

the art of being many reader for
an **assembly** of assemblies
kampnagel
internationale kulturfabrik,
hamburg

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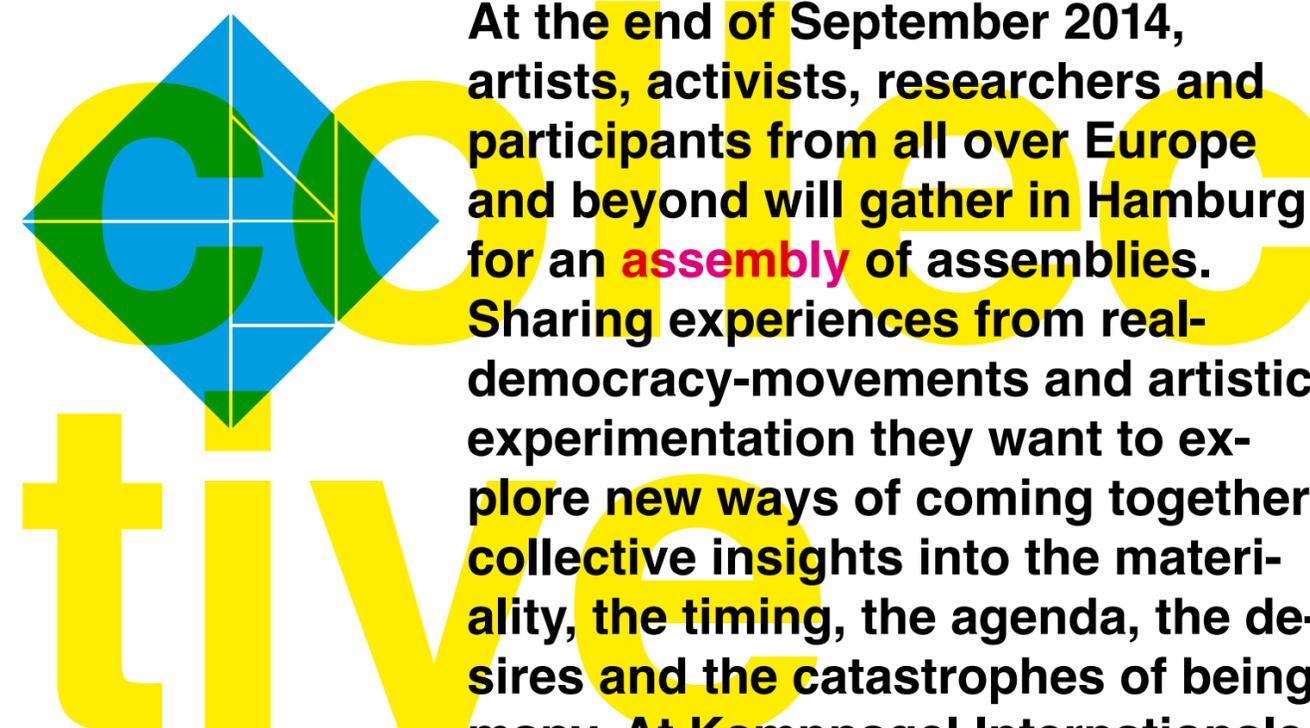
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imprint

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the art of being many



At the end of September 2014, artists, activists, researchers and participants from all over Europe and beyond will gather in Hamburg for an **assembly** of assemblies. Sharing experiences from real-democracy-movements and artistic experimentation they want to explore new ways of coming together: collective insights into the materiality, the timing, the agenda, the desires and the catastrophes of being many. At Kampnagel Internationale Kulturfabrik, geheimagentur* and friends will build an **assembly** hall and a camp to host them. Here, the **assembly** will become a laboratory of itself: a collective of friends and strangers with many voices and bodies including those of ghosts and things. Feel free to join!

* geheimagentur is an open collective and part of the many who initiated the project THE ART OF BEING MANY

...

Many of us will meet for the first time, but we all have something in common: We witnessed moments of assembling that made the word ‚democracy’ sound important again. Those moments may not have brought about the political changes, we hoped for. Still, we believe them to be important. We want to acknowledge them as a starting point for a new art of being many.

Really? But isn't it the feeling of NOT being many that art and activism share most of the time - not enough of us to realize the desired changes or to win the important battles? Their shared desire for being many doesn't make art and activism perfect accomplices. It can reduce "the many" to an economic feature: presumption, participation, social media, data mining — in all these discourses "the many" are potentially treated as a resource. And success is defined as providing access to this resource one way or another. Nevertheless, the desire for being many is nothing to feel bad about. For good reasons, it rises up against the cultural tyranny of the individual. The individual, who has long been captured and redesigned as the self-optimizing subject of cognitive capitalism. The desire for being many rises up against the economics of attention, its imperatives of the big name, the keynote, the star, and the principles of scarcity and accumulation. It rises up more generally against the ongoing concentration of power and capital in the hands of the fewer and fewer. And if then, all of a sudden, there are many, it feels like a miracle. When the many emerge and start to engage in the constituent process of becoming a "we," terrible and wonderful things can happen. The wonderful part is that, at such moments, the most important things can be reinvented: care, dignity, and the power to change our lives collectively.

So, let us ask: Is there an art of being many? How to learn, to embody, to continue the art of being many? To discuss these questions geheimagentur initiated *the art of being many* and invited the many to an assembly of assemblies: Can being many be rehearsed?

Many activists we know would probably say it can't. They argue that the many only come into being through an uprising, a power vacuum, inverting the fatigue of governmentality into a moment of collective self-governance. But our experience as performance artists is somewhat different. We actually rehearsed and tested anti-representational strategies like for example anonymity and multiple

names, open collectives and open sources in our work, and we were often treated like fools when we refused to send in our personal CVs to appear in programs or identify the "head artist" of our collectives for the press. For us, it was indeed like a miracle to witness how this very gesture of refusal became so important to real democracy movements all around the world. Of course, we do not claim that this gesture of refusal was first rehearsed in the arts. It has its roots in radical activism's self-protection against repression. But after 2008, the means of radical activist self-defense and the cultural critique of representation merged and produced something beautiful: the willingly-not-represented, the unrepresentable many.

So, who or what are the many? **The many are what emerged after the bubble of individualism crashed: the many failed to be autonomous subjects and then stopped feeling guilty about that.** The many are those who realize that, as individuals, we are precarious, fragile, and totally incapable of living, whereas, on the other hand, we are totally capable of producing a common life together. The many have a special kind of knowledge—the so-called "wisdom of the many" identified as typical of digital societies. The many are those who collectively produce the commons. The many are those who organize themselves horizontally, rather than vertically—those who are essentially irreducible to the few. This is what lies at the core of the conflict between the many and representational systems of all kinds, as almost all representation relies, in one way or another, on reducing the many to the few. Therefore the art of being many consists of all the attempts to organize and to assemble, to basically act together, without constantly being tempted to reduce the many to the few.

Modern representative democracy is based on the idea that the many are a given. This idea is a black box hiding a complex production process from our sight. As, actually, this "given" is constantly produced by biopolitical regimes in the form of data, it is a very special

form of the many. Furthermore, representative democracy is based on the idea that the many can only govern themselves or be governed by being reduced to the few. This reduction again is organized and legitimized by seemingly rational procedures of counting, dividing, collecting, and, therefore, of representing. Modern representative democracy produces a certain version of the many just to have it easily reduced again afterwards.

Now, what we have found in the social movements of recent years is that the many are actually not equal to countable members of parties or to statistical figures of biopolitics. The given procedures for producing and then reducing the many to the few have turned out to be invalid, as they notoriously fall short of the potential, the richness, and the essential horizontality of the many.

What to do with this insight? Maybe we could start by admitting that most of the time we are not many. We are actually few. Even in those moments when we seem to be many, as, for example, in the Occupy Movement, "we" have never for real been the 99 percent. Compared to this claim we have always been few. But we acted "as if we were many." And what is this acting "as if we were many" if not a kind of rehearsing to be many?

During this rehearsal we may find that the relations between the few and the many can actually be quite different: to act "as if we were many" is not the same as speaking for the many, embodying the many in leading figures, or representing the interest of the many. Instead it is a way to act that bears witness to the abundance of people, beings, things, and ghosts, who are always already present in our action, enabling it, framing it, carrying it. **To act as if we were many performs an awareness of the many, who are actually there with us, though many of them, unfortunately, again couldn't make it here tonight.**

rehearsal assemblies – is this it?

by Esther Pilkington

phd program assemblies and participation

/esther pilkington

is a performance artist and part of the many at the PHD Program Assemblies and Participation: Urban Publics and Performance

1 Research projects by Margarita Tsomou, Inga Reimers, Martin Nachbar, Eva Plischke, Dorothea Griefsbach, Stefanie Lorey, Hannah Kowalski, Esther Pilkington, Sylvi Kretschmar.

2 The programme was founded in Hamburg as a co-operation between the HafenCity University, FUNDUS Theatre/Researchtheatre and K 3 / Centre for Choreography. For more information see: www.versammlung-und-teilhabe.de

Collectively chatting with activists from Syntagma square in an internet café in Hamburg. Having a "research dinner" while listening to lectures on sensual knowledge production. Going on silent walks. Exploring scenarios of the future with the Young Institute for Future Research. Watching films made by teenagers on monitors in buses and underground trains. Listening to stories told by elderly people, and to the sounds of their bodies. Coming together to make decisions, using light, chairs and doors to vote. Meeting seafarers at a Seaman's Club to play a game. Protesting and remembering the demolition of the Esso Houses in St Pauli with the Megaphone Choir.¹

Since 2012, we have devised, staged and tested many different kinds of assemblies as part of the artistic-academic postgraduate research programme "Assemblies and Participation: Urban Publics and Performance".² Some of these events attempted to invent or introduce new types of assemblies, others took well-established settings for assemblies as their starting points and modified them in a way that new hybrid forms could emerge. These different approaches share a belief that what is at stake in identifying and investigating these experimental formats is the question of participation. They constitute attempts at facilitating a broader participation in the artistic and/or academic research process, and, more generally, they try to explore the potentials and possibilities of democratic participation as such: how can people come together who usually do not meet, what does it mean to produce knowledge together, what about the assembly of people who cannot actually be in one place at a certain time, how can people communicate in groups, why it is so difficult to reach decisions, how can the voices of the assembly be made heard, how can they be amplified, and so on. In a way, they are wishes for assemblies, prognoses for assemblies and how they

should be, or maybe rehearsals for assemblies. The projects in the research programme do not only engage with the topic of assemblies and participation theoretically but also practically and performatively by producing different settings and strategies of assembling. Creating assemblies to investigate assemblies – not only do research subject and methods coincide here, the research to some degree produces its own objects. A question that has thus emerged in our discussions about these assemblies is: is this still a rehearsal/a test-run/a scenario/speculation, or is this already it? And: to what extent do these assemblies – which in many cases involve or incorporate people from very different backgrounds, not only artists and scientists but also so-called "experts of the everyday", children, seafarers, activists - feedback into socio-political contexts from which they emerge, to which they respond and with which they interact?

At this point, it is important that all these experiments with assemblies, even though they can be described as rehearsals, take place in public. Thus, they also convey certain ideas of how the public for this particular event should be composed and organised. In his book *Publics and Counterpublics*, literary scholar Michael Warner has shown how publics come into being "by virtue of being addressed": the address calls a certain public into being by envisioning it as if it already existed and at the same time the public constitutes itself by at least partially identifying with that address— it is both called into being and calls itself into being. What Warner describes for publics can also be said for the programme's experimental assemblies: they are rehearsals exactly because they are public, because their public nature gives them the character of something unfinished, imagined, of a try out, yet for the same reason they are more than a rehearsal, they manifest, they constitute themselves, they might already be it.

the right to assemble

by **Andreas Blechschmidt**

andreas blechschmidt

is a political activist. He is part of the many who run the social center *Rote Flora* in Hamburg and part of the many who prepare the session on materiality and decision for the assembly in September

Public protests in public spaces indicate the existence of political conflicts in societies. Such mass assemblies in public spaces were characteristic for the protests in the Arab states as well as for those against the neo-liberal cutbacks during the Euro crisis in e.g. Portugal, Spain, and Greece. But since these assemblies are part of political confrontations they are also subject to the respective interpretations of hegemony.

In its 1985 landmark "Brokdorf-Decision," the Federal Constitutional Court of Germany states that assemblies in public space provide a legitimate opportunity to influence the political process and to contribute to the development of a pluralistic society by the means of critique and by highlighting alternatives. The judges even note that public protests contain a form of undisciplined direct democracy able to prevent the political establishment from running cold in its busy routines.

So goes the theory, at least, and it still has to prove its worth in practice. Progressive ideals like these have been caricatured by a harshly deviating reality: Public protests are considered illegitimate (i.e. radical-leftist) challenges of the governing views, which are the views of those who actually govern. Accordingly, the common Hamburg police practice to discipline political protests and demonstrations in an authoritarian way remains widely unquestioned and the fundamental right to assemble publicly is utterly disrespected. This happened on December 21 last year when tens of thousands of people gathered for a registered demonstration to protest against the destruction of the so called Esso Houses, for the preservation of the social center Rote Flora as well as to demand the right to stay for the so called Lampedusa refugees. On this day, police made the demonstration dissolve by attacking it from the very beginning with water cannons, batons, and pepper spray.

The Hamburg police forces revealed their underlying understanding of the law in a special meeting of the Home Affairs Hamburg Senate Committee in January 2014. They stated that whenever leftist groups registered a public assembly the routine protocol was to first check whether there were any legal grounds to ban this assembly. In case this would not be possible they would check then for possible restrictive requirements. It hardly needs stating that the constitutional requirement for the police to assist organizers in exercising their fundamental right to freedom of assembly is little valued by the Hamburg police leadership.

Consequently, in recent years, the operational management of the Hamburg police has had to face dozens of court decisions declaring obligations and resolution orders that concerned assemblies illegal. But this has troubled neither politicians nor the Ministry of the Interior—the unlawful practices have remained without any consequences whatsoever for the responsible police commanders.

Therefore, the right to assemble as the right to proclaim differing and oppositional points of view needs further defending on the streets of Hamburg!

charter for europe

http://chartereuropa.net/wiki/charter_1.1

End of February/Beginning of March 2014, a hundred activists from various parts of Europe gathered in Madrid for the conference 'El nuevo rapto de Europa: deuda, guerra, revoluciones democráticas', to discuss the topics of Debt, War and Democratic Revolutions. While a number of panels debated questions of organization in times of institutional crises and new forms of participation and the common, five workshops provided the ground for drafting a Charter for Europe. The conference participants developed both the foundations and a preamble for the entire paper, taking account of the themes of democracy, debt, commons, governance and borders.

In the following months, a first version of this Charter emerged and circulated via mumbles, skype-conferences, wikis and diverse other virtual communication channels and spaces. This version is planned to proliferate and get distributed over the next few months to discuss and further develop it. One place to do this will be the conference THE ART OF BEING MANY. Rather than considering this proposition as a text for a future constitution, it is supposed to operate as an impulse for a potential constituent process in Europe — in a way, it is already a component of such a process.

preamble

1. We live in different parts of Europe with different historical, cultural and political backgrounds. We all continuously arrive in Europe. We share experiences of social movements and struggles, as well as experiences of creative political work among our collectivities, on municipal, national and transnational levels. We have witnessed and participated to the rise of multitudes across the world since 2011. In fact, the European ,we', we are talking about here, is unfinished, it is in the making, it is a performative process of coming together.
2. In the wake of the financial crisis we have experienced the violence of austerity, the attack on established social and labour rights, the spread of poverty and unemployment in many parts of Europe. We have faced a radical transformation of the EU which now has become clearly the expression and articulation of capitalist and financial command. At the same time we have lived through a profound displacement of national constitutional frameworks, we have learned that they do not provide any effective defence against the violence of the crisis, and on the contrary are responsible for the dreadful governance of the crisis. In the ruins of representative democracy, xenophobic chauvinisms, ethnic fundamentalisms, racisms, antifeminist and homophobic processes, new and old forms of fascism proliferate. We rise up against all this.

democracy

3. Representative democracy is in crisis. A crisis produced from above, by international financial markets, rating agencies, private think tanks and corporate media. But the credibility of democracy is also questioned from below. To talk about democracy is to (re)appropriate and to (re)invent a common sense of democracy. The guarantee of rights to the commons, of the transformation of citizenship, of equality, freedom, peace, autonomy and collectivity.
4. The 2011 uprisings across the world have rescued the living meanings of democracy. When we claim democracy in Europe we do not aim to restore the lusters of the old national constitutional democracies, but rather to invent the institutions that can catch up with the cry of „They don't represent us" spread by those uprisings. We want to claim back our belief in the self-government of the ,demos'. Hold on to this concept. Hold on to its reinvention. Hold on to its transformation.
5. We are experiencing a post-democratic turn in Europe. National constitutions are being used for the private interest when the Troika imposes budgetary decisions as well as social policies without democratic legitimation. Security, in a similar way, has become a central process in the emptying of significance and

charter for europe

performance of democratic institutions. Austerity and security are prefiguring a general transformation of the role of institutions on the global level, that is rendering democracy impossible.

- The constitution of the people is what is at stake for us in what we term democracy. How can we re-think a democratic self-governance in pluralist and participatory experimental ways? How can we learn from the democratic practices on the squares around the globe and think of them as re-invention of participatory processes in the assembly of the many, in order to give ourselves our own rules, laws and rights? How can this process be pluralist, federalist, based on networks and assemblages, movements and relations instead of identities, functions and roles? We envision here something beyond the juridical form of democracy bound to a national sovereign. We are opening up this concept, to spread democratic practices into the social, the everyday, into production and reproduction of life. The state needs to be under scrutiny, challenged by the diffusion of radical inclusion and the invention of democratic tools from below.
- Democracy in Europe means for us a two-sided process in which both „democracy“ and „Europe“ are intertwined, (re)appropriated and reinvented on the basis of the transnational social and political struggles of the many. Democracy as a practice. Democracy for Europe.

income_debt

- Nowadays, debt has become the main mechanism of both economic governance and capital accumulation in Europe. It works as a multilevel system throughout the whole society. We are witnessing how debt is affecting everyone. Workers, students, unemployed: no one is allowed to escape from the new debtfare.
- Debt and income are the two sides of the same coin, when the very reproduction of life is increasingly tied up with the access to credit, and hence with the rise of private indebtedness. This is the most distinctive contraposition of the crisis - a contraposition between private and anonymous debtors and the many indebted. Rating agencies, bankers and financial institutions do not represent us.
- The struggle for democracy is about fighting against the blackmailing of public and private indebtedness, hence against the policies of austerity dreadful to the many. The challenge is to transform this generalised private indebtedness towards the financial few, into a common indebtedness of the many towards the many. Money and finance need to get back in the hands of the democratic many. Basic income is the tool we can use for our common indebtedness of

the many towards the many. It is the answer to the recognition that wealth is something we produce in common.

commons_state

- Democracy as a process goes along with the constant collective production and use of the commons. This collective production of the commons is the only way to prevent poverty and war and to create social and cultural wealth. It is a matter not only of defending the public policies that sustain education, health, culture and social well-being, but also of moving forward towards new institutionalities of the commons as the means we produce to live together. To do that, the people of Europe have the right to organise themselves in the horizontal way of the many thereby creating and performing a new form of democracy.
- New institutions of the commons are continuously invented and created all over Europe to oppose the monopoly of decision of the State. Many of them are emerging in the struggles against the crisis, the austerity policies and their impact on the everyday life of the people of Europe. They are the first steps to reinvent a political and social space beyond the dichotomy of the public and the private sector that sustained the political and social space of modernity, in which the state on the one hand and the market on the other guaranteed the reproduction of power and profit. State and Market failed to create the well-being of the people of Europe. Institutions of Commons break with the logic of social reproduction that have to be borne by other commoners and the commons of the world. They create collective forms of the reproduction of life that are beyond the logic of capitalization.
- The institutions of the commons are based on collective decision making and they have to grow stronger in order to have an impact on the everyday life of society for replacing step by step the dysfunctional structures of the nation states. We have to democratise governance and national institutions of education, city development, art, research, social and physical well-being in order to provide the means for these new institutions of the commons to become real, to spread and to be sustainable. This can happen only at a transnational level, fighting the global logic of profit and understanding Europe as the space of a democratisation from below in the affirmation of the commons.

governing_governance

- The problem is not what form of state is the more appropriate for democracy, the question is how we want to be governed: Modern representative democracy is based on the idea that the many should be governed by being reduced to the few in terms of the

traditional party system. Distributed democracy instead relies on the possibility of the self-governing of the people regarding the main issues of our lives in common.

- The prerogatives of absolute command of a separate body of professional politicians and technicians cannot be the guarantee of a political process in the general interest. We have to get rid of the idea itself of the State as One: The power of the One as a master and manipulator of complexity is incompatible with the practice of democracy for the many by the many. Representative democracy has degenerated into a technocratic authoritarian system, a "government of the unchangeable reality", that is relying on the administration of fear and submission.
- Beyond a technocratic top-down federalism, we think a democracy of the commons has to rely both on the local dimension and the transeuropean one. Natural and artificial commons cannot be „nationalized“, neither they can be managed by an oligarchic technostructure. A democracy of the many can only be a distributed democracy; it can only be achieved by expanding open and bottom-up networks for the common interest. There can be no One-and-only Power over the commons, but just a system of distributed democratic counter-powers deciding on the basis their continuous interactions, conflicts and negotiations.

citizenship_borders

- A redefinition of citizenship in Europe must start from migrants' practices of crossing the borders and reclaiming citizenship beyond its nationalistic and exclusionary origins. The various manifestations of borders that we are challenging and fighting against from day to day reflect different situations: they are geographical and state borders, detention camps for migrants, electronic control systems, walls and barbed wires. But they are also internal controls and visa regimes. The borders of Europe now reach far beyond the geographical limits of the EU member-States, establishing an externalisation of migration controls.
- Physical borders are continuously contested and reshaped by the movement of those who cross and are being crossed by them. Various practices and routes bring people to enter, leave and re-enter the space of Europe. However it is also the multiple movements of the internal migrants, which express and respond to the deepening disparities and inequalities in Europe. These practices are central in contesting what is Europe today and in foreseeing what Europe may be tomorrow.
- Challenging citizenship in Europe is perceiving it 'from the border' itself - we imagine and practice an open, ongoing and inclusive citizenship, disconnected from the place of birth and the place of

departure, independent from permanent or temporary residency in one place, not subdued to labour condition and instead grounded on a shared, open and democratic social space.

- We need to constantly question any position of privilege that downplays demands for 'inclusion', however this term may be contested, of anyone who experiences material constraints and differential treatment to access social rights and freedoms. Europe needs to be a project of peace, not for the security of its own borders but for the safety of economic, social and political rights. The Charter for Europe is an open process
- We want to initiate a different kind of constituent process on the basis of social and political struggles across the European space, a process towards a radical political and economic change of Europe focusing on the safeguarding of life, dignity and democracy. It is a contribution to the production and creation of the commons, a process of democratic regeneration in which people are protagonists of their own lives. In the squares and the networks we have learned something simple that has changed forever our way of inhabiting the world. We have learned what 'we' can achieve together. We invite people across and beyond Europe to join us, to contribute to this charter, to make it live in struggles, imagination, and constituent practices.

tear gas democracy*

by Ivan Casasola aka Punk Orgy

ivan casasaola aka punk orgy

hier müsste noch die Kurzbiografie oder so hin ...

performance

- | An electric grill will be on a table. On it hot peppers will be placed and left burning: the smoke will be a natural tear gas.
- | Small balls will be tossed to the participants (balls symbolize CS gas grenades).
- | All participants must wear glasses and surgical cloth masks, and will be grouped into teams of 4 people: one will have a bucket, another will have protection gloves to collect the balls that will be put into the bucket, another will hold a shield that will protect, the other one will watch out and give instructions.
- | Participants must breathe slowly to avoid swallowing chili smoke and should remain calm despite working quickly.

The use of tear gas in combat is nothing new; in fact, Spartans took advantage of sulfur gas as a military resource in the V century A.D. Contemporary history indicates that this irritant was used during World War I, when the French army included in its arsenal, 26 mm grenades with tear gas.

These grenades and spray versions, became a common resource to dissolve public demonstrations in Latin America in the sixties, and are still the quintessential tool against revolts in the streets, even though tens of years of scientific research have shown that it is a poison that affects the health of human beings.

About its harmful effects, a 1999 study called "Health Hazards of Pepper Spray" by Dr. Gregory Smith of the University of North Carolina, found that in the 90's, 70 persons deaths, under police custody, were related with the use of pepper spray. The pepper spray has the same ingredients as the tabasco sauce, but at much higher concentrations.

The tear gas or CS gas is mainly made of chili for its high content in capsaicin, which irritates mucous membranes and respiratory tract, and is used by state forces to disperse public demonstrations, protests and riots. Being long exposed to this gas can cause lung, heart and liver damage.

what are peppers (chili)?

The chili (from Nahuatl word "chilli"), also called aji in South America and pepper in Spain, refers to the immature, mature or dried fruits of a few species.

The fruit of most varieties of hot peppers contain high percentages of capsaicin (8-methyl-N-vanillyl-6-monenamida, C18H-27NO3) and related compounds, collectively called capsicoides.

The capsicoides bind to pain receptors in the mouth and throat that are responsible for the sensation of heat. These receptors send a message to the brain that something hot is being consumed.

Chili also has other cultural purposes other

than food - as a medicine used by healers and shamans to treat coughs, tooth infections, and cultural diseases such as "evil eye". It is believed that the smell of burning chilli scares the impure beings: when a living being is exposed to this smoke, it gets purified.

To develop this performance I combined my experiences as an activist - fighting in public confrontations - with my college education in gastronomy that introduced me to the work with chilis in the traditional Mexican cuisine.

Many people, invaded by fear of tear gas, go in shock hurting themselves by not acting in an appropriate manner: crying and running scared; something normal: humans fear what they do not know.

I propose a performance in which activists come into contact with smoke of peppers so they can experience a similar dynamic to a police brutality confrontation, asking participants to face their fears. I also seek to have a positive impact in the minds of the participants, using the magical and healing side of chilis. Prehispanic shamans used chili for spiritual cleaning and healing, which drives away evil spirits. I'll do the same and try to achieve a magical spiritual healing upon the participants.

* tear gas democracy is a 35-minute-performance presented at the assembly *the art of being many*

the art of being many*

In the end of September 2014 artists, activists, researchers, and participants from all over Europe and beyond will gather in Hamburg for an **assembly** of assemblies. Sharing experiences from real-democracy-movements and artistic experimentation they want to explore new ways of coming together: collective insights into the materiality, the timing, the agenda, the desires and the catastrophes of being many. Many of us will meet for the first time, but we all have something in common: We witnessed moments of assembling which made the word 'democracy' sound important again. The square-squattings and neighbourhood-assemblies of the real-democracy-movement may not have brought the political changes we hoped for. But they have been the catalyst for a new art of being many.

* the following four pages show the program of *the art of being many* _ take it out, if you want to ...



At Kampnagel Internationale Kulturfabrik, geheimagentur, WAV and other artists from Gängeviertel Hamburg, Freifunk, Showcase Beat le Mot and the PHD-Program 'Assemblies and Participation' will build an assembly hall and a camp to host the many. Here, the assembly will become a laboratory of itself: a collective of friends and strangers with many voices and bodies including those of ghosts and things. Before the public assembly starts about 120 people will meet in groups in order to focus on the art of being many from different angles. Together, they will prepare an assembly for about 400 people which is going to last for two days from noon to midnight. In a second step, the assembly hall will be opened to the public. As an assembly of assemblies the conference is not meant to be a series of individual presentations. It is meant to focus on what can be done together. There is no audience, no performers, only those, who participate in the assembly for these two days. Just two days. Not the most important days in the history of anything or the break-through of a new aesthetics. No. We might just be sad together – remembering lost battles. We might be very tired. But we will try to have an assembly just the way we like, for two days or for as long as it takes.

DAY I

noon to midnight

materiality and decision

At the beginning of the assembly, we will put the materiality of the meeting to the test. Collectives from art and activism like The Lab of Insurrectionary Imagination, *The Materials Library*, *geheimagentur*, *Sweet and Tender Collaborations* and others will examine the material makeup of collective decision-making. What media, what materials do we need in order to decide as many? If and how we decide collectively will influence the character of a meeting: consensus or majority? Hierarchical or horizontal? Analog or digital? Soft or loud? By lot or oracle? Intoxicated or sober? By applause-o-meter or by differing light moods? Shared decisions are necessary for joint actions. We will gather our knowledge about the different modes of collective decision-making. What is going to be decided by this assembly – and how?

timing and breaks

Timing is crucial for assemblies – for the structure of the assembly itself, but also for its formation: When do we get together? How do we organise our time? Who gets to speak when? What events will trigger our getting together? Many assemblies are characterized by the feeling of both urgency and boredom. Is there a way out of this predicament? And can we leave the norm-time-regime behind? In this session, *Macao*, *Everybody's*, *theatre of research*, *random people*, *Turbo Pascal* and others will rehearse, present and test different strategies of measuring, organizing and interrupting the time of the assembly. Can we predict what will happen? Are we ready? Are we able to plan ahead? Or has it already started?

blockade and panic

In this session, participants from international social movements will report about strategies and experiences from their struggles in public

spaces. What is the possible shift in power relations between police forces and protesters if the assembly turns into a collective experience of panic and blockade? A polyphonic discussion with the use of open-mic-techniques. With protagonists from *Enmedio* Barcelona, from Syntagma Square in Athens in 2011, Placa del Sol in Madrid, Tahrir Square and Gezi Parc.

vogue and voodoo

How do the trance-like states come about that are sometimes experienced when coming together as many? By what rituals are they produced and/or abused? In this session *Grupo de Choque* from Mexico City, *Liebe Bar*, *Kick Ass Queerreeké*, *Tätärä*, *SOMAL 21*, *Uschi Geller Experience* and others want to employ our pop-cultural imagination to examine techniques of sampling and appropriation that lead to enhanced states of self-presentation ("vogue") or self-loss/transcendence ("voodoo"). The rituals, rhythms, music, dances and stimulants that make up the art of being many are to be explored, exchanged, and unleashed as well as exorcized. While drifting we will listen to some midnight-theory: Every assembly contains elements of ritual: dress codes, seating arrangements, customary gestures constituting and transgressing thresholds, etc. Who's speaking in whose name and why?

DAY II

noon to midnight

sound, systems and voices

How is public space constructed by voices, sounds and soundsystems? How are temporary collectives produced acoustically? How are imaginations of political community linked to sound machines and rhetorical techniques? For the session on sound, systems and voices *LIGNA*, *Mobile Akademie*, *Megafonchor*, *metroZones*, *Magical Flying Lovelab*, *The Temporary Radio* and others will meet to work together on questions of echo and resonance. We want to exchange stories and experiences, tools and techniques dealing with sound in public assemblies. In this session the art of being many is all about hybrids of humans and technical devices like radios, public address systems, headphones and speakers.

affects and documents

The panel will assemble documentary image-production and -techniques of transna-

tional video collectives and diverse social movements. The specific narratives and struggles of the places and documents affecting each other within a double screen method. What affects are transported by the video image and the archive of political movements and how do they become protagonists of the assembly? With activists, archivists and producers from Gezi parc, anti-miners-movement *SOS Halkidiki*, Syntagma, Tahrir Square and *PAH* (the ones affected by the mortgage) from Barcelona we discuss strategies of performance and image production driven and re-scripted by the social movements. Transnational negotiations between collective practice are becoming possible. Potential political alliance visible. Lines of spaces of memory entangled. A real-time experiment to construct a room of possibilities by image streams and voices.

real fictions

To cooperate in new fashions often feels as if one is engaging in some kind of real fiction: just made up but yet entirely true. Maybe 'the many' themselves are such a real fiction, too. When do we feel like 'we are many'? Friends from *La Fundación de los Communes* will talk about the horizontal technopolitics of the many and analyze the digital communication of our assembly. Then we are going to work on shared future projects which, for now at least, look like real fictions: a constituent assembly process for a Europe from below, a network of alternative currencies for the commons, a fleet to reconnect from the side of the sea, a network of squatted theatres and factories. *Baldio Habitado*, *Observatorio* and many more collectives will join in. Meanwhile, graphic protocols and sketches from our assembly will be presented and the *Fablab-Bus* from the Netherlands will provide ways and means to produce agitprop material of all shapes and sizes. The assembly might end with a series of pep talks from the many to the many about the many. Representatives of *Teatro Valle Rome* and *Embros Theatre Athens* will start. You are most welcome to join in.

the art of being many is a project by geheimagentur. It is also an experiment in collective curating.

some of the many (individual names, not contained in collectives and movements mentioned, in the text): Andreas Blechschmidt, Vica Rogers, Serhat Karakayali, Vassilis Tsianos, Hagar Groetke, Kai van Eikels, Katrin Trüstedt, Martin Jörg Schäfer, Brett Scott, Veda Popovic, Daniel Kulla, Sophie Domenz, Ana Vujanovic, Robin Celikates, Giullia Palladini, Ramon Reichert, Raul Zelik, Katja Diefenbach, Gabriele Klein, Lena Ziyai, Enrique Flores, Yara Haskiel, Margarita Tsomou, Angela Melitopoulos, Katharina Duve tbc.

in cooperation with

Assemblies and Participation. Urban Publics and Performative Arts. PHD Program. Kampnagel Internationale Kulturfabrik

registration

To register for the art of being many will get you a ticket. It will not make you an audience-member, but a participant in the assembly. Tickets are only available for the whole two-day-assembly. A normal ticket for the two days is available for 20 Euro. As we do not want to exclude anyone for financial reasons you can also get a ticket for 10 Euro (no proof needed). This works, if those, who can afford it, pay 30 Euro and thereby become sponsors for the others. Please do! Before the assembly starts, we would like to send more information to all participants, to give everyone the opportunity to prepare and contribute. Therefore please leave your email-contact, when asked in the registration process. Please register at: www.kampnagel.de

more information

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www.geheimagentur.net
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 Professur für Neuere deutsche Literatur/Theaterforschung, Universität Hamburg

some of the many (individual names not contained in collectives) **the art of being many** materiality, & decision geheimagentur, the materials library, sweet and tender collaborations, the lab of insurrectionary imagination, gängeviertel, hamburg ... **timing & breaks** theatre of research, everybodys, t-rich, macao, random people, turbo pascal ... **blockade & panic** with protagonists from gezi park, syntagma, plaza del sol, tahir square ... **vogue & voodoo** theatre of research, everybodys, t-rich, macao, random people, turbo pascal ... **sound, system & voices** ligna, the temporary radio, the magical flying love-lab, mobile akademie, megafonchor, metroZones ... **affects & documents** sos halkidiki, pah, enmedio, with protagonists from gezi park, syntagma, tahir square ... **real fictions** fablab-bus, la fundación de los communes, baldio habitado, teatro valle rome, observatorio, embros theatre athens ... **constructors** showcase beat le mot, freifunk, we are visual, geheimagentur, kampnagel internationale kulturfabrik, zunderbüchse, phd-program assemblies and participation ... **and many more** arteleaks, fack, die koalition der freien, baldio, here to stay - lampedusa in hamburg, jeux sans frontières, initiative esso häuser, universität der nachbarschaften, s.a.l.e.-docks, your collective, strangers, fare dodgers ...

kampnagel and the art of being many

by Amelie Deuffhardt

amelie deuffhardt

is part of the many who run the Kampnagel Internationale Kulturfabrik

What happens when activists and artists after having encountered democratic movements at different places come together for four days to exchange ideas? When diverse people experienced in collective structures share their thoughts at a real place? Without a fixed schedule in an open process? Is it possible to curate participatory and non-hierarchically? Which action strategies can be developed in such a gathering?

The political revolts of the last years in the Arabic and Western World raise the question what democracy means today. With *the art of being many*, Kampnagel approaches this question by creating a laboratory: a space of open assemblage beyond traditional logics of representation—a space for exchanging, sharing, acting.

The terrain Kampnagel, a shut-down crane factory, was conquered by artists in 1982, at first in so-called “occupancy rehearsals.” The first protagonists were free theater groups that had been founded in the 70s to experiment with new forms of expression. These groups were founded as a reaction of young theater makers to the student movement: exit from the institutions, creation of new contents, politicization of the theater—that was their creed. The traditional theater space with its representational function and the institutional structures of the city theater were refused. Dissolution of traditional hierarchies, creation of other forms of community and basic democratic decision-making were central visions. Kampnagel was rescued from eventual demolition in a paradigmatic fight led by artists, political activists as well as citizens. It was established and then secured for the long term over a process of years and years. Today, more than 30 years later, Kampnagel is indeed a municipal “GmbH,” but has re-

mained a space that is open for the international and the city’s independent art scene.

Kampnagel has started its reorientation in September 2007 referring to its historical point of departure with the project *Besetzungssorgie*. Today, Kampnagel intervenes programmatically in current discourses about the city, the metropolis and public space. It also contributes to discussions about political and global questions. The transgression of spheres of influence and artistic interventions at neuralgic places of the city have been part of the programmatic objectives from the beginning. By now, diverse actors use Kampnagel as a discursive platform. Formats that are particularly fitting incorporate artists, academics, activists, the audience or a city astutely into the broader program. The *Black Markets* by Hannah Hurtzig, the *Treffen Total*, a platform for artistic exchange by *Sweet & Tender Collaborations*, or Matthias von Hartz’s *Orchestra Charaoko* putting entire halls into ecstasies should be noted in this context. ... as should the project *the art of being many* that, for four days will put 400 people in a many-voiced dialogue as a lively installation. **A virulent laboratory of accomplices will emerge as a spatial and discursive compression of a process that will further spread out. It will have an impact – not only on Kampnagel but also on Hamburg.**

c.t.

by Kai van Eikels

kai van eikels

is a philosopher and part of the many who are preparing the session on timing and breaks for the assembly in September

One obvious problem with time on occasion of an assembly is that while I never seem to get enough time to voice my opinions, express my thoughts, comment on what others have said, the entire event takes too much time. A crisp meeting, which leaves us with some energy for further action, demands a tight schedule, to be supervised with authority. Granting everybody the desired extra time results in an even more monstrous duration.

The assemblies I have attended so far were nominally organized according to the former principle, but often failed to implement it. Recently I discovered one that follows the latter: the Afghan Loya Jirga. Much to the chagrin of UN diplomats, this Grand Assembly of tribe chiefs knows no previously agreed-on time limit. It lasts as long as it requires the attendees to settle matters. The feeling during discussions therefore will not be one of urgency, of a time pressure supposed to ass-kick the process, but one of generosity. Although time to talk cannot be infinite (we'll all have to die, most of us have others to come home to), the act of giving each other a generous amount of time as a sort of welcome present establishes an atmosphere quite unlike a scheduled convention whose every second attests to scarcity determining time's value.

Bertolt Brecht's play *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* starts with a gathering of farmers conflicting over a valley: while a group of elders have been using the green meadows to produce small amounts of high quality goat cheese, a younger, progressive-minded group are about to establish an efficient industrial system of agricultural production. A professional facilitator has traveled to the countryside for the meeting. Being from the city, he sympathizes with the progressives, and the elders too are aware, and ready to respect, that the decision will ultimately be in favor of industrialization. The facilitator is eager to get done with the affair and embark on his return trip as soon as possible. Still, after a meal, the members of the progressive fraction who host the gathering surprise him with a theater performance that employs "the old masks." The play that, they vaguely say, "has to do with our question" takes three

hours or more to perform. In fact, Brecht's script of this play within the play is almost absurdly pompous, with many changes of scenery, dozens of extras – very unusual for the notoriously economic dramatist.

The Loya Jirga and *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* can teach us two things about the time of assembling. First, giving time is the munus, the tax that must be paid for entertaining a temporal community. Yet only a rich gift will have the effect of enriching the collective, of switching its default setting on 'affluence,' which converts conversation into a luxury, elevating it above the necessary.

Any assembly is also an attempt to get back the political freedom of being free to decide from the socio-economic business of having to decide.

We won't achieve that by simply ignoring the necessities, and neither will nostalgic fantasies of recovering the pre-modern slow prove helpful. However, we may put on the old masks and smuggle an element of extravagance into the modern schedule. Every assembly needs one element that exceeds the limited economy of time, turning its shortness inside out, as it were.

Second, time is involved in making decisions not only insofar as debate and ballot will consume the time(s) of participant's lives. Time's passing also has a hand in the deciding. Time is never neutral in respect to political decision, even though its inclination mostly won't be as patent as Brecht's notion of progress suggests. The organization of an assembly should acknowledge this: a good way of organizing deciding will have a critical-affirmative sense of what will happen anyway (since it already is happening), and of how the collective dynamics can be at ease with this penchant of time.

the many deciding

by Tommy Noonan

tommy noonan

is a performance artist. He is part of the many who founded the international artist network Sweet and Tender Collaborations and part of the many who prepare the session on materiality and decision for the assembly in September

Sweet & Tender Collaborations is an artist-driven initiative and an artistic project in constant development. It began as a grass-roots initiative from a group of participants in the 2006 DanceWEB program at ImPulsTanz Festival in Vienna. The initiative focuses on self-organization of artistic processes and production and emphasizes collaborative forms of working. Apart from individually produced projects, Sweet and Tender Collaborations exists as a shared practice of physical encounters. S&T meetings are celebrating the art of being many by making the process of deciding as important as the decision itself.

These days, the most common question about Sweet and Tender Collaborations is: „Does Sweet and Tender Collaborations still exist?“ This is a difficult question to answer, simply because it is difficult to define the existence of Sweet and Tender Collaborations in the first place. It has no official structure, no base of operation, no leadership, no fixed membership and no definite rules to govern its actions. Normally, I answer: „I don't know“, which is also how I answer people who ask me if I am part of Sweet and Tender Collaborations.

I can say this: starting in 2007, around 30 performance-related artists from many countries began to assemble periodically, in larger and smaller groups, sometimes in formally produced environments, often in sporadic informal gatherings. The numbers swelled to over 50 in one gathering, 10 in another, again 35 in another. We met in France, Portugal, Switzerland, Norway, Mexico, Germany, Holland, Belgium, Spain,

the UK and other places. We had no hierarchy, no structure, no formal agreement or procedure and most importantly, no single shared purpose (though we were unified by many common goals and desires, such as learning from one another, having space and time to experiment and share information, tools and skills).

We can best be described as an emergent and fluid community that only exists because enough of us have used a common name to describe a loosely formed and ever-changing collection of individuals who believe in the sharing of resources and knowledge, and the notion that we can all benefit from gathering together. It is a radically simple idea, which many artists, businesspeople, activists and citizens have been utilizing ever since the internet has dramatically dropped transaction and communication costs, and travel has become more affordable in the last decade.

the many deciding by tommy noonan

Of course, emergent, collective, and swarm behavior are all related phenomena which have received great attention in recent years. Sweet and Tender Collaborations has been one of many interconnected communities that can be described as such, its emergent nature characterized by a structure of decentralized control and a constantly shifting form, determined by multiple interactions between individuals. In other words, no one in charge and no map.

It is notable that Sweet and Tender, unlike virtual communities, is based in embodied meetings and relationships which exist in built space(s); also, it has no defined goal or reason for existence, other than the aggregate sum of the individual goals held by its various participants. And yet Sweet and Tender gatherings have represented much more than the meaningless actions of flash mobs. They have repeatedly concerned themselves with the process of decision-making – not only to make decisions themselves, but to decide how to make decisions together, both in physical and in virtual space.

In making decisions, we were always uninterested in Democracy, and generally incapable at consensus-based agreement, due to our large numbers, our unbridgeable differences, or to the porous nature of our ‚membership‘. Still somehow, the overall project continued. An organic decision-making process evolved through repeated meetings; decisions were not made, they were simply apparent in the movement of the group. Over time, we let go of agreement as a requisite part of our decision-making process (though some of us still fought vehemently at times). Decisions

were successfully reached less through conversation as they were through a continuous back-and-forth between action and group reflection. Reflection and discussion informed action; action propelled the need for reflection and discussion. Many of us felt an appreciation for the ‚group‘ as well as a sense of personal gain through our involvement, and therefore we continued to subscribe ourselves to the common we of Sweet and Tender.

Yet this has never been a fully functional process. It has been, at best, a tendency that emerged at times as the network continued to meet. Each meeting was a different group with a different character – yet a kind of evolution was apparent over time; there was a shift from goal-related decisions to process-oriented ones that were supported by the set of criteria which defined our gatherings: horizontal exchange, sharing and common evolution. Rather than mobilizing large groups towards a specific end, our project has been about mobilizing large groups towards articulating in the void of the unknown.

This had required several things of those individuals: notably, engaging with the tension between the impulse to affect the direction of the group and acceptance of its utterly uncontrollable nature. The tension between these two modes of participation is what drives the emergent actions and decisions of the group as it hurdles forward, alternating between action and reflection.

And so what is the benefit of a group of people who do not agree, have no goal and no idea where they are going? Though we are dealing with the art of the many, the art of the many is still for the benefit of each

individual. We as individuals utilize one another as resources for our own needs, and in so doing, we develop a way to support and grow our communities, based on a foundation of sustainable collaboration; the group is not the point, it is the result of a shared principle of individual action.

With Sweet and Tender, the absence of agreement reflects the absence of a decisive goal, which in turn reflects the absence of competition for resources or political power. This is of course not how our political, economic and social institutions function in most parts of the industrialized world; and that is exactly why it is so important to carve out temporary enclaves like our meetings sometimes do, wherein communities and groups may function together under alternative models for a period of time. To momentarily step out of our constructed social and political realities, and to experience the confrontation between Self and Other through a process-oriented emergent community, allows a moment to air the possibility of other realities. It can also allow us to better access the resources and information we each require.

art /// be(com)ing /// many

by Federica Giardini

federica giardini

is a philosopher. She is part of the many who squatted the Teatro Valle in Rome and part of the many who prepare the session on real fictions for the assembly in September

The inhabitants of contemporary West are either individuals or a collective profile traced by statistics and classification or the result of a reactive urge for local and territorialized identities.

Being many is a counter-conduct, is entering another field of passions and relations.

As individuals we are scattered around, either depressed or competitive or resigned and isolated. But something is already at hand, the urge, or even a need. And, from the very beginning it is transindividual.

Austerity EU policies have effected a material common sense with respect to what could have appeared as a sort of political ideal. There is a new awareness: water, education, housing, culture – these are what we need for sure. No persuasion, no higher skill in analysis, just a motion and an urge.

Thus, something transindividual is already at hand in our techno-cognitive-bodies, and only on an additional level this can be ideologically separated in individuals, related to each other through contracts and cost-benefit computation. And the more the economical and juridical effects of neoliberalism expand, the less its art of splitting the many into individuals succeeds.

If transindividuality is the trigger, being many is a becoming. Urge has to shape into an action. Occupying a Theatre in Rome, for instance. Or an abandoned skyscraper in Milan. As soon as the news spreads hundreds arrive, joyful. To escape from individuality has joyful effects.

Political action reveals to be an art, for any

material – bodies are involved and gestures, the space inside-outside, the city – they are all significant. Politics as a material subversion of the dominant narratives.

In action, in a starting action – occupying, re-owning, restituting – individuals become many as a differentiated and, yet, connected subject. Action literally takes place. Space is redefined, new habits come out of alternative forms of relating, inhabiting, producing. Art is in the awareness that each single act is both labor and emotional, discursive, relational capabilities. Rather than production, the core is now social reproduction.

When the result of an action becomes a new reality, the art of being many is an art of remaining. There is no division of labor, but rather rules that progressively take shape, as days go by, as action becomes a process. The many start to feel familiar, familiarity risks to transform the many in a community identified by spatial and yet invisible borders.

The antidote: the art of welcoming, the art of the first words addressed to the newcomer, the art of dissemination by engendering new connections.

the labor and leisure of performing the many

Martin Jörg Schäfer

martin jörg schäfer

is a cultural theorist and part of the many who prepare the session on vogue and voodoo and the session on real fictions for the assembly in September

The current Real Democracy Movements have often been perceived as a reenactment of the political assembly on the ancient Greek agora. Equating democracy with gathering shifts two sets of metaphors associated with “modern” politics: that of labor and that of theater. On the square, the work and labor of democracy has to be undertaken by each and everybody. One of the catchphrases of the “Real Democracy” movements pinpoints their anti-representational ambition: “direct” democracy instead of a delegation of power while those who delegate just watch and listen to those who speak and act for them. In the 18th and 19th century, the bourgeois “representative” theater came to stand for the gathering public as a whole. The critique of the leisurely gaze passively taking in what is presented has long been a starting point for political theory from Rousseau to Rancière. It has also been at the heart of many theatrical practices aiming at the transformation of the traditional performers/spectators-relationship. The audience is to be activated, i.e. to be pulled out of some poisonous stupor dreaded as the death of political life from Plato to the *The Matrix*. Would the dawn of a democracy as we have not come to know it yet mean the end of a certain kind of theatrical leisure as well as political laziness, then?

There is a certain arbitrary character to the attribution of “labor,” “work,” or “leisure” to any given action. My labor may be your leisure depending on personal tastes, cultural codes and potential wages involved. In Hannah Arendt’s famous theory of Attic politics, women and slaves keep busy with the labors of daily life while the “free men” leisurely stage the play of democracy. Freed from other duties they appear to each other, in Arendt’s words, on a “perpetual stage on which there are only entrances.” Without preexisting procedures and representative power, these men put democracy in action. Writing in the 1950s and 60s Arendt finds such allegedly spontaneous power of self-organization in the “local councils” of every political movement since the American Revolution. But she neither elaborates on what has happened to the labor aspects of daily life when these activists aren’t

slaveholders any longer—nor on the theater aspects of democracy.

Arendt’s approach is constantly evoked when talking about the events on the various squares since 2010. But it needs to be readjusted with regard to the theater of politics as to its labor and leisure: 1.) The “spontaneous” self-organization mainly consisted of keeping the camp afloat: Who’s to provide food and how? Who’s to cook? How to camp on the square? What about lavatories? These labors weren’t on the outside of democracy but proved to be their center. 2.) When entering the Arendtian stage the procedures and implicit scripts governing daily life weren’t left behind. Power relations were addressed; procedures were adopted or invented. The theatrical elements of ritual governing assemblies (dress codes, seating arrangements etc.) became part of the process. Instead of staging “freedom” or other political phantasms the theatrical procedures themselves were put on. 3.) Assembling on the squares was an “endurance performance” for everyone involved whether leisurely hanging out or toiling through time. **Taking part in an assembly means going idle over long periods of time. But just going along with the flow can mean becoming part of the very “working” of the assembly. At times, it can even transform into a leisurely festive mode of gathering, e.g. shared states of intoxication brought about by cigarettes, alcohol, drugs, oxygen or the lack of it.** Like democracy it is always in danger of tilting over into a pervasive foul or even dangerous mood. In such democracy (just like in current capitalism), the distinction between labor and leisure might lose its meaning. But the ways both are performed when gathering remain crucial.

how to do sovereignty without people? materialising experience and politics in the time fo crisis

Vassilis S. Tsianos & Dimitris Papadopoulos

vassilis tsianos

is a political scientist and part of the many who initiated the project *the art of being many*

dimitris papadopoulos

is a sociologis and part of the many who are invited

1 Hier fehlt die Erläuterung der Fußnote!!!

The emergence of modern political sovereignty is founded not on a subjugated, working, tormented, reproductive, or disciplined body but on a stolen body. The establishment of sovereignty through the punishment, control, productivity, and disciplinization of the body is a recurrent theme of classic political and social theory: Hobbes’s genesis of Leviathan, Marx’s primary accumulation, Polanyi’s great transformation, Foucault’s great confinement. These are the stories told from the perspective of dominant power: how power gets inscribed onto the body, how the order of power absorbs the body and renders it fertile, creative, manageable, profitable, and governable. In *The Life of Romulus*, Plutarch tells the story in a different way. The myth and birth of Roman power starts with the abduction of the Sabine women.¹ By means of subterfuge, Romulus kidnapped the women of the Sabine tribe so that the future growth of Rome’s population could be assured. In its very first moment, the myth of modern political sovereignty is founded not on the issue of the productive transformation of the body under its power but on the theft of bodies. The life of power is a primordial result not of a capacity to transform the body into an available thing but of its disposition over life. The life of power is parasitic. It devours something it never owns. The stolen bodies are never completely absorbed into the order of power.

The magic formula of social transformation that we attempt to grapple with is that the social changes not when people resist, respond or react but when they craft new situations, new worlds, new ecologies of existence. Resistance is only one of the things that sparks people’s creative action – think of fantasy, melancholy, desire, boredom etc. **Moreover, acting sometimes produces a surplus which does not just respond to oppression but creates a new occasion, an excess that is not reducible to what existed before.** The relation between social movements and power that played out in the 20th century can be depicted as an aleatoric succession of encounters. In the case of the relation of capital and labour for example, we can see that in every one of these encounters labour attempted to escape its own conditions of existence and exploitation, and this es-

cape kept transforming the tissue of everyday life itself. It is like a Beckett play – the actors coexist on the stage and each actor’s deeds are the precondition for the actions of the other, but they never directly address each other or engage in systematic dialogue, they simply act and change the other through the material effects of their doings. We name this as imperceptible politics: politics that are imperceptible firstly because we are not trained to perceive them as ‘proper’ politics and, secondly, because they create an excess that cannot be addressed in the existing system of political representation. But these politics are so powerful that they change the very conditions of a certain situation and the very conditions of existence of the participating actors.

Representations do not exist independently of the material world which they supposedly re-present. So politics is not about representations but constructing the world. This work of construction can be done through concepts, affects, ideas. But these are not just outside matter – they belong to it, they are made of the same stuff. Concepts, affects, ideas are material, just as a cell, a neuron, tissue, water or soil is material. Radical politics are possible only when they are anchored in the flow of experience between people and between people and things. In other words, politics is a practice which materialises in the everyday life of people and in their relations with each other and the world. Continuous experience works without being mediated by some form of representation but through constantly being in a process of materialising.

In respect to the 2011 Tunisian revolution, Asef Bayat talks of ‘social non-movements’, non-movements because for years they were sustained and nurtured silently through the continuous experiences of people, things and places. It is these non-movements that when they were confronted with the brutality of the state, they crafted a non-identitarian collectivity of insurrection. But long before the eruption of the insurrection they had already answered the question of ‘What is to be done?’ simply by silently crafting new political ecologies, by creating new enchanted worlds.

from 'people' to 'many' and maybe back? magic.

Ilias Marmaras

Ilias marmaras

is a media artist and part of the many who squatted the Syn-tagma Square in Athens in 2011. He is also part of the many who made the website www.the-art-of-being-many.net

In May 2011, a description of the so-called “phenomenon of squares” in a mainstream Greek newspaper went like this: “It was a mosaic of ages, wages, and demands. A multitude that was belonging everywhere and nowhere.” The journalist went further; he tried to categorize this multitude. First: the newlyweds. Practically this category included just a couple that “celebrated their wedding with a kiss in the square among the indignados.” Then: the activists defined as “these individuals” that came at the square holding their bicycles instead of holding the Greek flag like others. Then arrived: the gadget geeks accepting invitations from “friends” in social media. Their goal being “to upload everything that happens.” Then: the unemployed described “as those that hold one or two degrees but no job.” Finally came the veterans, experienced syndicalists and members of parties, some “standing embarrassed” in front of the motley multitude, while some others feeling “pleasantly surprised by seeing colleagues that had never participated in protests in the past now standing in front of the parliament.”

the many and the others

Such a description was an attempt to give a representation of the “many” gathered on the square for those who were not there (yet?). It is true that most of those gathered on the square had no prior political experience. They were not organized, at least not in the way that people used to be organized in the past. Most of them were sharing a common belief, a common feeling against parliamentarianism (and some against the parliament building itself).

The refusal of the many on the square to select representatives embarrassed state politicians because it was inverting the usual practices of power: practices that are based on the aspersions of the leaders and, as a matter of consequence, the breakdown of the movement. It is characteristic that mainstream media used a psychiatric term to describe the anti-representative will of the many by calling it “depersonalization.”

In an interview with Alexei Penzin, Paolo Vir-

no talks about the relations between the I and the many, referring to the theory of Lev S. Vygotskij. He states that initially there is a “we,” but this “we” is not equivalent to the sum of many well defined “I’s.” On the contrary, the mind of the individual is the result of a process of differentiation: “The real movement of the development process of the child’s thought is accomplished not from the individual to the socialized but from the social to the individual. Gradually the child acquires the collective ‘we’ that can be defined as an intersubjectual dimension turning it into an intrapsychical reality: something intimate, personal, and unique. However, this introversion of the intersubjectual dimension, this singularization of the ‘primordial us,’ does not come to a conclusion during childhood: it always repeats itself during adulthood.”

Can the manifestation of the Many on the square be interpreted before this background? Was there an upcoming desire to form new institutions of communication – based on a different relation between the I and the Us not constituting a People anymore? Was this the beginning of a new form of life? Maybe the answer is again in Virno’s claim: “For the people the One is a promise, for the many it is a premise.” In any case at the square, consciously or not, the many performed rituals for future institutions. But these peaceful rituals didn’t last long.

violence as ritual

Violent clashes during protests are nothing new. Going back in time, protests of workers’ syndicates, students etc. were turning violent for several reasons. But all of these protests were protests of the people.

Therefore what the occurrence of violence did to the many on the square was new in terms

of subjectivity. When the Greek riot police decided to fully raid the square using thousands of canisters of tear gas the many faced the emergence of the ‘no subject.’ What since then was loosely called “riots” encircled the movement of the square, punctured it, penetrated it and produced deviations from the practices of the movement so far. Violence was practiced as a ritual.

Who was this emerging no-subject that practiced violence as a ritual? In 2011 we were already in the middle of the crisis and the number of the unemployed especially among the youth was already high and still increasing. Precarity produced exclusion. For thousands of young people mostly belonging to the lower social classes the grounds they had stood on were lost. Losing the ground means losing subjectivity. Where the objective conditions of living, the objectivity of a social section, and the vital space of desire production are cancelled there is no subject anymore. The subject disappears. But was this no-subject-group part of the many?

The answer is yet to come. The many kept a rather contradictory stance towards violence. This stance was visible during the two days of June 2011 when the police was raiding the square. The first day many voices among the many were against violent involvement with the riot police. But this changed the second day after experiencing the “hate for society” that was performed by police forces.

Sunday 12th of February 2012 was the day the movement of the many as well as the violence skyrocketed. This day was more or less expected. It was almost announced in the mainstream media. Nobody did something to block its arrival and nobody could do something about it. That day the many faced

the rage and at the same time experienced the tactics of the state. It was a crucial day because it was a necessary explosion for the reproduction of power structures: A violent re-integration into the state through discipline and oppression but brought on by the state itself breaking the law. It was a risky situation for the state as well as a brand-new lesson for the movement of the many. It was the day that many among the many realized the end of the workers’ movement. The rupture between power structures and the people was total. That day the many won the battle because they stood in the streets in spite of the oppression. Nevertheless, they lost themselves. They lost themselves not in fear but in hope. They went home expecting the promise of the One, like normal people.

the many on demand (as people)

There have not been any significant protests since Sunday 12, February 2012. Attempts to “reconstruct” a massive social movement failed. A new political landscape, which stands until today, has arisen from the 2012 elections. The majority expects a “solution” from parliamentary parties.

However, hundreds of assemblies, collectives, and social initiatives have spread all over the country. Maybe the many responded to the demand to become a People again but some practices and ideas of direct democracy – regardless of the wildness of the landscape – remain alive. Will the magic – turning the People into the Many – work again in the future and how? It remains to be seen.

{ excerpts
from a first
draft for a text
to be listened
to on the way
to the
assembly by
random
people* }

Departure: Hi there, wherever you are. [...] You look great in those shoes. They will surely take you to wherever you need to be. [...] Please take a moment to anticipate where you are going. Imagine the space. Imagine the furniture: rows of chairs, neatly organised, or piles of them, a barricade [...]. Please take a moment to consider what you are leaving behind. [...] Every gathering, every **assembly** requires a journey, or, to be more precise, many journeys: the journeys that all participants undertake to come together. But this journey also opens up the **assembly**, connects it with other times and other places, like the place where you are now. [...] is this already the beginning? [...] think of this as a rehearsal: repeating that which has not yet happened: mic check one two one two protest test test test [...].

On the move: You might have noticed already that there is some ambiguity here in how you are being addressed: it is not quite clear if that “you” means you individually or a larger group of people, a collective, a public, something like the many. It can mean “you” who is travelling at this moment, alone perhaps, or it can mean all the people who are on their way. Let's enjoy this uncertainty for a moment. It will never completely go away [...]. Maybe the possibility to not identify completely with this “you” or “we” introduces a certain openness that is needed to even conceive of something like the many: participation, not belonging. [...] Think of the people who cannot make it: their number always exceeds that of any concrete gathering of people, because everybody is invited. [...] there are different manifestations of the many [...] those who turn up, and those who turn on, those who participate without being there, virtually, in spirit, but for real. Those who send their message of solidarity. Those who can't afford the train fare. Those [...].

Arrival: Soon, we will be many. We might already be many, but soon, we will meet. Democracy is like a blind date: you don't know who'll turn up. The date might have been set in advance, or you might be reacting spontaneously to something [...]. There might be people there you know, there might be people there you've met, but it is a blind date nevertheless. You know where you are going, but you don't know where you're gonna end up. [...] Soon. Very Soon. [...]. Perhaps you can see it already?