated by the rhetorics of these outcries. These affectuous roarings sounded not like political declarations or demands, but as expressions of anger, indignation, suffering or sarcastic humours. They reminded me of Menenius Agrippa's fable about the retreat of the plebs on the Aventine, as narrated by Jacques Rancière in his book *Disagreement*. The patricians, Rancière says, could not call the plebs into order, because they could not communi-

cate with them, since the plebs' language sounded to their masters as mere unarticulated noise. There would be no code for a discussion between the plebs and the patricians, because the plebs 'would not talk, they are creatures without names, creatures without logos'.^[I] Rancière describes plebs as anonymous, uncountable and without language.

It seemed to me that I could read the crowd in front of parliament with this line of thought: as a contradictory amalgam of singularities, which chose forms of expression that differed from the left's political alphabet. Thus their screaming was a sort of disidentificatory gesture, making the crowd difficult to name and identify with given political or social identities, such as workers, students, women, unemployed, leftist, feminists and so on. Rather, they would call themselves 'nobodies'—entities with-

out identities. Consequently, this social corpus, beyond given identities, was not only difficult to identify and thus represent, but also refused to be represented—be it by the parliament, protest representatives or traditional media.

By being unrepresentable, the crowd produced the potential of radical inclusivity: the indignant could not speak on behalf of the population, but they could stand in for nobody and at the same time for 'everyone and anyone'.^[II] Thus, the occupation was perceived as a popular unrest, widespread and deeply rooted in all parts of Greek society, speaking on behalf of those affected by the crisis, whomever this might be. With all its contradictions and not always progressive moments (see the sexism in the slogans above, for example), the square occupation shifted our percep-

AS A POINT OF DEPARTURE FOR POST REPRESENTATIVE POLITICS

tion of how political upheavals form themselves today, and put questions of representation and self-constitution on the table on behalf of a massive democratic uprising of the many as *everyone* and *anyone*.

Moment 2: Assembling images—YouTube videos of the square

The negation of representation was expressed also on the level of media: an image ban was established against mainstream state and private media, banning them from filming or photographing on the square. As a result, the primary sources of images from within the square were amateur videos uploaded on YouTube. These were images recorded with mobile phones or small cameras: pixelated, shaky, expressing excitement in hand-held mode. I collected these videos and presented them as a simultaneous

montage of multiperspectives on a video screen, in order to reflect on their way of dealing with questions of representation.

The videos show random images. Sometimes they manage to focus on actions, sometimes they are carried away and show bits of streets or sky as the hand holding the camera falls or runs. They are unedited continuous pieces with no beginnings and no endings, mostly boring to watch, and do not depict anything in particular, giving no explanation for their political context. In my eyes these videos were like document-rags, which cannot claim to represent the events on the occupied square, since they don't unfold some kind of narration of what happened; you only understand them if you have someone to explain (or represent) the context to you. Thus, I would claim, these images are not so much vehicles of representation but rather, as

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By being unrepresentable, the crowd produced the potential of radical inclusivity.

process where media activists try to create counter-narrations and thus represent an event—but are more tools of networking, connectivity and self-organization of a dispersed online crowd.[III]

It is common ground to acknowledge that social media has become a central agent for organization and personalized mobilization in protest movements. The experience of today's political subjects is that to operate one's Facebook-identity one does not need intermediate representatives—there is only the personalized 'me' and 'my friends', whom 'I' can mobilize directly. This media-practice correlates to the form of subjectification in post-Fordism and translates itself into a political attitude, and vice versa. The post-Fordist subject, who lives and works in precarious structures, is left to itself to manage its life through self-governance. The call but also the habit of self-governance is

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and let my public re-enact the assembly: they would need to draw lots, like in the original livestream, and those that were called by the moderator would read out the speaker's contributions, which I had translated and printed out. While reading the short speeches out, one becomes the character of the assembly and embodies those feelings: the expressions of affects and emotions, the sharing of experiences in the crisis, questions of organizing in the everyday on the square, as well as positions on debt or on representative and direct democracy alternated during the assembly—everyone expressed themselves as they wanted. Further down you see a screenshot of the livestream: the camera is positioned exactly behind the speakers addressing the assembly; the participants form themselves amphitheatrically around the citizen-mic. There could be up to 5000 people each evening.

Moment 3: Re-enactment of an assembly and commoning in the every day

The image ban was also established for the General Assembly. The only permitted camera was the one installed for the livestream. It is by chance that I found a short-recorded extract of one livestreamed assembly on YouTube that I used for a participatory re-enactment in theatre and exhibition spaces. I made a protocol of the speakers' contributions

The circle of assembled bodies we see forming in front of the speaker stands in a Western tradition, poised for the choreographic picture that we relate to the idea of antique democracy.

the architectures of parliaments or ancient theatres. Thus the indignant performatively claim the image of the citizen in the *demos*, making decisions directly by raising their hands and enacting an archaic ritual of direct democratic practice carried out by those who are present. In this way, their democratic practices could be read as an applied critique on the political form of representation. Democracy on the square was carried out as a practice in situ and thus without representation, without the act of delegation to third persons and thus as a non-representative democratic practice. If you want, the assembly in Syntagma Square was a miniature implementation of Castoriades' or Rousseau's writings on the form of democracy as being always a direct, presentist democracy. Today, we identify representation with democracy, although the two terms have different genealogic origins: from Aristotle to Rousseau, democracy always meant the unmediated, direct democratic participation of those who are bodily present.

Thus democracy is not reduced to juridical procedures but expanded into the social and economic sphere of the square: being part of this democracy acquired a practice of maintaining this bodily presence through acts of commoning and reproduction in the everyday. In order to hold a permanent occupation, the indignant organized themselves for the cooking and distribution of food, provided infrastructure for communication, for cleaning, medical assistance and so on. According to the studies of Tsianos, Papadopoulos, and Stephenson (2008), these practices could be read as post-representative politics: politics that do not address representation and cannot be integrated by its apparatuses, since they invent new forms of life or new ecologies of existence. Post-representative politics materialize in the everyday, promote new social relations between people and enable the making of experiences that capacitate the subjects to transform themselves. And it is these activities that left traces in Greek society for the years following the square occupation.

Instead of a conclusion: Traces of the Syntagma Square occupation

The occupation devolved in the same summer but its experience inscribed itself into the every day



Popular Assembly at Syntagma Square. Photo courtesy of Margarita Tsomou

Walter Benjamin would say, expressions of their mode of production. They don't convey their political background but instead reveal the anxiety, panic, anger or fear of those present in front, around and behind the camera: a sensual impression of endangered bodies. I read them as post-representative images—as expressions of affects and bodily conditions during their production process. In their uncommented, unedited state, they were uploaded online, where they were

shared, forwarded, posted and reposted in order to mobilize the crowds to the square. Following Hito Steyerl's arguments on the 'poor-image', these images don't only convey their mode of production but also give a testimony of their distribution through the internet: they are parts of a chain of circulation and participation in file-sharing practices. Hence, these post-representive videos, one could argue, are not so much vehicles for the creation of 'counterpublics'—meaning a

QUEER AND FEMINIST REVOLUTION! CONFLICTS AND COLLECTIVE LEARNINGS IN THE SPANISH INDIGNADOS MOVEMENT

As is well known, the Indignados movement originated with the occupation of many city squares in Spain on 15 May 2011. The massive takeover of public space lasted a few weeks but part of the movement (a constellation of assemblies, together with people involved in actions and initiatives in the different districts and on the streets) continues today, five years on.

Activists and/or people who research social movements (in my case, both) know that these rarely come out of nowhere. The beginning of the 15-M/Indignados appeared in some media as a popular uprising that emerged spontaneously. We know that this was not the case, the 15-M was neither completely 'new' nor spontaneous: it had to do with earlier movements that made it possible, such as the anti-global-

ization movement and the 'Arab Spring'. The 15-M/Indignados movement inspired, in turn, other occupations, such as the one in Syntagma Square in Athens, and Occupy Wall Street in New York. In addition to these processes of protests spreading transnationally, the 15-M has a history that is connected to that of previous feminist and queer groups. This political genealogy is not 15-M's only one, but one of the many

that we can trace, although this one is usually forgotten or not taken sufficiently into consideration.

From the beginning, 15-M made an important critique of a democratic system that inhibits or does not permit citizen participation to a political class *'que no, que no nos representan'* ('that does not represent us'), and showed its refusal to having leaders and

debt crisis. They should be considered as models for inventing post-representative democratic forms that could introduce democracy as practice.

END NOTES:

[I] Jacques Rancière, *Das Unvernehmen* (Suhrkamp: Frankfurt a. Main, 2002), p. 36

[II] Their disidentificatory practices enabled a 'becoming everyone' (Tsianos/Papadopoulos/Stephenson 2012: 5) on the square, like becoming Rancière's demos, as a "democratic practice of inscription of the part of those who have no part - which does not mean the 'excluded' but anybody whoever"(...) (Rancière 2002: 33ff.)

[III] ...Hence one could argue, that the negation of media representation did not produce accurate alternative representations, but images, that became the fuel behind the networking and the creation of social relations through the connective, self-organizing and self-mobilizing practices of everyone and anyone.

agent. But as we know, this lasted only for a short time—the Greek government is trapped in the logics of debt and memoranda, with no space for democratic manoeuvre and unable to represent the will of the population, as it was expressed in the referendum of 5 July 2015.

In the context of debt-informed financialized capitalism, representative statist politics seem to have reached a limit. What appears to have persisted is the experiences of post-representative politics: the self-organization in social economies, which has created incubators for democratic experiments. The social practices of self-organization in the everyday should be taken seriously as political formations that can lead to a way out of the dead ends of liberal democracy in the Greek

of Greece's society. Today's clear trace of Syntagma Square is a boom of self-organization in non-monetary exchange networks and social economies of solidarity. The experiences of the self-organized life in the tent city led to an emergence of a new culture of creating a commons from below. At the same time, the occupation contributed to a shift of political attitudes that had some impact in the arena of political representation itself: the occupied squares played an important role in the rise of the left party, Syriza. The success of Syriza brought representational politics back to the agenda, and parliament seemed to regain its function as a political



Sites of urban conflict that occurred on the 6th of December 2008 in Athens, following the murder of the teenager Alexandros Grigoropoulos by a police officer. Image source: Athens, unfortified city: A spatial analysis of the uprising of December 2008, online brochure.

spokespersons in the movement. Assemblies are open to everyone (that is, in fact, one of the major differences with the anti-globalization movement), and decisions are made by consensus or can be blocked by anyone sitting in the assembly at that moment. From the outset, the movement was very heterogeneous in terms of social class, age, sex and gender identities, ethnicity, legal status, and so on, and in terms of ideologies, activist experiences, and political socialization. In addition to activists who came from previous movements, people without prior political experience in social movements nor political parties joined the 15-M, too. This issue is important to understand how sexist and homophobic attitudes in the assemblies and camps in general co-habited with very rich and transformative discourses. The Indignados movement showed from the beginning an amazing diversity of individuals working together in coalitions between struggles and groups such as feminists, ecologists, okupas (squatters), lesbians, gays and trans*, republicans, students, sex workers and many more.

‘Revolution will be (trans)feminist or it won’t be!’

As expected, in the 15-M camps there were problems related to the fact that very different people, most of whom did not know each other, were occupying a public space. In this space, which was at the same time being collectively (re)created, people

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shared their beliefs about how to organize themselves, the goals or priorities for the movement, the strategies to follow, personal issues, and more. Not only this, but also, as it happened in other Occupy movements such as that in Tahrir Square in Cairo and Wall Street, the camps were not free from tensions and conflicts, nor violent situations. In fact, many Egyptian women who took part in Tahrir even reported that they had been victims of group sexual assaults. In Madrid, feminist activists reported violent and unpleasant situations, too, which led them to decide to no longer spend the night in the feminist tent set up in the square; this space continued to be used for meetings, activities, et cetera, but not for sleeping.

I am interested in analysing the conflicts and resistances that feminist and queer activists had to face while trying to get a space of their own in the Sol camp (*Acampada Sol*), and in the 15-M/ Indignados movement in general. These activists were present from the beginning of the occupation of the square and made themselves visible with their banners, slogans and rainbow flags, in

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what we could call the beginning of the queering of the camp. It was then when the conflict arose with the feminist banner that had been hung on one of the buildings in Puerta del Sol, draped with many other posters displaying 15-M’s demands. The banner said *‘la revolución será feminista o no será’* (‘the revolution will be feminist or it won’t be’). What happened then was that a group of men tugged on the banner until they managed to pull it down, spurred on by others (men). That conflict is one of the most well known, but it was not the only one, not in Sol nor in other square occupations across the country. And there were not only sexist issues, but also homophobic attitudes in the form of slogans alluding to anal sex as the epitome of political and economic oppression, insults, and so on, or those referring to the stigmatization of sex workers through, for example, slogans against politicians.[I]

Following the conflict with the feminist banner in Madrid, as in many other cities, *Feminismos Sol* (Sol Feminisms) and the *Asamblea Transmaricabollo de Sol* (Sol Transfagdyke Assembly) were created. Some activists who took part in both groups thought that the queer assembly should organize under the umbrella or tutelage of the feminist one, but the majority did not agree to this. On the one hand, for political reasons this ‘merger’ in some way

subordinated sexuality issues to those of gender, the latter being considered more important, or that necessarily encompasses the former. On the other hand, this was not operative (agreements reached in the Transfagdyke Assembly had to then go through the 15-M’s General Assembly). This proves how, for feminist activism, occupying their own space was not easy against dominant sexism, whilst queer protest was not guaranteed a space from the beginning either, not only in relation to the 15-M movement but also to feminism itself. A space for sexual and gender dissidents was something that we could not take for granted at all: we had to fight for it. In this sense, and as Pérez Navarro has pointed out, the spatial politics of the camp gradually developed following a matryoska or Russian nesting doll structure.[II]

People who are part of the Transfagdyke Assembly (this term was the translation of queer into Spanish we finally decided to use) do not share an identity (these are more than diverse) but similar political goals. A previous organization, and quite influential for us, has been the *Bloque Rosa* (Pink Bloc) of the anti-globalization movement, created in 2001 in the context of the protests against the IMF in Prague and inspired ‘by queer and feminist movements and, to a certain extent, by the queer and feminist theory’.[III] The Transfagdyke Assembly, like the Pink Bloc, defends non-violent

actions (unlike Black Bloc, less so inclined to this), the need for activism to be inclusive to all, coalition politics with other struggles, and a repertoire of activities that include performances, parodies, music and comedy... which have proved to be very useful tools for social movements.[IV] As Judith Butler said, queer activism breaks with the distinction between the private and the public (following the feminist one) and with the opposition between the theatrical and the political, through public die-ins or kiss-ins.[V] These are strategies that the Transfagdyke Assembly has deployed in many occasions already in public demonstrations and protests.

Lessons in political action

Social movements are forms of collective action by a series of people based on defending common interests, which are *sustained* over time against elites, opponents, and authorities.[VI] Movements are also pedagogical spaces, whether we consider the political work done inside them or towards the outside; that is, aimed at media and society in general. We have seen this double direction in other movements, such as the occupation of Gezi Park, in Istanbul, where lesbian, gay and trans* activists battled against neoliberal policies (symbolized by the plan to build a shopping centre in a park) and, *at the same time*, worked towards the inside of the movement. The Transfagdyke Assembly has been

doing and continues to do a similar thing in Madrid: confronting the homophobic slogans inside the 15-M movement and social protests against austerity politics, while building networks and joining forces with other struggles.

Thanks to this pedagogical work within the 15-M, we can say today that the movement has improved a lot since the days when the camp was set up and people used to laugh nervously whenever they heard the name *Transmaricabollo* (Transfagdyke) in the General Assembly or when one of our critically queer manifestos was read. At the beginning of the camp, the Transfagdyke Assembly was attacked in the most significant virtual spaces of the 15-M for discrediting the movement with its ‘marginal’ and ‘particular’ demands. Right-wing media tried to question the movement using this assembly, saying that it was a disorganized space for promiscuity and sexuality, which the assembly itself ended up defending, of course. The ridicule (and sometimes virulence) of the criticisms of this type of press finally resulted in greater support for the Transfagdyke Assembly from the 15-M in general.

In relation to the educational work carried out by social movements, one of the aspects to which this queer assembly has devoted several activities is to question sexist

and homophobic attitudes reflected in language, for example. Thanks to the work of feminist assemblies such as *Feminismos Sol* from Madrid, *Setas feministas* in Seville and *Feministes Indignades* in Barcelona, among others, the 15-M uses the plural feminine (in assemblies, texts, et cetera) as a way of questioning sexism (and homophobia) in language.

Initially, the Transfagdyke Assembly managed to bring together many people who were atomized (at first the assemblies were very large, with 30 to 40 people, at least), like other 15-M assemblies organized around issues like housing, health, legal issues, education, and other issues. In recent years, the number in our assembly has fallen and we are now currently around 10 to 15 people, which is not insignificant at all if we consider the much lower numbers of the majority of 15-M assemblies. The assembly is still active on many fronts and it seeks to link up its activities with those of other social groups to combat cuts and austerity policies in the current context of the crisis of the neoliberal system. This varied series of issues includes de-pathologization of trans* identities; control and/or modification



Protest Banners of Indignados/ Pink Block-Madrid. Photo Courtesy of Gracia Trujillo

of our bodies and sexualities; reproduction rights; HIV/AIDS; sex education; the fight for citizens’ rights for everyone; sex worker rights; and rejection of homophobic attacks and depoliticization and commercialization of Pride marches.[VII] An important issue here is that the Transfagdyke Assembly protests not only for these demands but also tries to take part in all demonstrations, rallies and activities against cuts to public education, health and social services, the labour reform, the *Ley Mordaza* (Gag Law), and so on. It is quite surprising to see that some people still today look at us quite amazed when they see us with our rainbow flags and queer slogans in a general strike, for example, or in a march to support public education or the Republic, to give a few examples, as if non-heterosexuals were not affected by cuts and austerity policies. As Judith Butler said,

In the case of public assemblies, we see quite clearly the struggle over what will be public space, but also an equally fundamental struggle over how bodies will be supported in the world – a struggle for employment and education, equitable food distribution, liveable shelter, and freedom of movement and expression, to name but a few.[VIII]

The sustained presence of this queer (and feminist) assembly in all the possible political spaces and the criticism, tongue-in-cheek, of sexism and homophobia inside and outside social movements have contributed

Protest Banners of Indignados/Pink Bloc-Madrid. Photo Courtesy of Gracia Trujillo



to the critical break with the hegemonic subject of social protests. As Pérez Navarro, who is also a member of the *Transmaricabollo* Assembly, wrote, if the prototypical subject of the workers' movement was a heterosexual white man and 'new' social movements were characterized by a series of identity divisions, what we see in the 15-M is a complex articulation of identities and bodies on the streets. This has been possible through the intervention of feminist and queer groups in the global protest, from their position of clearly gendered and sexualized (and racialized) subjects, and *at the same time*, committed to combatting different forms of exclusion. The *Transmaricabollo* Assembly has done, in my view, important work in *queering* social protest and the 15-M as a whole (as the Pink Bloc did in the anti-globalization movement), with its performative use of insults and of feminized language ('*somos todas perras flautas*'—'we are all (female) crusties'), of street music and theatre (such as the parody to welcome Frau Merkel or the Pope), comedy (like in the demonstrations in support of the Republic: '*para reinas, ¡nosotras!*'—'if you want queens, here we are!'), sit-ins in the middle of Pride marches, very depoliticized and commercialized in the last years, or kiss-ins (against attacks and during the Pope 'invasion'). Here I also share Pérez Navarro's idea

that this transversal orientation of the discourse and constant activity within the general protest has few or no precedents in the history of queer activism in Spain.[IX]

To sum up, the Indignados movement cannot be understood, at least not entirely, without previous queer feminist activism, together with the current one: from the outset, the Transfagdyke Assembly has been taking part in all struggles possible and deploying its queer tactics to mobilize and disseminate the demands. We are thereby questioning, from a transfeminist position, hermetic identity politics and defending the need to work in coalitions, even if they are temporary. In other words, we claim that our transfeminist and queer demands and struggles in the context of neoliberal austerity policies are not marginal or particular at all, nor secondary or any less important than those related to social class, ethnicity, race, et cetera; rather, they intersect between each other. We cannot therefore consider them separately nor as adhering to any type of hierarchy (as was argued in the seventies and as we

have heard again in the context of the crisis in Southern Europe).[X]

Final thoughts

In this article I have tried to question the idea that social movements arise spontaneously (it is vital, in this respect, to recognize the political genealogies of movements), and that protest spaces are homogeneous in terms of participation (it has been said that the 15-M is a movement of young middle-class university graduates), and exempt from conflict. Even spaces that claim to be utopian, like the camps, are not free from sexist, homophobic or racist violence – on the contrary, they sometimes happen to be a replica of what occurs outside these microcosms: in the city, in the media, and in society in general. The wide diversity of the 15-M movement since the beginning explains why insults and violent attitudes run parallel to

differences; I suspect that some patterns (those related to these internal conflicts, for example) can be found in these occupations of squares.

Analysing the Indignados movement from queer and feminist perspectives (which have generally received little attention, both academic and activist, in writings about the movement so far) could shed light on several issues, such as those related to the why and how of the tensions and conflicts that highlighted a series of resistances related to the feminist and queer change proposed within the camp spaces; those related to the double political work of some assemblies like the *Transmaricabollo* Assembly, fighting (and surviving) the crisis, in defence of education, health and public services, against evictions,

et cetera, and, *at the same time*, doing educational work targeting the inside of the 15-M, in an attempt to implement another language (inclusive), other ways of doing politics, other repertoires of activities, other demands that are not particular or marginal but which affect all of us and/or should concern us all (such as HIV, lack of sex education, bullying at school, to name a few).

One issue that we must continue highlighting is that there is no hierarchy of discriminations and demands but rather different vectors of oppression, which overlap with one another. In this sense, one of the challenges we face is how to recognize and appreciate differences (race, class, sex, gender, and so on) and build political coalitions around them. The AIDS crisis taught us a lot in this respect, about what was done in other contexts (and was lacking in the Spanish one) in terms of solidarity, coalitions and building or strengthening our sexual communities. I think that these can be very useful lessons for today's protest.

Thinking along more general lines, today there are quite a few queer and transfeminist groups in Spain (our assembly is just one

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of them), with intersectional work between struggles, some also at fertile junctions between activism and art (as is the case with the transfeminist group Post-op and functional diversity in the great project 'Yes, we fuck'). In addition, we have stronger links with Latin America in recent years through, but not only, migrants in Europe and vice versa, who are building bridges between struggles and oceans, more necessary than ever, to continue resisting global threats critically and collectively. And returning to the 15-M: as I heard Stavros Stavrides say at the event HOW Assemblies Matter? held in Athens in October 2016, which referred to the occupation of Syntagma square but could be extended to the occupation of Sol, Tahrir, and so many others: 'Failure? The important thing is to consider what remains.'

END NOTES:

- I] The Colectivo Hetaira, a group that defends sex workers' rights, designed in response to this a collection of posters with the slogan '*Las putas insistimos: los políticos no son nuestros hijos*' ('Sex workers, we, insist on that politicians are not our sons').
- II] Pablo Pérez Navarro, 'Queer Politics of Space in the 15-M Movement', in *Lambda Nordica*, nº 2, vol. 19 (2014), pp. 83–114.

Our transfeminist and queer demands and struggles in the context of neoliberal austerity policies are not marginal or particular at all, nor secondary or any less important.

- III] Marco Bísticas-Cocoves, 'Black Bloc, Pink Bloc: Reflections on the Tactics of the Antiglobalization Movement', paper presented at the American Philosophical Association Eastern Division, Washington D.C., 2003.
- IV] One example of many on using comedy with a queer tone is the following: <http://madrid.tomalaplaza.net/2012/02/18/transmaribolleras-al-borde-de-un-ataque-de-nervios/> There is also an English version of this manifesto on our blog: www.asambleatransmaricabol-lodesol.blogspot.com
- V] Judith Butler, 'Acerca del término queer', in *Cuerpos que importan. Sobre los límites materiales y discursivos del 'sexo'*. Buenos Aires, Paidós, [1993] 2002.
- VI] Sidney Tarrow, *Power in movement. Social movements, Collective action and Politics* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1998).
- VII] The first manifesto for the queer assembly can be found here: <http://madrid.tomalaplaza.net/2011/09/12/orgullo/>

- VIII] Judith Butler, *Notes towards a performative theory of assembly* (Harvard University Press: Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2015), p. 72.
- IX] See Pérez Navarro (2014), op. cit.
- X] Gracia Trujillo and Ana Cristina Santos (eds.), 'The first revolution is survival: Queer and Feminist Resistances to the Crisis and Austerity Politics in Southern Europe', special edition of *Lambda Nordica*, nº 2, vol. 19 (2014), pp. 12–24.

SPACE MATTERS

PRACTISING SELF GOVERNMENT

Maybe Walter Benjamin was right when he said that 'More quickly than Moscow itself, one gets to know Berlin through Moscow'.^[I] Let us not forget that Berlin was his home city whereas Moscow was a city he visited as a foreigner. What this short text attempts to develop is a strategy similar to that of Benjamin's, but this time with the explicit aim to explore a different kind of knowledge connected to spatial experience. What if in order to understand the role space played in shaping alternative experiences of democracy and autonomy in the occupied squares of our cities (especially during the Occupy movement period), we focus on the experience and practices of Zapatista politics in faraway Mexican Chiapas? What if through studying the building of autonomy in Chiapas we can better understand insurgent assemblies in Athens, London, New York, Hong Kong, Istanbul, Paris, Tunis, Cairo and Rio?

Space matters. Space does not simply reflect or sustain existing relations between people. Space gives form to these relations. Especially in periods of crisis, new spatial arrangements seem to emerge along new relations and new forms of social organization. Maybe then we need to use different terms to approach the

inherent spatiality of processes of social change. Critical geographers seem to be already aware of this need.

To understand the spatiality of commoning practices in self-managed Zapatista communities, we need to first explore the very basis of Zapatista autonomy: Zapatista territory. In rural Chiapas, one encounters some strange signs indicating areas described as Zapatista territory. However, no explicit boundaries may be observed that are necessary for a territory to be defined.

Thinking in terms of space, we cannot actually locate a strict inside and a strict outside of the Zapatista area. Village communities are scattered in the region of almost 74000 km² and some of them are pro-Zapatista, some are mixed (including non-Zapatistas who, in many cases use the facilities of the autonomous municipalities and often prefer the autonomous system of justice and health instead of the federal one), and some are controlled by the *partidistas* (those who support one of the institutional parties of Mexico). Federal roads and highways cross the area and federal networks of electricity and telephony extend throughout most of the inhabited land. Notably,

too, large military camps are situated near the most important Zapatista communities.

So considered merely as space, Zapatista territory is not easily definable. One can even say that it only exists in a precarious state of hybridity. It is space both included in the Mexican state territory and, at the same time, excluded from it. This socio-political experiment of autonomy in terms of space is puzzling: where is this autonomous area that, as we tend to suppose, should be clearly separated from the state-ruled one? Andrea Mubi Brighenti suggests that we should reconsider the term territory by first agreeing that 'territory is not an object and should not be confused with the space where it takes place'.^[II] 'Territory is not defined by space, rather it defines spaces through patterns of relations. Every type of social tie can be imagined and constructed as territorial'.^[III] For Brighenti, this approach is the necessary starting point for a potential scientific endeavour he calls 'territorology'.

Carlos Walter Porto-Goncalves and Enrique Leff seem to offer a different perspective to a possible rethinking of territory as not merely space. Their point of view, which they situate in the emerg-

ing field of political ecology, was formed through engaged field-work oriented towards the study of localized environmental struggles, especially in Latin America. Porto-Gonçalves and Leff suggest that such struggles are predominantly connected to the 'reinvention of territories'.^[IV] A defining characteristic of such practices, according to them, is 'the claiming of rights to their territory [by indigenous peoples]'.^[V] What they describe as a 'shift from the struggle for land to the claim for

territory' is thus an emerging set of struggles and collective acts that establish new social relations and forms of social organization. ^[VI] Claiming territorial rights is more than claiming their right to live where their ancestors used to live. It is claiming their right to live according to values and habits they share and according to forms of organization they have created in order to reproduce their communities.

True, such territorial struggles

may seem to be merely struggles for a specific community's mode of existence. What connects those struggles with the problematics of commoning (and especially with the prospect of emancipatory commoning), however, is the fact that those communities actually have coexisted and co-evolved with important ecosystems,^[VII] acquiring and developing crucial knowledges focused on an 'alternative social rationality',^[VIII] which also amounts to 'an alternative en-

Territorial struggles are not simply struggles for space. They are struggles for and through the emergence of new territorialities.

vironmental rationality'.^[IX] Territorial struggles of those communities thus represent a kind of confrontation with the State and market imposed capitalist social relations. In this confrontation, territory is both a shaping factor and an issue at stake.

The nation-state constructs its



Athens anti-austerity riots. Image found online

How to SHUT DOWN the CITY



territory as a set of rules, practices and patterns of social relations, which amounts to a form of governing a certain population living in a certain, usually clearly defined, area. As Stuart Elden suggests, commenting upon Foucault's lectures on Security, Territory, Population: States, in the era of security, exert their power through a 'politics of calculation', which is manifested not only in the control of populations but also in the control of territories. Thus, '[t]erritory is more than merely land, but a rendering of the emergent concept of "space" as a political category: owned, distributed, mapped, calculated, bordered and controlled'. [X] Territory construction, however, is a process rather than an originary act of a State. State territory is reconstructed in and through social antagonism, especially when dominant modes of life and production are being challenged. This is how 'a number of projects of territorialization can exist in the same physical location'. [XI]

Porto-Gonçalves and Leff deduce that 'National State [is] a territory inhabited by multiple territorialities'. [XII] Social antagonism and alternative forms of life coexist in the state territory and it is due to specific circumstances that this coexistence may become explo-

sive or even acquire transformative power. Communities that produce 'alternative social rationalities', then, actually support alternative territorialities.

Territorial struggles, therefore, are not simply struggles for space. They are struggles for and through the emergence of new territorialities. It is in this context that we can understand the meaning of Zapatista territory. 'We might best characterize the Zapatista strategy, then, as the construction of another structure of relation between a newly produced collective subject and space—a new *territoriality*...'. [XIII] In this understanding of Zapatismo, Alvaro Reyes refers to a somewhat different notion of territoriality, borrowed from Claude Raffestin. [XIV] Nevertheless, he seems to arrive at a conclusion similar to the one suggested so far in this text: namely, territory is constructed as a process that shapes social relations and, thus, collective subjects.

'Alternative social rationalities' emerge in Zapatista communi-

ties because new forms of social organization and government are being tried out. This is a process that sustains a new way of practising politics aimed at emancipatory changes. Such politics draw from the existing creative forces that give to 'those below' the power to survive in spite of dominant neoliberal policies of discrimination and 'expulsion'. [XV] '[T]he Zapatistas propose that the politics of changing worlds requires the harnessing of the structures of value and social relations that are present below for the construction of organizational forces that would make possible the definitive exteriorization of those worlds from the world of capitalism'. [XVI]

Whereas the 'definitive exteriorization' is a defined scope (a 'beyond' the capitalist relations and the statist forms of organizations), Zapatistas do not start from establishing such an exteriority in the form of an autonomous state separated from Mexico. They know that this state would soon be transformed to a precarious protectorate due to its limited resources and power (if it ever

manages to successfully separate itself from the Mexican state, of course). On the other hand, they also know that their peculiar project of autonomy 'inside Mexico', is really a form of reaffirming a territorial logic that is different from those of the real-existing neoliberal states. Mexico is perhaps one of the most extreme examples of the consequences of advanced neoliberal capitalism. The Mexican state territory is an arena of struggle between various rival capitalist centres of power (drug cartels and local political mafia included). Mexican territory, thus, is fragmented and fragmenting. Reclaiming territories and constructing new territorialities means for Zapatistas producing a different world 'in, against and beyond' the existing one (which is dangerously approaching humanity's critical survival margin).

In the context of such a project of social emancipation, shared spaces acquire a very important role. It is in those spaces that the reclaiming of new territorialities actually takes shape. In shared spaces, Zapatistas do not simply practice commoning as a form of regulating and producing egalitarian social relations. They produce in those spaces new collective subjects capable of mobilizing both ancestral traditions and new critical knowledges. New collective subjects are be-

ing shaped through everyday practices in which new forms of coexistence are being developed: forms of coexistence that depart from the predatory capitalist ethos. A politics of culture is crucially important in such a project. Learning from the cultural politics of Latin American movements (including indigenous movements, feminist and queer movements, rural movements and landless and homeless movements), Zapatistas seem to have realized how important space sharing is not only as a means for their communities' survival, but also as a means for developing alternative values: collective and personal dignity, equality, justice, solidarity, respect for difference and plurality, and participation in collective decisions. Their communities, therefore, actually territorialize a different and emerging culture that redefines democracy.

The Zapatista's building of autonomy in Chiapas may help us reformulate a controversial proposal connected to the resistances against globalization's prevailing de-territorializing effects: the reclaiming of place as opposed to the predominance of the space of flows. As Arturo Escobar helps us understand, in their 'politics of the defense of place', social movements 'are not just trapped in places' but rather defend 'local models of nature and cultural practices' while actively and creatively engaging, at the same time, with translocal forces, thus producing 'novel politics of scale'. [XVII]

So, if one wants to study the effects of territorialized and territorializing Zapatista politics, one needs to see how specific forms of place making (and therefore, specific forms of space sharing and commoning in and through space), indeed clash with established territorialities (both those contained in the Mexican state as well as those harnessed by globalization mechanisms). Zapatista territory is a dense network of insurgent territorialities: territorialities that shape spaces of insurgent education, autonomous assemblies and self-government, and the everydayness of commoning.

Let us now visit the occupied squares of 2011. Here is a thought which problematizes the experiences that unfolded in one of those squares, the Puerta del Sol of Madrid: 'The space-time created in the last days has one single obsession: continuity. Paradoxically, this is only possible to maintain through intermittancy. Through a physical entering-and-leaving of Sol. Keep the experience alive even though you are not present. For this reason (and so many others) the camp at Sol cannot be understood without the social networks. The continuity of the experience is achieved by deterritorializing it'. [XVIII]

This remark could have been written for almost any of the occupied public spaces that were appropriated by people during the so-called squares movement. What the author describes as a

Without a shared will to transcend existing identities and habits, the experience of the squares movement would not have been possible.

process of space-time continuity through practices linked to de-territorialization may be compared to the rising territorialities of Zapatista autonomy. In both cases, assemblies and new forms of participation in shaping new relations between people unfold in multiple spaces. The territoriality of insurgent square assemblies should not be reduced, then, to specific places, although indeed specific places were occupied and collectively used. What is really important is that occupied squares were transformed into multileveled territories of resistance and commoning. As in the insurgent Chiapas, those territories were shaped by new subjects of political action who were shaping themselves in the process.

'In the occupied public spaces of the squares movement, common spaces became alive, albeit temporary, urban thresholds. Such spaces neither define people who use them nor are they defined by them. They rather mediate negotiations between people about the meaning and use of the space they share. Common threshold spaces thus correspond to a process of identity opening which characterized the squares experience'. [XIX]

Without a shared will to tran-

Common spaces were actually spaces in the making, spaces that belonged to nobody and everybody, and spaces activated by collaboration and mutual support.

scend existing identities and habits, the experience of the squares movement would not have been possible. People did not simply participate in demonstrations. They collectively declared that life in the world they were forced to live in had become unbearable: 'enough is enough' was the cry of the squares no matter what the actual political context in each country was. 'Life can be otherwise. Give us back our ability to dream a different, more just world'. Establishing common spaces therefore meant establishing new forms of sharing for the squares' commoners: sharing new equalitarian habits, relations of collaboration, available resources, and dreams.

Common spaces were actually spaces in the making, spaces that belonged to nobody and everybody, and spaces activated by collaboration and mutual support. Always open to newcomers, those spaces were not limited by the perimeter, which so often was imposed by the so-called forces of law and order. Always porous and inclusive, such spaces of active autonomy were actually expanding—pushing against the 'sanitary zone' barriers that were erected to absorb their metastatic potentialities. Spaces in the making, spaces-passages rather than spaces-strongholds [XX]—these threshold spaces, sheltering threshold identities, were used and defined through thresh-

Master plan of Tlanezi
Calli autonomous
neighbourhood, Mexico
City. Photo by Stavros
Stavrides

In today's
struggles, in the
everyday acts
of collective
discontent, and in
the eruptions of
collective anger
and creativity,
space matters.

old rules that were negotiated in
open and inclusive assemblies.
And people keep on exploring
territories of solidarity in which
common life develops through
commoning.

Could we then possibly say that
in the occupied squares a poten-
tial territoriality of emancipation
emerged? And isn't this process
of emergent emancipatory terri-
torialities part of the construction
of a world beyond capitalism? In
today's struggles, in the everyday
acts of collective discontent, and
in the eruptions of collective an-
ger and creativity, space matters.



END NOTES:

[I] W. Benjamin, *Moscow in One Way Street and Other Writings* (Verso: London, 1985), p.177.
[II] A.M. Brighenti, 'On Territorology: Towards a General Science of Territory', *Theory, Culture & Society*, Vol. 27(1) (2010), p.56.
[III] Ibid: p.57.
[IV] See: C. W. Porto-Gonçalves and E. Leff, 'Political Ecology in Latin America: the Social Re-Appropriation of Nature, the Reinvention of Territories and the Construction of an Environmental Rationality', *Desenvolvimento e Meio Ambiente*, vol. 35 (2015), pp. 65-88.
[V] Ibid: p.73.
[VI] Ibid: p.72.
[VII] Ibid: p.71.
[VIII] Ibid: p.86.
[IX] Ibid: p. 85.
[X] S. Elden, 'Governmentality, Calculation, Territory', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, vol. 25 (2007), p.578.

[XI] A. Reyes and M. Kaufman, 'Sovereignty, Indigeneity, Territory: Zapatista Autonomy and the New Practices of Decolonization', *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 110:2 (2011), p.519
[XII] C. W. Porto-Gonçalves and E. Leff, p.72.
[XIII] A. Reyes and M. Kaufman, p.421.
[XIV] See: CL. Raffestin, 'Space, Territory, and Territoriality', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, vol. 30 (2012), pp. 121-141.
[XV] See: S. Sassen, *Expulsion: Brutality and Complexity in the Global Economy* (The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press: Cambridge, Massachussetts, 2014).

[XVI] A. Reyes and M. Kaufman, p.419.
[XVII] A. Escobar, 'Culture Sits in Places: Reflections on Globalism and Subaltern strategies of Localization', *Political Geography* 20, 20017, p. 165, p. 166, p. 163.
[XVIII] See: G. Kaejane, 'Seven Key Words on the Madrid-Sol Experience, 15M', 2011: <http://fromtheplazas.wordpress.com/translations/seven-key-words/>
[XIX] S. Stavrides, *Common Space. The City as Commons* (Zed books: London, 2016), p.170.
[XX] S. Stavrides, *Towards the City of Thresholds* (Professional-dreamers: Trento, 2010).

Iris Lykourioti (A Whale's Architects)

IN TIMES OF WEIRD FEAR^[1]

WHAT CAN AN ASSEMBLY AS AN ARTISTIC FORM DO AGAINST FEAR?

Once I saw you at the crossing of the eternal junction,
In times of terror and weird fear,
to fold, to worry and be terrified
and before the days are over, to shut up.
Once more the same story, same trails, same circles
barking men, frightened dogs,
mourning mothers, and no place to rest
when distances grow longer in your memory.
This is the way unsound rulers stage our present.
I am tired of what is valid, they are all provocateurs,
the ones who catch hold of your fear
and make up stories
and against the faithless
set up their crusades
from gluttoned people, same values, same poise,
ones who will annihilate all that they dislike.
And me, since you are scared, I spit on you once more
while searching to become all that you are afraid of.

—What else are you afraid of, 2005, Active Member

Only when people worry because they have stopped worrying, only then does individual and collective freedom becomes possible.

The masses showed via art that 'the grandest horror is justice; that is the power that can subjugate the dire collective experiences'.

Kostas Papaioannou, L'art Grecque.

The following text is a short reference to the enlightening theory of Mass and History^[II] developed in the 1950s by the Greek philosopher Kostas Papaioannou.^[III] It deals with the idea that art is fundamentally necessary to the processes seeking the political emancipation of the masses. It is by artistic means and symbolic sublimations that society can, a) share dire social experiences and fears, b) transform them, c) transcend them and thus, d) take history into its

own hands. Fear, as we know, is the favourite playfield of demagoguery and domination. Preferably, the masses are not supposed to be prepared for it.

The mass that goes beyond the 'deina', the dire straits

Kostas Papaioannou was a political refugee who migrated from Greece to France. He left by boat in order to escape the coming horrors of the Greek civil war, and the dire straits of the Nazi occupation in Greece during World War II when he was an active member of the Greek resistance and suffered arrest and maltreatment. He settled in Paris in 1945 together with important young Greek intellectuals of the period such as Cornelius Castoriades, Kostas Axelos, Mimika Kranaki, George Candilis and others who escaped the country for the same reasons and on the same boat: Mataroa.

Papaioannou belongs to the generation that took part—when mature—in the turbulent events



“Killah-P”. Graffiti of the murdered hip-hop artist’s name. Photo by Panagis Marketos

of the period between the 1960s and 1970s, another instance when the masses made an appearance in politics. He came into contact with the horrors of the Nazi extermination camps; he saw the aspirations of the revolutionary masses for a socialist society to be restrained by Stalinist means of social control. He defines these events as experiences of collective defeat in the masses’ struggle for freedom, equality and justice. His interest focuses not on the struggle for unquestionable civic rights but the struggle for political emancipation that will render the mass the sole maker of its history.

Contra the stumbling views of elitist theories,[IV] Papaïoannou’s thought opposes the concepts that define the cultural life of the masses as devastating, or the cause of socio-spiritual degeneration. He opposes such arguments by introducing the concept of the mass as a qualitative and not a quantitative category. With this counter-claim, he demonstrates that when the masses manage to play the leading role in history they create exceptionally advanced societies and new cultural paradigms. [V] By posing the question: *‘what causes the frustration of society’s endeavours towards freedom and*

instead throws it repeatedly into sufferings (deina)?’ he examines western philosophy by pinpointing the fundamental differences that exist between philosophical systems: how do they help legitimize or limit (if they do limit) the will to power?[VI]

Papaïoannou noticed that modern thought—by installing in its core the idea of perpetual progress (he includes Marxism in the same paradigm)—expelled the possibility of a profound discourse on fear, on the memory of dire collective experiences and on the development of tools that can help the masses transcend suffering (*pathos*). The result is that sufferings are forced into oblivion and are not tamed within a process of learning (*mathos*). Masses demobilize under the unexplored effects of fear and thus submit to any form of power.

Let us not forget that the powerful elites are continuously manipulating the passive, unprepared masses through their favourite play of demagoguery, fear. The land of fear cannot be a fallow land but a land cultivated by the masses. Only in this condition can sufferings be transcended though a process that offers a human

identity to men and women (as a mass) so that they can establish the scale, the limits and the means for the exercise of power (scale refers to justice, freedom and equality).

Papaïoannou exemplifies his arguments by focusing on the participation of the masses in art. Art symbolizes, recalls and transcends the direct effects of experiences. He situates this privileged moment when art enters into the realm of politics in the *pathos-mathos* process. It is in the moment that Tragedy and theatre emerge through the traumatic *deina* of the Persian Wars, he argues, that the masses, for the first time in history, developed through Tragedy a form of symbolic court of the people: an assembly gathered in order to condemn the responsible individuals (men, gods or demons) and the aftermath of their actions. The masses showed via art that ‘the grandest horror is justice; that is the power that can subjugate dire collective experiences.’[VII]

After revolt, subversion, or the overthrow of the old order, it is the masses that have to create the next paradigm. Their previous experiences (*mathos*) should help them avoid the pitfalls that happen when the social conception is just a procedural succession of individuals instead of a more radical societal transformation mobilized by them. Papaïoannou writes: The masses have been awakened, they have gone out of their passivity but they have lost the chance to be defined as revolutionary because they finally submitted to another form of social control and lost the opportunity to come to terms with the real world and thus be transformed to the conscious and responsible protagonist of its own history’—the history that comes after revolt.[VIII] He reminds us that ‘only when people worry because they have stopped worrying, only then does individual and collective freedom become possible’.[IX]

A day like this is a fine time to die
Beautifully up right and in view of the public
my name is Pavlos Fyssas from Piraeus

two wings were stitched on my back the day I was born
ones that alas flutter only through my pen
ones that make everything around me seem to flow in vain
in particular the sacrifices that were made on my name
but I won’t sacrifice anything that can be sacrificed
I won’t be sacrificed for anyone who sacrifices
perhaps I should blame my care towards almost everything
perhaps I should just blame the next day that approaches.

—Strains, 2012, Killah P (Pavlos Fyssas)

We conclude in a more carnivalesque, subversive and thus optimistic tone with a carefully selected, erotic quotation that Papaïoannou cites from Aristophanes’ *Birds*, when Aristophanes cheekily ridicules Dionysus inside the worshipping dionysiac medium par excellence, Comedy, without any sort of self censorship:

Demand the empire back from Zeus; if he does not agree, if he refuses and does not at once confess himself beaten, declare a sacred war against him and forbid the gods henceforward to pass through your country with their tools up, as hitherto, for the purpose of sleeping with their Alcmenas, their Alopes, or their Semeles! If they try to pass through, put rings on their tools so that they won’t make love any longer.[X]

Projecting our own words on to the text: let us put rings on the erected tool of those powerful men, gods or demons who want to throw us back in time.

END NOTES:

[I] In Times of Weird Fear (Ston Kairo tou Allokotou Fovou) is the title of a song by Active Member a Greek low-bap music group. It was released in 2001.

Note: The text is part of the series under the general title *Bon pour l’Orient*: Short stories of realism and deceit. It is based on a former publication under the title *The dino-saur* and the babies*: Deina**, mass, memory and beyond, which appeared in the catalogue of the exhibition ‘In the mouth of the wolf. Die wolf, die!’ edited by Chrysanthi Koumianaki and Kosmas Nikolaou in 2014. Its present form was presented within the framework of the project ‘Why Assemblies Matter?: the Meeting Room’ by Jenny Marketou in Athens in December 2016. [II] Kostas Papaïoannou, *Mass and History* (Enallaktikes Ekdoseis: Athens, 2011). [III] Theories on mass society, mass culture thrive in the ‘50s as a critique to the post war development of mass production. Some very important contributions are those of the Frankfurt School intellectuals, Hannah Arendt etc. [IV] Papaïoannou refers to the works of Gustave Le Bon and José Ortega y Gasset. [V] For Papaïoannou the masses related to mass consumption or mass culture



Athens Graffiti commemorating the murder of the hip-hop artist Killah-P. Image found online.

are symptomatic. They reflect the historical circumstances when masses remain passive and subjugated to the social and economical orders imposed by the elites. These symptoms do not define the masses per se. Papaïoannou develops a more advanced, more general theory on the issue. [VI] He quotes the famous phrase of Friedrich Nietzsche. [VII] Kostas Papaïoannou, *L’art Grecque*, Jean Ducat, Jean Bousquet, Gilles Touchais (ed.) (Citadelles et Mazenod: Paris, 1993), p.164 of the Greek publication. [VIII] Ibid, p. 121–122. We are rephrasing his words. [IX] Ibid, p.123 of the Greek publication. [X] Ibid, p.124. The source of the translated text is the website of The Internet Classics Archive hosted by the network of MIT Program in Writing and Humanistic Studies. Translator uncredited.

Notes on the verses: These verses belong to artists Active Member and Killah P. Killah P (kill the past) was the nickname of Pavlos Fyssas, a hip-hop aficionado who earned his living as a worker in the factories of the industrial zone of Piraeus. He was murdered by a sub-group of the neo-Nazi Greek political party Golden Dawn in 2013 for his political views that were very present in his music. He was 34 years old. The trial process of this political assassination has not yet been resolved.

OEDIPUS BOUND PRISON, CAMP AND THEATRE AS AN ASSEMBLY OF HUMANITIES^[1]



Attica Prison Riots 1971-Image found online

I knew ‘assemblies’: the weekly assembly of the clandestine resistance group of which I was a member in the waning years of the dictatorship in Greece; the monthly assemblies of the Society of Democratic Women of which my mother was a member, and which was outlawed by the dictatorship; the monthly teacher assemblies in high schools (what I later learned that in the US are called ‘Faculty Meetings’); the assemblies of the trade unions; the assemblies of different professions. Assemblies had their own aesthetics and synesthetics, their own affect, their own vibe, their own structure, their own performativity. There was a daily agenda, the right of each member to speak, the assurance that the space of the assembly was a safe space from the outside. Assemblies were convened by the members through their representatives. There was agency there. Assemblies were peaceful even when boisterous. Occasionally they were raided by the police

and things got really ugly. But assemblies were not to be confused with demonstrations, a different beast altogether.

All that was changed, of course, in 2011 when first the movement known as the Arab Spring and then the Movement of the Squares were subsumed under the more general notion of the ‘Assemblies’. Judith Butler notes in the first chapter of her book on assemblies that initially she had given it the title *Bodies in Alliance*. She changed the title as 2011 progressed along the Movement of the Squares and she saw ‘these mass demonstrations...when bodies assemble on the street, in the square, or in other venues [as an] exercise—one might call it performative—of the right to appear, a bodily demand for a more livable set of lives.’^[1] In Greece we had already seen the first assembly that looked like a demonstration, only it wasn’t. Following the forest fires of 2007, when hundreds of thousands of acres of

forest were burned to the ground and even the site of Ancient Olympia was burned, a large-scale demonstration formed outside of the Greek Parliament. It was a demonstration like no other in the history of the country—it was quiet. No slogans, no chanting, no violence (except by the police who broke it up with hand grenades two hours into the gathering). It looked like what we later saw in 2011—an assembly.

As I began writing about political prisoners in 20th century Greece it became clear that prisoners, nowhere in the world, are allowed to hold their own assemblies. They are not allowed to call an assembly, to assemble without permission, to state their thoughts or needs with impunity—Janowska, Attica, Angola, chain gangs, Robben Island, Makronisos, Yaros, Trikeri, Sing Sing are (were, some of them still are) places where even the rudiments of the con-

cept of the human being have been challenged daily, where the right to assembly is revoked along with the rest of the civic rights that those of us living in parliamentary democracies take for granted. (The recent experiments in new forms of incarceration being attempted in Germany and Norway notwithstanding.)

But what if an assembly can be reconfigured, re-articulated? What if there is another modality where the assembling takes on a different form, operates on different forms of subjectivities; what if there is a different modality of performing the performative of the assembly? A modality where the assembly leans on to a performative resistance that cannot speak its name. A space that becomes quietly, unannounced, clandestinely political becomes democratic and engages deliberation and dissensus.

Then we should ask what sorts of performativities—as politically

engaged, activist, interrogative—are required for the production of that space of democratic engagement, interlocution, and interpellation? If the parastatic (as in παραστατική) quality of performance (the performance of a speech act) engages the political horizon of the performative (indeed, the only horizon available to the performative) through the act of the witness (present—παριστάμενος—as a witness), is there any possibility of safeguarding that the performative will also be uniquely and singularly emancipatory?

Reading J. L. Austin on performance and performativity, Andrew Parker and Eve Sedgwick

have warned against both Austin’s normativity through the explicitly performative: ‘I do (take this woman...)’ and its dialectics—the disinterpellation of ‘Don’t do it on my account’.[III] Writing on the edge of this dialectic they find the space of the performative on the surfaces that constitute the communicative plexus that brings together words with their acts, when they write:

Arguably, it’s the aptitude of the explicit performative for mobilizing and epitomizing [the] transformative effects on the interlocutory space that makes it almost irresistible—in the face of a lot of discouragement from Austin himself—to associate it with theatrical performance. And to associate it, by the same token, with political activism, or with ritual.[IV]

In other words, even when performance and the performative are properties of a theatrical performance, they are, Parker and Sedgwick tell us, almost *a priori*,

primarily, actively political. They not only participate in the construction of the space of the polis by providing a *topos*, but they also give a way, *tropos*, for such a construction. In reading Austin’s formulation of performance at this oblique angle, Parker and Sedgwick retain, nonetheless, the foundational prerequisite of performance, as posited by Austin: namely that performance and the performative deal almost exclusively with the detritus of speech, with the margins, with that which is not necessarily, readily, or intuitively included in hegemonic and/or official discourse.

Reading on these lines, Judith Butler (in the same volume) proposes the performative as an iteration of the Nietzschean formulation of subject formation. Butler reads Nietzsche as proposing that subject formation rests on the duality (perhaps even the dialectic) of accountability and punishment, the former necessarily preceding the latter. This formulation, however, Butler argues, exposes Nietzsche’s syllogism as inherently impossible: punishment and accountability presuppose yet another subject, separate from the one being formed; one that actu-

ally ‘delivers that formative judgment’.[V] Nietzsche leaves this unclear, Butler says, since he does not foreclose ‘a figure of the law who performatively sentences the subject into being’.[VI]

We might disagree on Butler’s reading of Nietzsche on this point, and we could argue that of course Nietzsche has provided ‘the figure of the law that performatively sentences the subject into being’ and that this ‘figure of the law’ is not a subject at all, precisely because it prefigures the performative sentencing. For Nietzsche that is the Will. ‘There is no “being” behind doing, effecting, becoming; the “doer” is merely a fiction added to the deed—the deed is everything’, says Nietzsche in *On the Genealogy of Morals*.[VII] And we might also want to point out that Nietzsche’s gesture here is a descriptive, rather than a prescriptive one (as Butler seems to be

implying). But Butler is correct in reading this ‘doer’ (*der Täter*) as an *a priori* wrongdoer, and the act as an *a priori* injurious act. In a sense, any act is, putatively, injurious. (Of course, here we need to keep in mind that for Nietzsche acts, even injurious acts, do not constitute a moral constellation; they are not part of a moral system or a moral economy.)

Just to stitch these points together: performance and performativity are locutionary moments, events (in the Hegelian or even Foucauldian sense) that invite the margins, the detritus, the wake of utterances, that which is being left unsaid, into the discussion as they make the formation of the subject possible precisely because both (performance and performativity) are resolutely located within (and constitute) the space of political activism and of ritual. But what would that look like on the ground, so to speak, when we look at the possibility of an assembly as a theatrical performance, where assembling (in the sense that I defined it in the beginning) is impossible?

Theatrical performances have taken place in prisons around the world, but performances of ancient drama have been rare and far in between. A notable one was the staging of *Antigone* on Robben Island, with Nelson Mandela playing the role of Creon.

Here, though, I am looking at two other instances—two such events—that are separated by time, space, and gender, but, nonetheless, share context. I am thinking of two specific *performances* of ancient drama, one actualized, the other cancelled, one in Greece, the other in New York, one by women prisoners, the other by men, one by Aeschylus, the other by Sophocles, both prepared with the rudiments of theatrical materiality, with things existing at hand and easily procurable, both appearing in the precarious space of rehabilitation. Both came into being through what Gonda van Steen has named ‘the theatrical or performative context of intimidation’.[VIII] I am referring to the aborted open performance of *Prometheus Bound* on the prison island of Trikeri in the summer of 1949,[IX] and the staged performance of *Oedipus Tyrannus* at Sing Sing on 17 November 2006. There is no space here to explain

But what if an assembly can be reconfigured, rearticulated? What if there is another modality where the assembling takes on a different form, operates on different forms of subjectivities; what if there is a different modality of performing the performative of the assembly?

the specific circumstances of Trikeri (I, and many others, have done so elsewhere),[X] but suffice it to say that Trikeri was an exile island that was established as a rehabilitation and reeducation camp for leftist women during the Greek Civil War (1946-1949). There were two other equally notorious places in Greece at the time for men—Makronisos and Yaros. The rehabilitation-through-torture programme was the same at all three places and was implemented continuously, pausing only for sessions of indoctrination delivered by the priest, the director, or various visitors to the camp (from the royal couple of Greece, King Paul and Queen Frederica, to General Van Fleet and scores of intellectuals and politicians in between). The women held there ranged in age from infants accompanying their mothers to grandmothers over 80 years of age. The objective of the programme was to rehabilitate the leftists into becoming ‘humans’ again (άνθρωποι: meaning Christians and nationalists) and to extract from them the infamous ‘Declarations of Repen-

...[the performance] only got to the point of a dress rehearsal, but we worked on it for over two months and it remains unforgettable to all who were lucky to have seen it.

It happened on Trikeri, in the summer of 1949, exclusively by women who were prisoners there. It was taught by [educationist] Roza Imvriote along with [painter] Liza Kottou.[XI] Katri and Vokovits worked as choreographers.

We had no real actresses then except for Taygeti Basouri who played Io. Theatrical troupes now hire Taygeti as a comedienne. But I can’t remember anyone else who has played better the tragic Io and her madness. I had even made her a pair of little cattle horns, which were really good on her, but she refused to wear them ever.

Three ancient dramas were taught, prepared, and performed on the islands: *Antigone* and *Philoktetes* on Makronisos, and *Prometheus Bound* on Trikeri. Yaros had no such engagement. Very little is known about the staging of *Prometheus Bound*, other than just references to the fact that such an attempt did take place which, at the last moment, was forbidden by the director of the camp. We have a single description of the process by painter and sculptor Katerina Hariati-Sismani, who was interned there, and who has left valuable information about the theatricality and the materiality of the experience of the production:



I had undertaken the task to produce the stage design and the costumes, and I also played the role of Oceanus.

I had never played at the theatre before, neither did I know Prometheus, nor had I ever seen or read the play. Therefore, I accepted with great enthusiasm this educational offer made by Roza

There was a hill that had the sea as its background with high mountains further ahead. All around there were hills, and more hills full of olive groves.

One day, as I walked away studying my role and trying my vocal chords—I was trying to become acquainted with my voice in all its capacities, I wanted to try all the tones it could give me, so that I could choose the ones that suit me best—I heard a voice as clear as a church bell, that was coming from

the opposite hills. It was Kiki Dionsypoulou, our Prometheus. Kiki was a lawyer with an artist's psyche. Tall, like a tomboy, well-built [δευένη], with eyes like sparkling coals, she shook her head like a horse's untamed mane, with resolve on the fold of her mouth and enough passion in her psyche to prevent her from signing a Declaration.

To us, Prometheus was the one who doesn't sign a Declaration; who prefers to remain chained to his rock and to his torture, like us, rather than submit to violence. To us Prometheus was us and all the words of the play fit us like a glove. Hermes was the 'little snitch'. Hephaestus was the worker who constructs his own chains. Oceanus? That was my uncle who had written to me a few days earlier instructing me to sign.

All other characters had been selected with great care—we had the necessary material anyway, the four thousand women who were then living on Trikeri.

We dressed the twenty-four Oceanids with soft colors, starting with tea rose to beige and light blue. And they were wavy as they encircled the rock of Prometheus with their dancing movements. That rock, which measured about a metre and a half in length, had been

constructed from coloured marble. Trikeri had wonderful such rocks. They were green, pink, purple. We had moved them with great difficulty from the beach to the top of the hill.

But the performance was never staged. Our warden, Zervas, who understood the meaning that we were giving to the play, reckoned that he should not allow it to be performed.

After all these great efforts, anticipation, after such success, there is not even one photograph of it to salvage its memory. Not a word was ever written about it.

The production of *Oedipus Tyrannus* at Sing Sing is only slightly better known. There were four performances—the first three were in-house, the fourth one for a few invited guests. It was organized as part of the Rehabilitation Through the Arts (RTA) programme in New York and became known to the wider public when Lawrence Downes, a journalist for The New York Times, reported on it on 16 November 2006:

As I watched, I wondered what it would be like to be defined by my own worst sins. It struck me that when people are locked up for horrible crimes, a lot of goodness and

beauty necessarily get locked up too. It also seemed that the Theban society onstage—though afflicted by plague, vengeance and divine cruelty—was probably gentler and saner than the one the inmates knew. Its members clearly cared for one another, and were not numb to grief...[XII]

Years later, in 2016, I was speaking with an inmate at Sing Sing who had participated in the production.[XIII] Why had they picked *Oedipus*? I asked. 'No reason', he said, adding that they did not know anything about the play before, and it was easily available at the library. He continued to say: 'know what? when I play I become a human being again'. Despite their obvious differences—which are many—there exist many commonalities in these two experiences, both on the level of sovereign power and on the experiential level of the participants. Most notably, of course, the attempts by the respective states to make the inmates into 'subjects', refashioning their original subjectivities. The Greek State of 1949 was telling the leftists that they were not human beings, that their subject formation had been flawed at its beginning. At Sing Sing the human being, the subject of the self, had

been removed from the act, until the act itself (or whatever has been construed as an act) was denuded and left to stand alone; as Downes noted 'being defined by one's worst act'. A new process of subject formation started taking place, then: one originating from and executed by the State as the only arbiter of meaning. What is being performed in these cases, then, in the act of assembling, is, indeed, the collection of the performative aspects of being; the marginalia of existence, which are being presented and performed as the fragments that cry out to be recognized as constitutive of the always already existing human subject.

END NOTES:

[I] The portions on the performativity of incarceration in this paper were originally presented in 2014 at the conference Literature as Performance organized by the Center for Hellenic Studies at Harvard University. I thank Niki Tsironi for the invitation to the conference. I reworked the paper with an eye towards the re-theorization of the assembly at the invitation of Jenny Marketou, whom I thank. I also thank Katerina Stephanos, Nota

Performance and performativity are locutionary moments, events (in the Hegelian or even Foucauldian sense) that invite the margins, the detritus, the wake of utterances, that which is being left unsaid into the discussion as they make the formation of the subject possible precisely because both (performance and performativity) are resolutely located within (and constitute) the space of political activism.

Pantzou, Eleni Kyramargiou, and Harilaos Sismanis, the Director of the Exile Museum Ai Stratis (and Katerina Hariati-Sismani's son) for allowing me to consult her correspondence, and has given me permission to publish some of it (see Panourgia (2009; 2016). [II] Judith Butler, *Towards a Performative Theory of Assemblies* (Harvard University Press: Cambridge, 2015), p. 25. [III] Andrew Parker and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick 'Introduction. Performativity and Performance' in Andrew Parker and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (eds.), *Performativity and Performance* (Routledge: New York, 1995), p. 9. [IV] Ibid p. 13 [V] Judith Butler, 'Burning Acts-Injurious Speech' in Andrew

Parker and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (eds.), *Performativity and Performance* (Routledge: New York, 1995), p. 200. [VI] Ibid. [VII] Ibid. [VIII] Gonda Van Steen, *Theater of the Condemned: Classical Tragedy on Greek Prison Islands* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2011), pp. 99–100. [IX] Gonda Van Steen's is the only scholarly account of the production on Trikeri and it focuses mainly on its theatricality. Ibid, pp. 106–128. [X] See Panourgia, *Dangerous Citizens. The Greek Left and the Terror of the State* (Fordham University Press: New York, 2009) and at <http://dangerouscitizens.columbia.edu> [XI] http://www.nationalgallery.gr/site/content.php?artwork_id=61760 [XII] Lawrence Downes 'Oedipus Max: Four Nights of Anguish and Applause in Sing Sing', *The New York Times*, 2006. <<http://www.nytimes.com/2006/11/16/opinion/oedipus-max-four-nights-of-anguish-and-applause-in-sing-sing.html>> [XIII] I teach at Sing Sing through Columbia University's pilot project for a Master's Programme in Social Sciences.

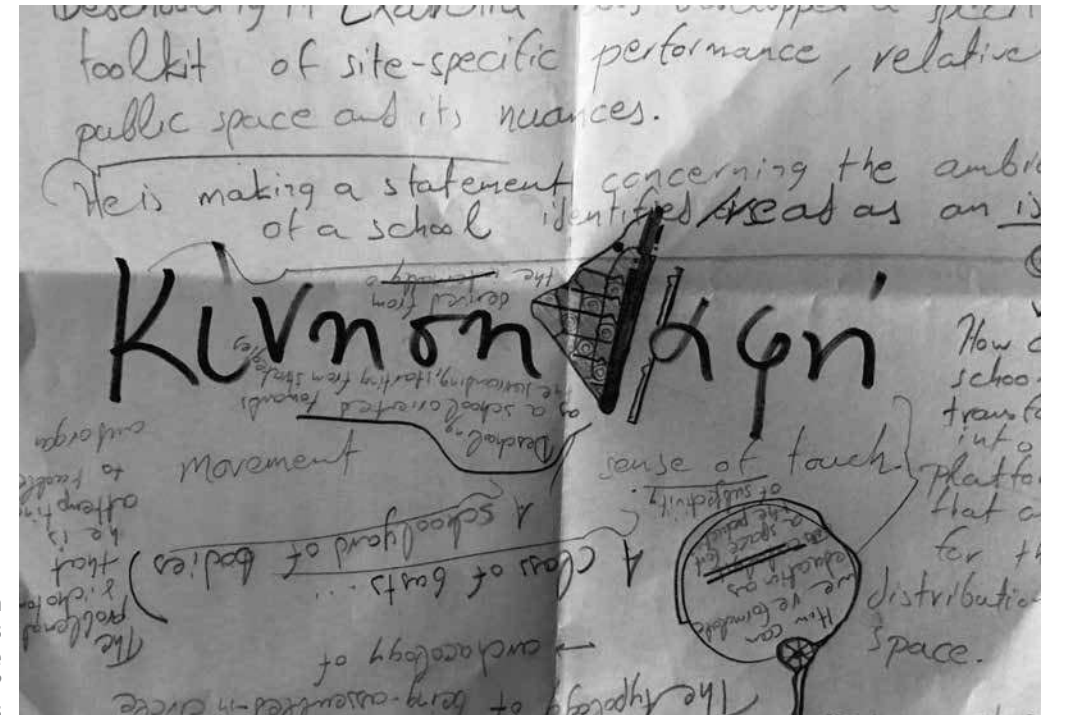
DISOBEDIENT OBJECTS

ATHENA ATHANASIOU
AND JENNY MARKETOU
IN CONVERSATION



Interior view of the M.A.X amphitheater, Patission Historical Complex, National Technical University of Athens. Photo by Panagis Marketos

Notes from the Assembly on
Deschooling, hosted by Babis
Baltas within the context of the
summit HowAssembliesMatter?
Photo by Panagis Marketos



**J. M. Who holds assemblies?
Who are the people? What are
they constituting?**

A.A. Asking why and how 'people' or 'the people' come into play through collective practices of claiming the unconditional-ity of public space implies also a potential to rethink and rework, again and again, the norms of admissibility through which 'the people' come together or are not admitted to this 'togetherness'. This performative potential entails unsettling the founding myths of 'the people' as an enclosed community. The challenge is to engage the performative possibilities of coming-together as constituted and constituent, while countering the (national, racialized, classed, gendered, sexual, able-bodied) demarcations, hierarchies, and foreclosures inherent in normative definitions of the people 'as one'.

The question of who 'the people' might be implicates also the question of what counts as 'public' and how people come together, in multiple ways, even in conditions of impossibility. What

alternative and critical form of 'the people' might refugees and undocumented migrants who cross the Mediterranean waterways in overcrowded fishing boats embody? How do differently positioned subjects embody differentiated conditions of precarity in practices of assembling and disassembling?

J.M. What kind of subjectivities do assemblies produce?

A.A. Uttering and enacting 'we' with others might be a way of claiming a different, non-commodified, non-disposable life, and, at the same time, of addressing the trepidations, impossibilities, elisions, and prescriptions that mark this invocation/declaration. 'Being-with' can be conceived as a condition of possibility for critical subjectivation and de-subjugation. This 'we' brings forth performative subjectivities that are internally differentiated and radically indeterminate. In this sense, we might also think of public assemblies as material, affective, and fictive occasions in which people embrace, share, and rework the contingencies

and impossibilities of their presenting as such, of their 'being-in-common'. The question must remain open and operative, then: what kind of engagements with the political might this undecidable and non-foundational(ist) coming-together entail and enable in different contemporary conditions of biopolitics?

J.M. What do assemblies leave behind?

A.A. Traces of affective labour, transversal acting and counter-acting, reflecting together, practices of claiming/using/sharing resources, exposure to others, alternative economies beyond possessive individualism, corporeal economies beyond representation, alliances and assemblages, spaces for mobilizing one's actually lived vulnerability as a critique of capitalism/inequality/gender privilege/heteronormativity/racism, transnational reverberations and (mis)translations, creative failures and other im/possibilities. Perhaps a becoming of the political, even a becoming of democracy.

There is something inchoate, untenable, elusive, transitory, and ephemeral about the processes of assembling and disassembling. And yet they produce transformative effects and reverberations. They leave behind residues, undercurrents, and a non-linear, non-totalizable, spectral genealogy of embodying the political or engaging with the political. Even the physical, corporeal exhaustion that arises from the reflective actualization of relationality and exposure (to others, to the open, to police violence) is a vital trace of the intimate relationship between vulnerability and resistance.

But to 'leave behind' means also to 'break with'. We might think of assemblies, then, as an archive of discontinuous temporalities beyond the conceits of presentism and representation: an archive of ambivalent legacies and disinheritances.



«YoN» (YES or NO)

A performance by Vana Kostayola with Petros Christidis (violin)

Firstly I would like to thank my son. His early coming in life has made me as vulnerable as ever and more conscious on what life at its purest stage can be about. His existence made me realize that we are all small-big miracles..... that when we grow up we become something else. What do we become? We become curious, funny, genius, absurd.... oppressors, oppressed.... Lately I have the feeling that after these small-big miracles we all become μικροαστοί... we all become middle class introverted people. Let this be our first vote:

WE ARE ALL PETIT BOURGEOIS
Yes Or No?

I would also like to thank my father who taught me how important it is to listen to my desire, a desire which often is not even mine but which still determines my life. He is one of the most interesting split-subjects I have ever met. His economical situation is a micrograph of the financial situation of Greece. I am found now in the difficult position to choose between saving a family property by paying the debts or just selling it. On one hand I feel I should save it. Feelings of attachment and belonging related to that house attack my other side that claims that I should get rid of anything that has to do with property. I tend to think that.... NO PROPERTY NO FEAR. Let's vote on that!

NO PROPERTY NO FEAR
Yes Or No?

I would also like to thank all the people with major or minor influence, from academics to politicians, who are engaging in the discourse and the practice of the socio-political crisis in Europe and in general, in one way or another. It is because of them that I have been feeling less hope-less in recent years.

It seems there is this leftist tendency and an effort to go against the main European tendency of having politics based on an abstract market that rules the world etc etc etc... —BUT—

I am sad to say that this left side appears to be a dream.... What do you think? Does the European Left exist? I think the EUROPEAN LEFT DOES NOT EXIST. Let us vote on that.

THE EUROPEAN LEFT DOES NOT EXIST
Yes Or No?

I would also like to thank all the people who are trying to provoke a social change from the bottom

up this time. I feel that they, in a way, prove that... we.... can make history. Examples and experiments of alternative economies, occupy movements, reclaiming public space, public kitchens, open assemblies, square meetings.... etc etc... might be proof. Still..... I wonder..... are we really making history or...are we simply products of history? Let's take a vote.

WE ARE PRODUCTS OF HISTORY
Yes Or No?

I would also like to (as abstract as it sounds) thank my 'patrida' including all the moments of collective identifications and the collective complexes, too. The last 7 years in Geneva, where I am based, I feel more and more 'Greek'.... especially when prominent female theatre directors come to perform and a lot of Greek swearing fills up the space and then... it is THEN that..... 'it feels like home.'

Since the European crisis started and Greece was found to be the protagonist, 'we are all Greeks', aren't we?

.....In other cases 'je suis Charlie' or 'je suis Bruxelles' 'je suis Bataclan'?.....we are all aganaktismenoi ?..... we are all Jews? we are all Muslims? Referring to the violent moments in the Mediterranean waters lately let us say:

WE ARE ALLDEAD
Yes Or No?

(In one way or another.... Sooner or later....?)

BUT death is just a technical problem and here I would like to thank all the transhumanists who, based on the evolution of artificial intelligence, work on NOT ONLY how to SAVE man... BUT also on how to UPDATE human nature. ...Due to this progress we would be able to one day die at the age of 180 years old. The future is here...Technical progress was always a matter of time, computers now can DO IT ALL. Quoting Yuval Noah Harari: 'In a world where computers will replace doctors, drivers, teachers and even landlords.... everyone will become an artist.'

This time not only algorithms but
also ART WILL SAVE US ALL.
Let this be our last vote:

ART WILL SAVE US ALL
Yes Or No?