

— ONOMATOPEE 43.3 —

THE AUTONOMY PROJECT — NEWSPAPER 3

AT WORK

THE SYMPOSIUM AND 2ND SUMMER SCHOOL

ONE OF OUR FAVOURITE WORDS...

STEVEN TEN THIJS, CLARE BUTCHER

INTRODUCTION

“Autonomy is not one of my words.”

With this statement Jacques Rancière started his contribution to The Autonomy Project Symposium in October 2011 and it seems to describe not only his complex relation to this monumental (art) philosophical term, but also our own. In the last two years the Autonomy Project has attempted to make “autonomy” one of our words once again. Perhaps one could do this by adding a prefix like ‘critical’ (John Byrne), or ‘performative’ (Sven Lütticken), as argued in the first Autonomy Project newspaper, or maybe even ‘collective’, as suggest in this edition by Judith Westerveld, one of the participants of the symposium. Or perhaps we must ask ourselves first if we need rather to rethink the place of autonomy: making it more than the site where we think we can express individual agency, but actually appropriate it as a site where a group – a “we”– can ask itself what it wants and needs to know to emancipate itself to the full, as Ruth Sonderegger describes in her contribution to this newspaper.

Regardless of their differences what all these proposals mark is that the term “autonomy” is still contemporary and stimulates speculative reflection. In the last two years the Autonomy Project has been a platform for channelling that reflection – allowing as many people as possible to really “work” with the term. We have done so by organising two Summer Schools where both studying and recently graduated artists and art theorists could explore our central term collectively. We have done so through the symposium in October 2011 where a large variety of artists, philosophers and art historians debated that word “autonomy”. This then became a truly collective debate via smaller sessions where the public could engage on more equal terms. And, finally, we have done so through our website and especially these newspaper publications which are designed as a meeting place between more established artists and intellectuals with their future peers, who participated in the summer schools and symposium.

Concretely this third edition of the Autonomy Project newspaper is structured around those two main events we organised last year: the symposium and the summer school. However, to give a better sense of the discussions we have chosen to structure the contributions thematically rather than chronologically. We start with a more general reflection on the symposium by two visiting critics, Harlan Levey and Catherine Somzé, followed by a young artist’s impression of the symposium by Urok Shirhan. Ruth Sonderegger, a speaker at the symposium, then starts the more reflective part with a discussion of how to develop a ‘communism of intelligence’: an inspiring idea that we would like to take also as a model for the Autonomy Project. Sven Lütticken follows this with an article that previously was

published in the context of the heated debate on art in the Netherlands resulting from the dramatic cuts in the State culture budget – a tense background against which the Autonomy Project is taking place.

In the mid-section, three sub-topics are discussed. First we have two reflections by Jesse Ahlers and Judith Westerveld on the work of Thomas Hirschhorn, following the artist's passionate contribution to the symposium. Then we pause to reflect on the tradition of the *Autonomia* movement, thinking patterns in the '90s and the complicated struggle against neoliberalism, all addressed in an interview with Franco Berardi, an article by Summer School coordinator or orchestrator, Willem van Weelden, and a reflection on today's Italy by former summer school participant Michelle Franke. As a final case study we then zoom into the Arab Spring, which the collaborating artists Windferreira (Alexandra Ferreira and Bettina Wind) experienced personally, thus framing our discussion more globally.

Concluding this edition we have a section of reflections on the Summer School in 2011, consisting of contributions by Tina Bastajian, who coordinated the practical element of the programme, and, following some documentation of the proceedings, some participants of both the summer school and the symposium, Ingeborg Entrop, Eric Philippoz have chosen to present a broader, poetic set of responses issuing from their on-going artistic practices.

In between the different sections we have placed small segments of a longer interview with Jacques Rancière which took place the second day of the symposium, conducted by Nikos Papastergiadis and Charles Esche. Rancière's thinking throughout the entire project has been a source of inspiration through his original description of the place of autonomy in society as formalized and formulated after the French Revolution. Certainly not all participants are 'Rancièrean' and disagreement was and is very much part of the Autonomy Project. The hope is however, to reach a new and firm common perspective through disagreement and dialogue. In this way the Autonomy Project is a constructive project which works to make "autonomy" again, one of our words.

The editorial team would like to thank all the contributors deeply for all their smart, elegant, funny but above all personal and committed work on this new newspaper. And we want to thank all the Autonomy Project partners – the Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven; John Moores University, Liverpool; Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam; Dutch Art Institute / ArtEZ, Arnhem; Lectoraat Kunst en Public Ruimte / Universteit van Amsterdam, Gerrit Rietveld Academie, Amsterdam; Onomatopée, Eindhoven; Universität Hildesheim, Hildesheim. And to the Mondriaan Foundation for their generous support which opened up this project to such a diverse set of people and perspectives.



Charles Esche, Nikos Papastergiadis and Jacques Rancière
Location: Vanabbemuseum, Eindhoven / Photo: Emilio Moreno

At work
The Symposium and
2nd Summer School



Franco "Bifo" Berardi & Hito Steyerl — Symposium 2011
Location: Vanabbemuseum, Eindhoven
Photo: Emilio Moreno



Steven ten Thije, workshop
Location: Vanabbemuseum, Eindhoven
Photo: Emilio Moreno



Jacques Rancière — Symposium 2011
Location: Vanabbemuseum, Eindhoven
Photo: Emilio Moreno



Summer School 2011
Location: de Gang, Arnhem



Crowded cafe - Symposium 2011
Location: Vanabbemuseum, Eindhoven
Photo: Emilio Moreno

AUTONOMY, DEPENDENCY AND TRUST: A MUSEUM AND A SILENT MAJORITY

BY HARLAN LEVEY AND CATHERINE SOMZÉ

The Autonomy Project is a conscious gesture to address the pressing global problem of the social and political function of the arts in the context of civic and fiscal crisis. While the timing of the symposium provided a passionate atmosphere that spoke of the need for action, it also allowed for a necessary pause. The event brought a diverse group of local and international actors into the room to explore autonomy together with the understanding that regardless of all the (personal and common) external pressures, this look cannot be a quick glance. What is the nature of a museum's work in so-called post-ideological times characterised, however, by a problematic revival in populist policies?

During The Autonomy Project Symposium, diverse lectures, workshops, and panels fed a focused discussion as to what happens when the traditional function of the museum to treasure physical evidence of a preferred moral system becomes obsolete. That the broad investigation of the symposium was sewn together through readings of Jacques Rancière's work meant highlighting contradictions in democratic pillars such as emancipation, equality and the problems of so-called expertise. To speak about autonomy today in regard to aesthetics, implies a conscious avoidance of self-indulgence and acrobatic auto-congratulation as dialogue purposefully detours from teleological narratives of art history with the knowledge that every type of production is entangled in a distinct and relative political paradigm. The Museum of Modern Art doesn't need anymore to live up to the protean imperative to enlighten and to educate, to store and to showcase evidences of a wishful (progressive?) past that should lead the way towards an even greater future. But does it want to give up this "universal" humanistic task? What is our responsibility towards all of the futures that never came to be?

What came in response to these questions seemed to reveal the implicit logic (traditional perhaps) that in order to be 'autonomous' and even self-reflective, one must be politically and socially engaged. Speaker Hito Steyerl described a somewhat chilling linguistic shift that covertly addressed engagement by detailing a movement where "work" is replaced by "occupation" and leaders specialized in concealment illustrate roadmaps while civil invention moves on to the dying local factory lines.

In crisis, do you work your way out of it and invent your future? Or do you accept the plan you are given and allow yourself to be occupied?

What happened at the Van Abbemuseum was an exchange of knowledge towards the development of tools that could be applied towards this work and external perception of the future value of such instruments. More specific to the museum's future job description were discussions about the ethics of accessioning and deaccessioning, of ownership and intellectual property, of production, partnership, precarity and the need for (and simultaneous threat of) consensus.

There was also talk of a civil war on Europe's horizon, a green infatuation with the Occupy movement and a ripe nostalgia for Marxist interpretations of labor and production that seemed to harbor lingering hope for a post 1968 future that never came to be. The continual thought of failed futures reflected the constant return to where we were sitting and how an investigation of autonomy might open up crucial discussions to the future of the museum.

The museum may be one of the last homes of the long slow look before and behind civilization and as a democratic arm, must maintain the ability to protect "alternative" histories, languages and instruments rather than reconfirming traditional, dominant ones. The gesture suggests a responsibility to protect and engage with minority perspectives that may not necessarily translate to blockbuster hits: the need to create a framework to avoid surrendering to the urgency of speculative values and short-term returns. It becomes a question of translation, which looks for an autonomous territory that interrupts dependency on the market, the state and the idea that one may exist freely of the other.

The museum has to create a safe ground for dissent to stand against the potential dangers of dictatorship and empower the community it serves with aesthetics and stories that have not achieved the confirmation of consensus. If not it would be another easy to read mirror: a place where all the reflections are recognised by a majority of people, another sort of Cineplex that adheres to the propaganda models and filter bias of mass media. If it is fair to say that the museum has a responsibility to challenge the architecture of consent and preserve plausibly obscure histories that may add value to the future. What a difficult and artful task this is should also be acknowledged. The pragmatic individual task is being able to afford this type of conceptual work internally, while garnering trust for a sense that does not submit to so-called common sense. The collective task is one of translation from research to empowerment, which assumes that autonomy always relates to dependency. The question therefore becomes one of standing alone together.

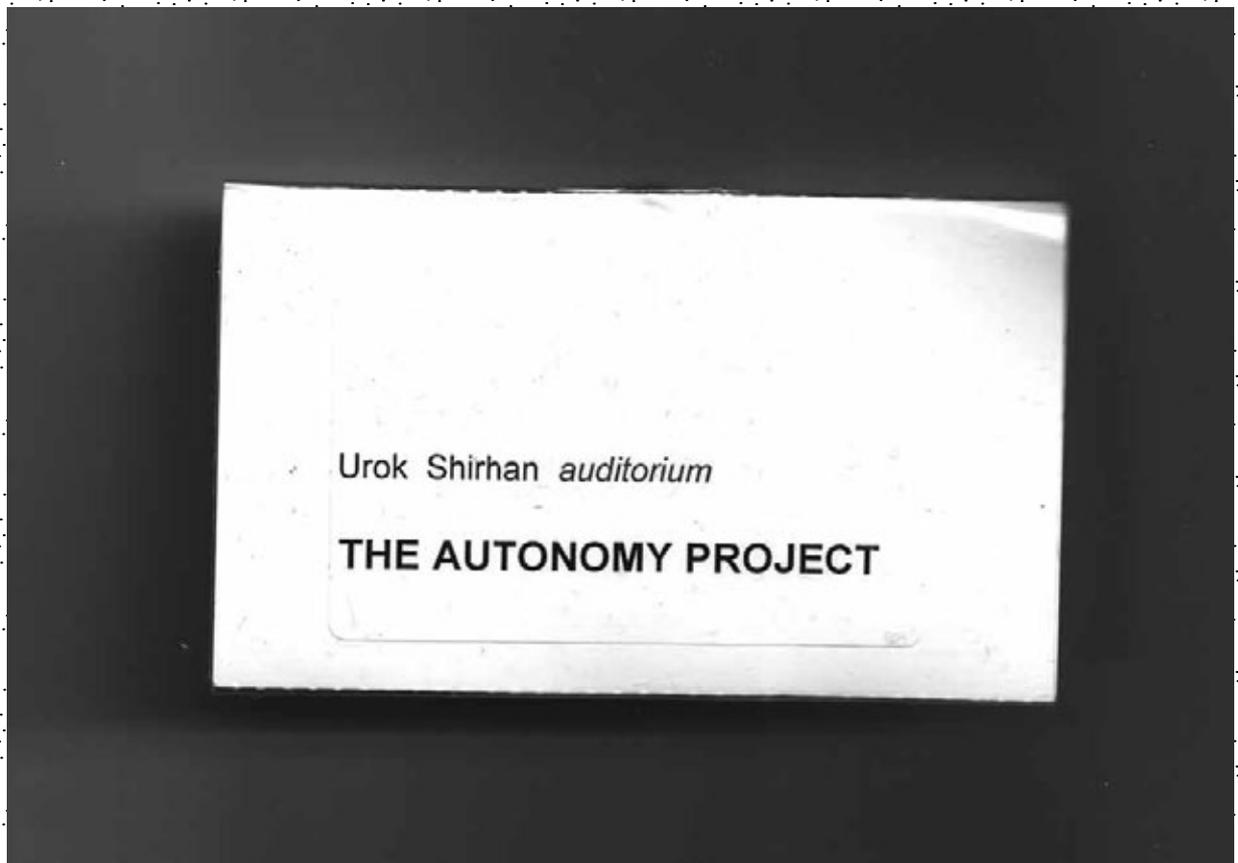


At work
The Symposium and
2nd Summer School

AUTONOMY PROJECT SYMPOSIUM: NOTES ¹

BY UROK SHIRHAN

¹ Drawings made during the symposium on the 7th, 8th and 9th of October, 2011



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DATE

"autonomous art which is independent of (social) intention"

"socially determined autonomy"
take up its own social conditions in itself and shows its social conditions in itself, its presentation."

contradictory

heteronomous (or dependent) art

→ autonomous art: doesn't make sense to think of these as oppositional rather than relational

adomian position is "history of modern art is the history of the struggle of art with the commodity form"

"autonomous determinations" Kant, theory,
"autonomy of will - heteronomy of choice (subjection to your desire is a mark of your un-freedom)"

→ "art is the appearance of practice"

→ "the artwork appears to be autonomous"
→ "art is autonomous if it can produce the illusion of being autonomous"

→ "art's figuring of a free practice. ART IS PART OF an aesthetic of truth, not an aesthetic of art"

IMAGE OF FREEDOM

→ "every work of art is a critique of society by being a work of art"

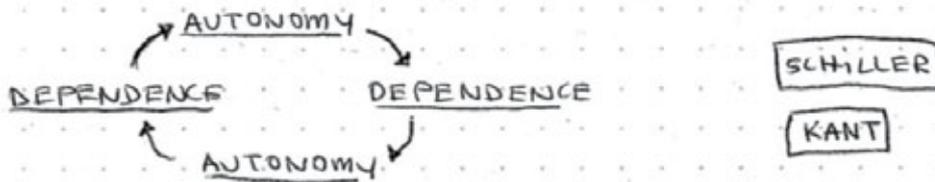
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PROJECT "people nowadays seem to be ^{DATE} more unhappy about being unhappy, rather than about being unfree"

ANTI-ART

Genuinely illusory autonomous art (when it is taken serious) instead of being self-consciously illusory autonomous.

ANTI ART — DEPENDENT ART (POLITICAL ETC)
— THEN INCORPORATION OF ANTIART AS A PART OF ART BY INSTITUTIONS (HAPPENS MORE RAPIDLY NOW..



"WHAT ARE THE LIMITS OF AUTONOMOUS ART?"

| | |
|--|---|
| it is immanent critique of liberalism dutch neo-liberals should fund arts because it is the foundation of the liberal individual | (adorno is a liberal utopian) he's a marxian liberal |
|--|---|

→ do we blame adorno or capitalism?

the reason that autonomy appears in art as art rather than as/in politics, because it cant. appear in politics

(negative freedom in 2nd part of Kants 4th sum. 4)

"autonomy of politics is autonomy of economics"
"autonomy of autonomy is a negation"

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"WHAT IS ENLIGHTENMENT" KANT

DISCUSSION

"ART HAS NO FUNCTION, WHICH IS ITS FUNCTION"
(Adorno)

NON-FUNCTIONALITY? RATHER NON-DETERMINENCY
(Peter Osborne)

DUTCH SITUATION J. ten Hije, J. Segbars, K. Fuijk

Platform Beeldende Kunst - Jack Segbars
Kees



Thorbecke:
"Government does not
make judgements
about art"

Documenta Kassel's implemented as the manifestation
of the 'quality' of western art vs the east
(strategic location at the Iron curtain
between West and East)

WHO SAW
THIS COMING?
AUDIENCE?

Joost de Biddis:

I'm surprised at
the surprise!!

Gabrielle Schlijpen:
Art educational
institutes saw it
coming but "artworld"
didn't want to listen

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I AM JACK SEGBARS
AND I HAVE OPINIONS:
"WE" WERENT ABLE
TO ORGANISE OURSELVES.
"ARTISTS" ARE DIFFICULT
TO UNITE

JOUKE
WHO IS THIS "WE"!!



WE HAVE NEVER
REALLY BEEN
IDEOLOGICAL IN
THE NETHERLANDS

JEROEN BOOMGAARD:
- ABOUT WE: ITS MORE 'ME':
- LOOK AT THE PETITIONS!
- PUBLIC ART DIDNT HELP
TO GAIN MORE AFFINITY
WITH ART..
USE VALUE BECAME
DEMAND, BUT LOST ITS
AUTONOMY... WHY SHOULD
ART SUBMIT TO THIS?
WHAT IS ART GAINING?

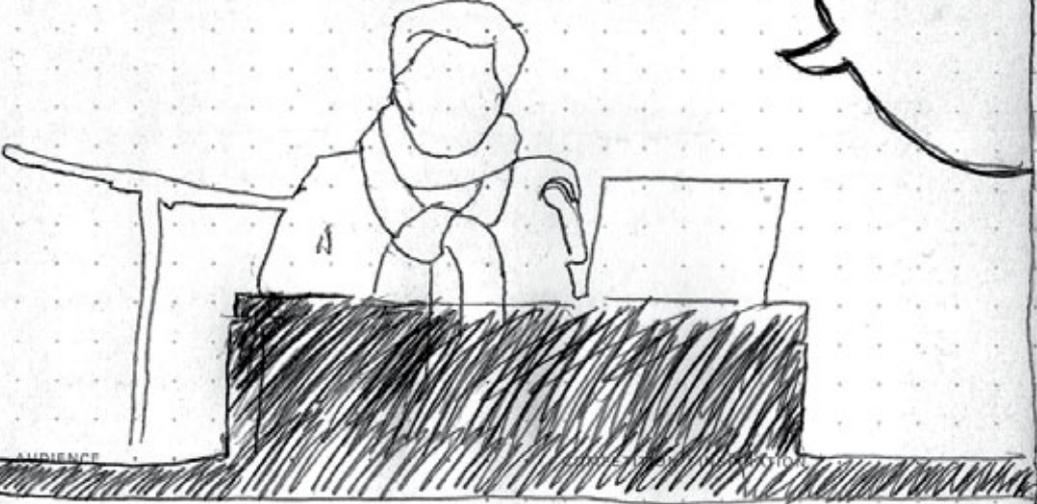
SVEN LUTICKEN:
ART BEING SOCIALIZED,
BE PART OF 'CREATIVE
INDUSTRIES', BUT ITS
UNPRODUCTIVITY @
COMPARED TO OTHER
FIELDS LIKE DESIGN
AND ARCHITECTURE...

CLARE BUTCHER:
⊗ THERE IS A STRUCTURE HERE AND
A COMMON LANGUAGE AND AN
EXTRA-INSTITUTIONALITY! ⊗

People are shocked
because they
have been
sleeping.

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At work
The Symposium and
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| PROJECT | DATE |
|---|---------------------------|
| DESCRIPTION | PARAMETERS / RESTRICTIONS |
|  | |
| EXPERIENCE | |
| KEYWORDS | CONCEPTS |
|  | |

PROJECT

DATE

11:45 RUTH SONDEREGGER

Who is the subject of emancipation?

On the autonomy of speaking subjects
and the collectivity of their intelligence

- 1- Reconstruction of Ranciere's unique account of equality.
- 2- Discussion of 4 implications of Rancierian equality and their consequences for moral and political philosophy.
- 3- Problematization of a hidden, rationalistic understanding of autonomy in Ranciere's theory of universal intelligence so that Ranciere's theory of universal intelligence so that Ranciere's allusions to a communism of intelligence become meaningful.

Learning a language autonomously. "We might need teachers not to teach us things we do not know, but to make us feel more confident about what we (can) learn autonomously" (jacque cotran)

Universal intelligence (Ranciere), learning and claiming something radically new.

"Emancipatory politics"
"equality of all speaking beings to learn"

FAITH IN EQUALITY

COLLECTIVE INTELLIGENCE IS NOT THE INTELLIGENCE OF A COLLECTIVE (GROUP)

Equality needs to be claimed and taken, not given condescendingly.

intelligence of individual, any individual

At work
The Symposium and
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PROJECT

DATE

NIKOS P.
GERARD RAUNIG

" BRINGING TOGETHER
people WHO ACTIVATE
THE IDEAS OF RANCIERE "

" OBJECT
TO THE
TERM OF
'AUTONOMY' "

Ranciere

THE INTELLECTUAL DENOUNCES
THE WORK OF THE ACTIVIST
AND VICE VERSA

: Kafka: Josefina:
: mousefolk?

" ART DEMANDS EXCEPTION
BUT IS NOT ACCEPTED. "

" the artist should not
be privileged - artists
should not be exempt
from everyday work
and struggle ... "

" nobody can
predict the
moment of
revolution "

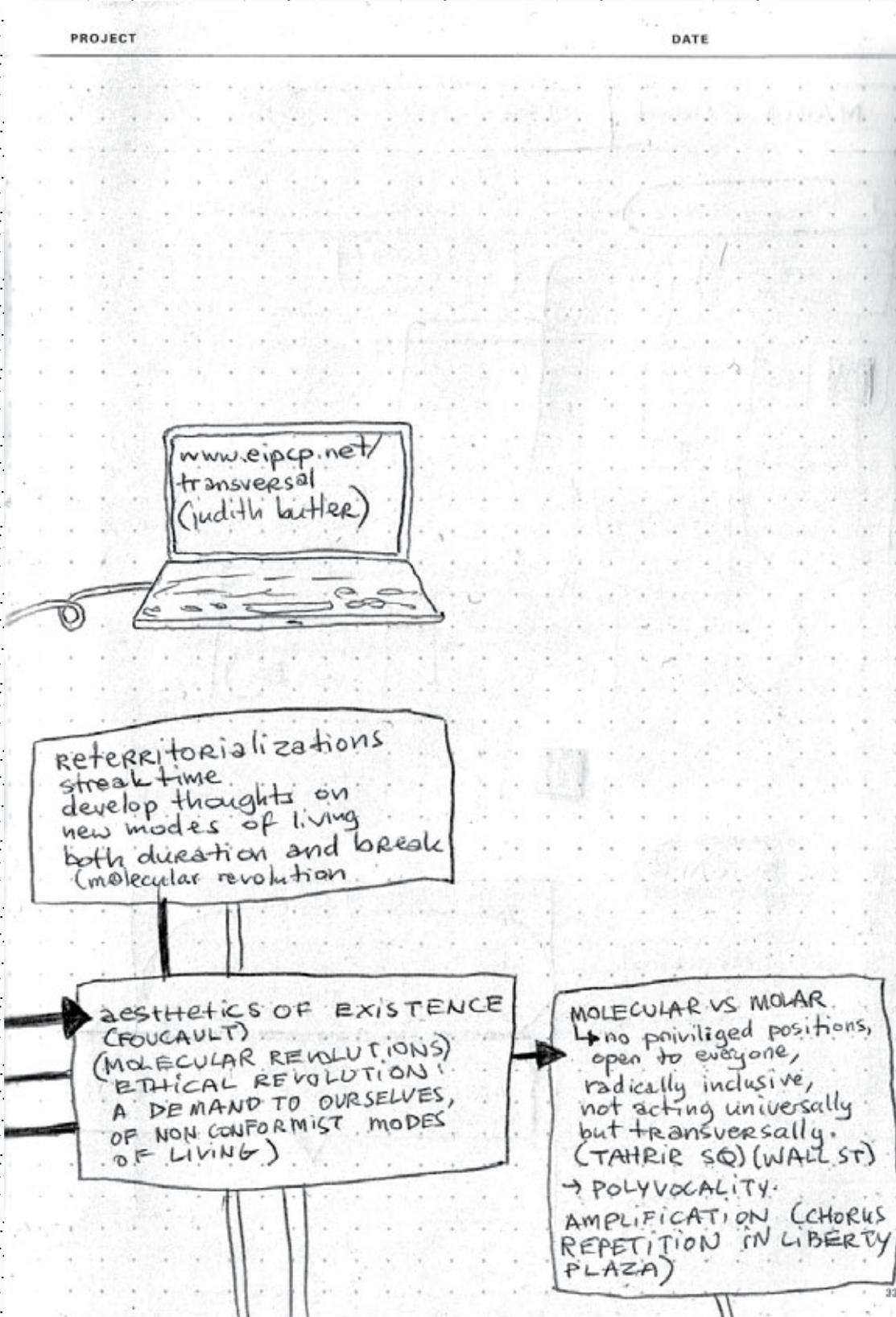
YOUTUBE

" OCCUPY WALL ST "

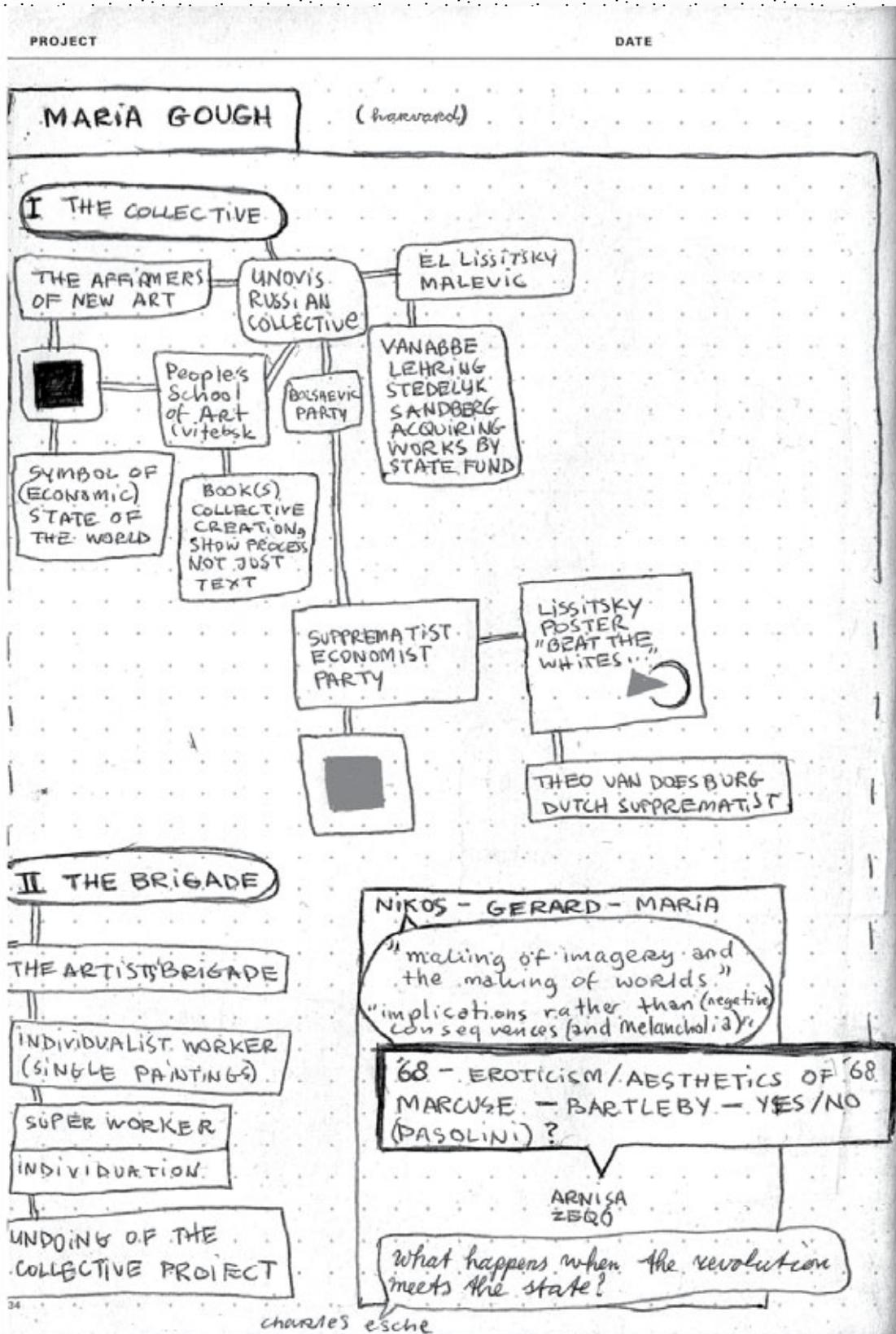
FOUCAULT:
THE COURAGE OF
TRUTH / THE
CYNICAL PHILOSOPHER
(ACTIVIST PHILOSOPHY)

- search for new forms
of living
- organisational forms
of radical inclusion
- industrious reappropriation
of time

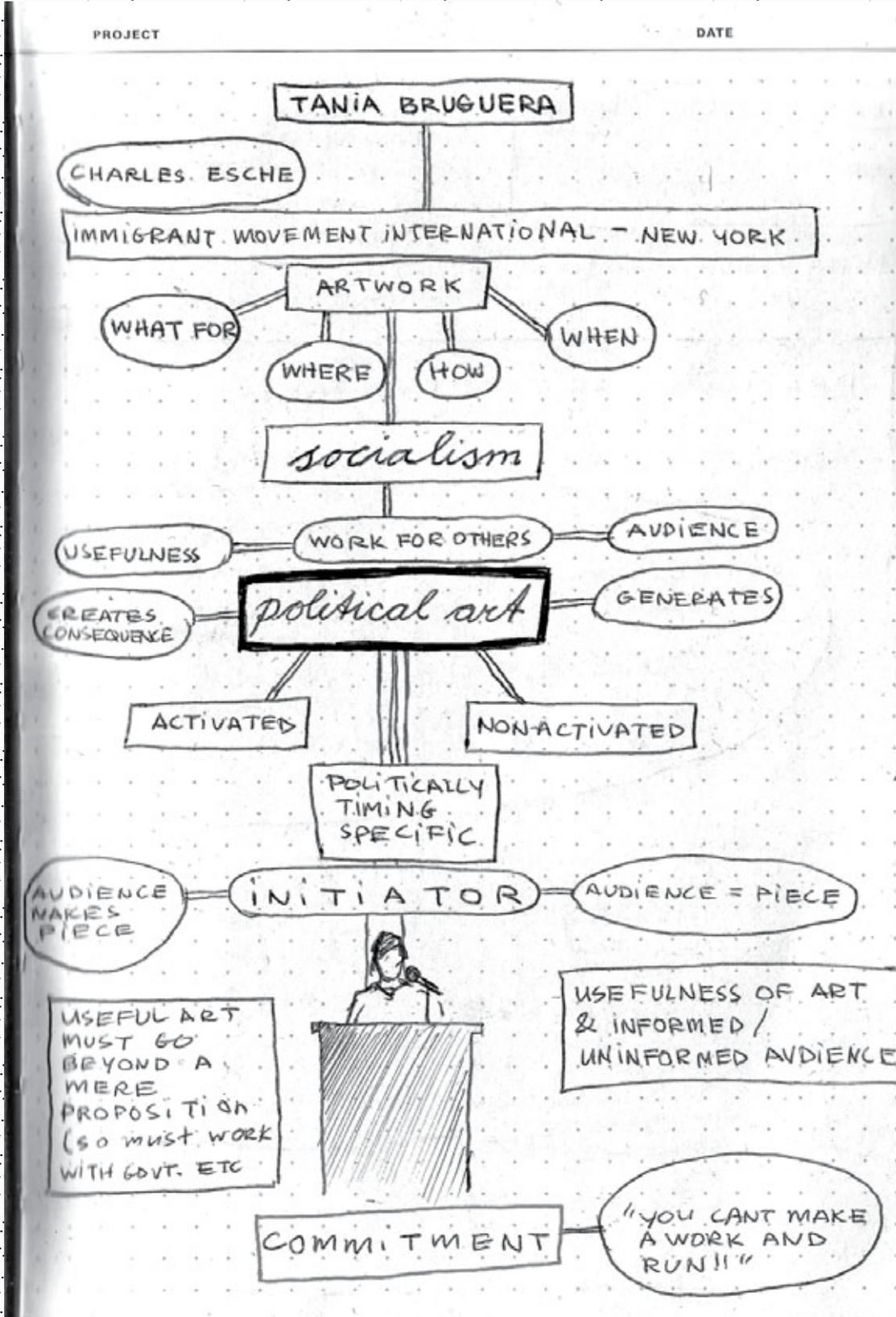
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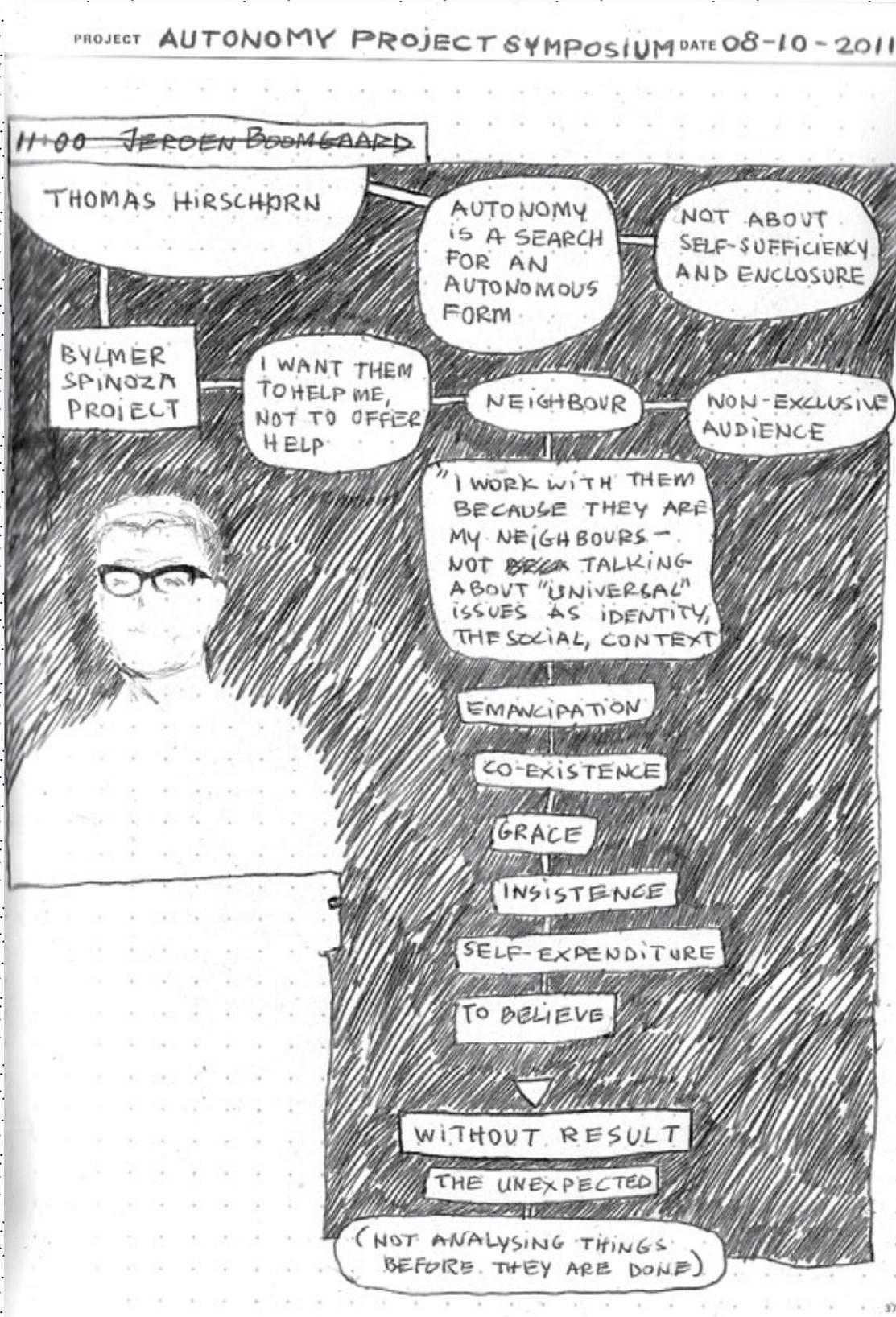
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At work
The Symposium and
2nd Summer School

| PROJECT | DATE |
|---|--|
| DESCRIPTION | PARAMETERS / RESTRICTIONS |
| Bernier & Olive Martin work within loopholes in the law | illegal immigrants collective artmaking making it impossible to deport them |
| Mejor Vida Corporation: (Mexico) | BARCODES ON FOOD MAKING IT CHEAPER |
| POLITICAL ART - USEFUL ART | |
| immigrant movement international | |
| AUDIENCE | COMPETITION / INSPIRATION |
| Peter Osborne: "art - useful art - like secret social work... or does useful art need institutionalised as tools to be politically resonant (instrumentation the institutions)" | |
| KEYWORDS | CONCEPTS |

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At work
The Symposium and
2nd Summer School



At work
The Symposium and
2nd Summer School

PROJECT _____ DATE _____



FEAR OF AESTHETICISATION

these mediation of protests

To which extent does mediation ~~Does~~ the ~~representation~~ or aestheticization of protest spark or stifle more protest?

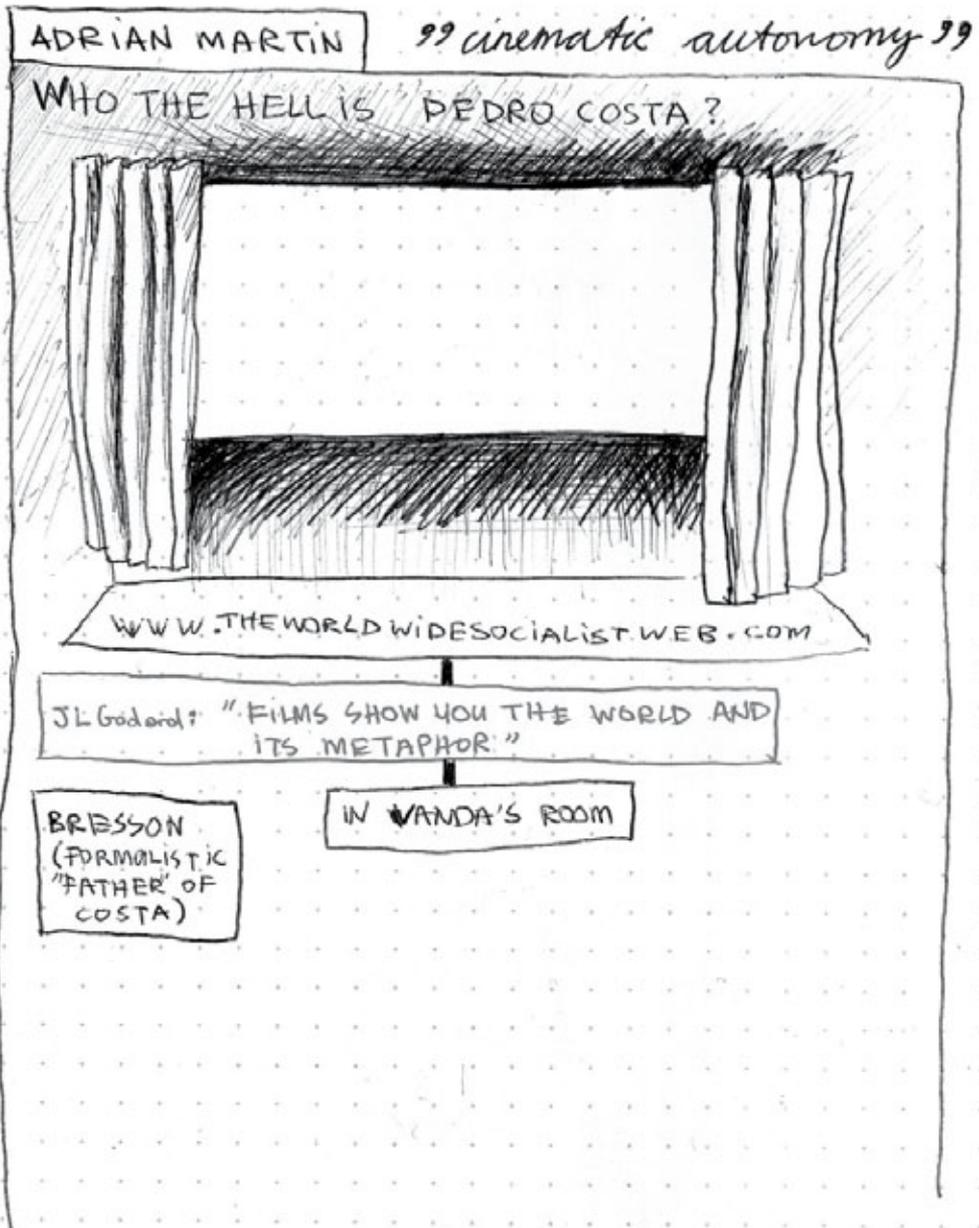
Do you think that there is a moment in which (over) mediation of these events create a certain kind of fatigue and therefore passivity in the ~~the~~ so called spectators, the people "watching" the protests at home?



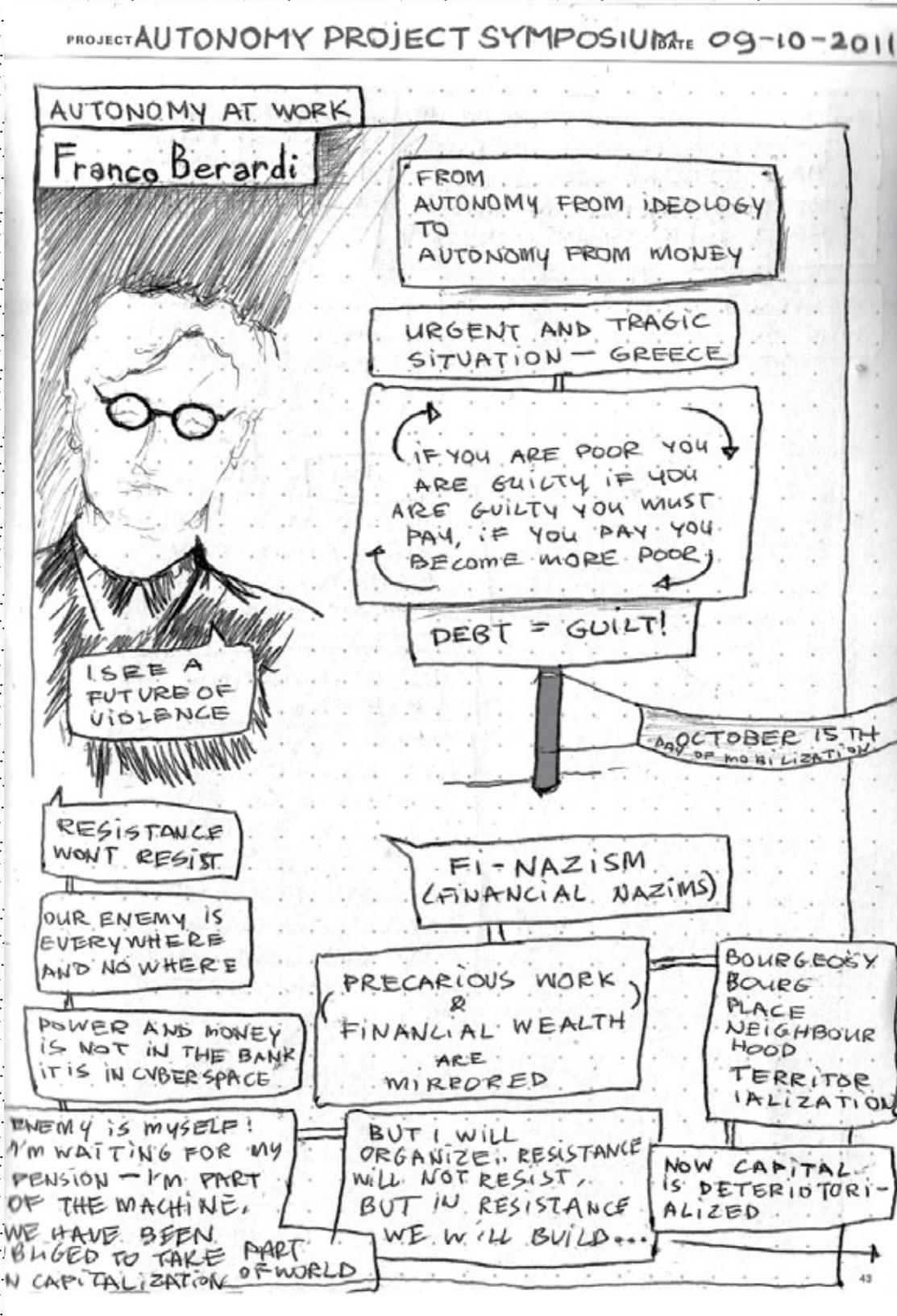
At work
The Symposium and
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PROJECT

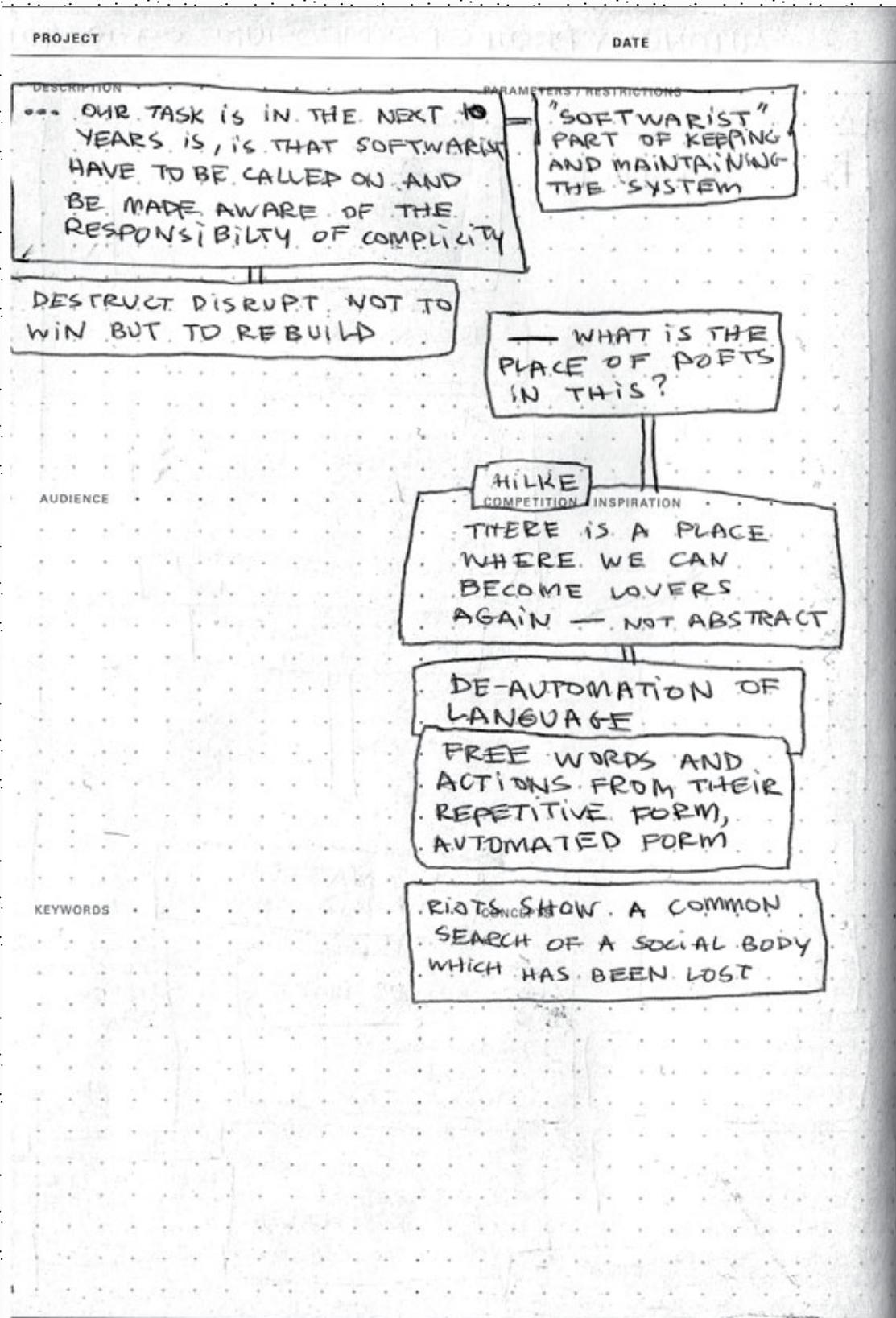
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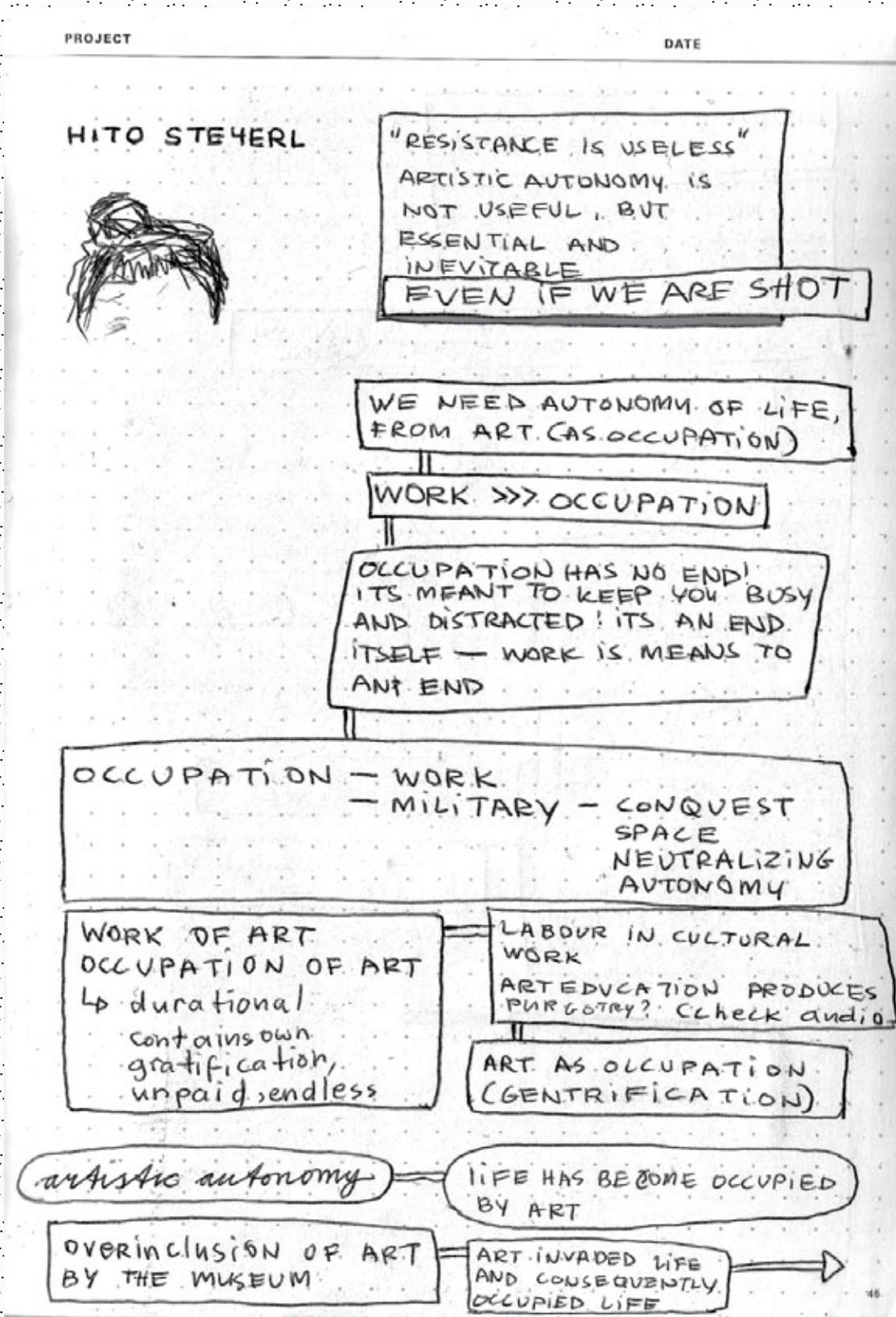
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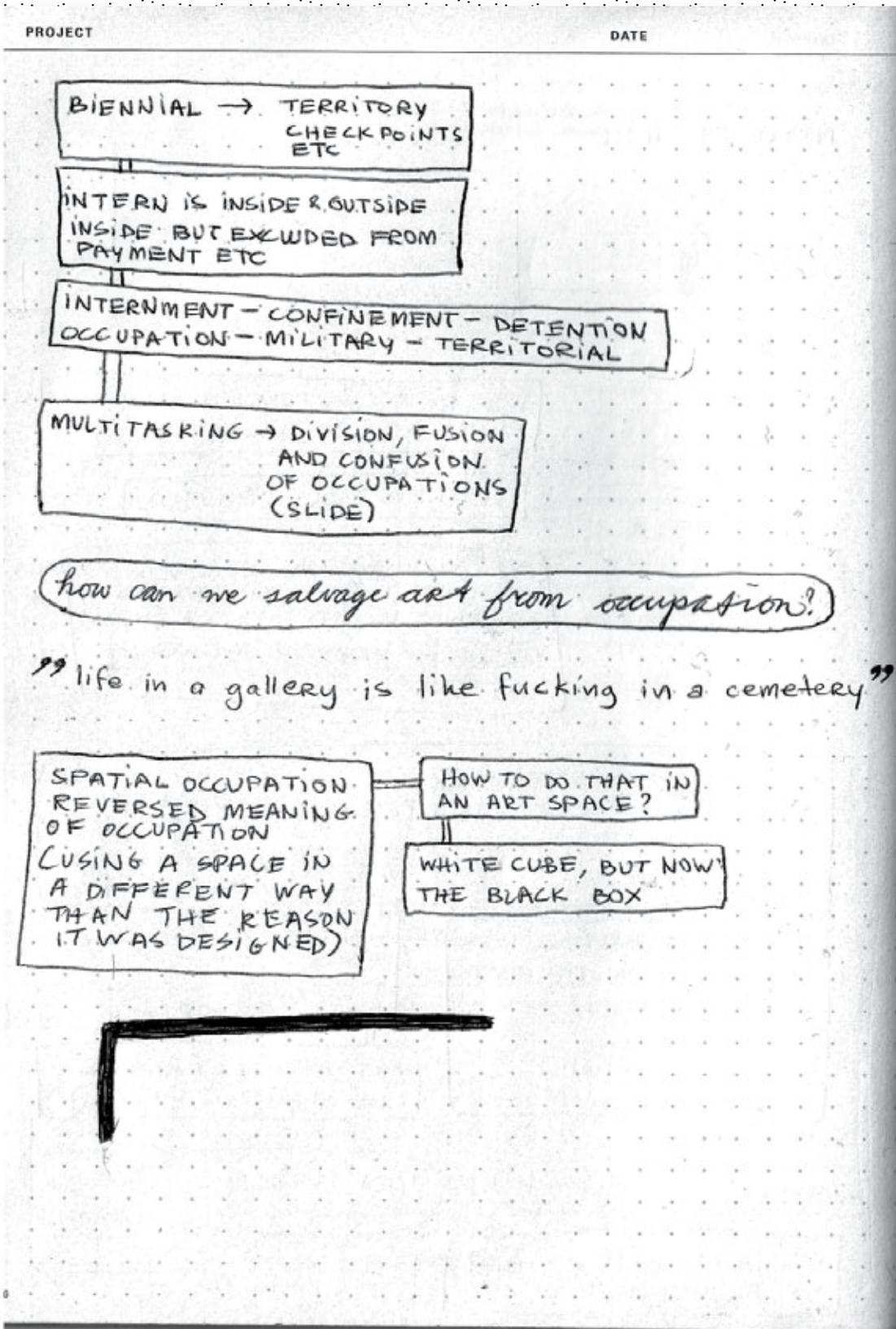
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At work
The Symposium and
2nd Summer School



At work
The Symposium and
2nd Summer School



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2nd Summer School

PROJECT

DATE

99 what do we occupy
when we occupy? 99

USE VALUE — EXCHANGE VALUE
|
EXCHANGE IS THE VALUE

WE HAVE NEVER BEEN SO CLOSE TO COMMUNISM!

BIFO

- DIS-ENTANGLE:
- MAKE FREE SOMETHING WHICH IS ALREADY THERE
- RICHNESS IS ALREADY HERE, OUR POTENCY HAS "BECOME COUNTER-PRODUCTIVE" (delecta/ouATTAR)
- BREAK THE FORM!
- "THE GENERAL INTELLECT IS LOOKING FOR A BODY"

"WE" (ARTISTS, POETS) ARE NOT A SOCIAL BODY; WE ARE THE THERAPISTS, THE DOCTORS.

TO BE CONTINUED...

At work
The Symposium and
2nd Summer School



Summer School 2011
Location: de Gang, Arnhem



The Autonomy Project – Public Debate 2011
Location: Vanabbemuseum, Eindhoven
Photo: Emilio Moreno

ON THE AUTONOMY OF SPEAKING SUBJECTS AND THE DIVIDED COLLECTIVITY OF THEIR INTELLIGENCE

RUTH SONDEREGGER

¹ Cf. e.g. J. Rancière, *The Aesthetic Revolution and its Outcomes. Emplotments of Autonomy and Heteronomy*, in: *New Left Review* 14, March/April 2002, 133-151.

The Autonomy Project's conference held at the Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven (October 7-9, 2011) aimed to explore the intersections between the thoughts of Jacques Rancière and autonomy's various agendas. In contributing to this debate, my concern was not with the alleged autonomy of art, i.e. not with the type of autonomy that probably first comes to mind when re-considering Rancière's oeuvre from the perspective of autonomy; not least, because it is in the context of art that Rancière himself frequently makes use of the term. ¹

² J. Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster. Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation*. Translated with an introduction by K. Ross, Stanford, California: Stanford University Press 1991 [1987].

My starting point, however, is what I take to be the core of Rancière's entire work, namely equality or, rather, what Rancière calls 'the presupposition of equality'. As far as such presupposition is concerned, the pivotal book undoubtedly is Rancière's *Ignorant Schoolmaster*; i.e. those *Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation* Rancière draws from the writings of the Joseph Jacotot (1770-1849), who discovered, practiced and theorised the equality of all speaking beings as a teacher in Louvain. ² Jacotot qualifies equality as the equal intelligence of all beings that have been able to learn their first language on their own; that is, without yet understanding the hints of those who already spoke the respective language. In other words: they learned their first language autonomously and had to be their own teachers since all other alleged teachers spoke a language the kid did not yet understand.

From this Jacotot concludes that learning (a language, but all other practices, too) does not depend on teachers. Rather, the only prerequisite for learning is the desire to learn; be it for reasons of survival, play, curiosity, knowledge or whatever else.

³ For the historical and political background cf. K. Ross, 'Translator's Introduction', in: J. Rancière *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, vii-xxxiii.

It is in the context of fervent debates about the school system and theories of education in France that Rancière in 1987 published his both archival and manifest-like research on Jacotot. ³ Rancière fully endorses Jacotot's account of universal equality and intelligence. Moreover, he transforms Jacotot's 'presupposition of equality' into a paradoxically anti-foundational fundament of political action. For Rancière contends that political action (which is per definition dissensual) consists in claiming equal treatment in a situation of *mésentente*, a situation, that is, in which exclusion is invisible and inaudible; at least for those who are content with the status quo and very often indeed cannot even imagine that alternatives might be possible.

Therefore, political action, i.e. the claiming of equality, can only be performed by the excluded. Or, in Rancière's wording, by the part who has no part.

⁴ For a critique of such liberal autonomy cf. G. Ch. Spivak Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak', in: C. Nelson and L. Grossberg (eds.), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, Macmillan Education: Basingstoke 1988, 271-31.5

This is why Rancière polemicizes against all kinds of commiserating, assisting, teaching, or speaking in the name of the excluded. He asserts that, in principle, the subjects of mesentente can speak for themselves and act on the basis of their equality; an equality, that only those in power cannot or, rather, refuse to see. Despite the fact that Rancière, to my knowledge, does not use the term "autonomy" when he theorises political emancipation it seems to me that his understanding of acts of emancipation and politics is very much in line with classical, liberal accounts of autonomy in political and moral philosophy. According to such accounts, autonomy refers to the universal capacity of any thinking and speaking individual to take self-determined and un-coerced decisions. Emancipation, accordingly, is the process of becoming such a self-determined individual, which, in its turn, is possible because of the universal capacity to think and speak. From this perspective, those who do not emancipate themselves can be blamed to be irrational and even immoral for they possess all the capacities needed for emancipation. ⁴

⁵ Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 98.

Such liberal understanding of autonomy is emphasized where Rancière writes: 'A society, a people, a state, will always be irrational. But one can multiply within these bodies the number of people who, as individuals, will make use of reason [...]'. ⁵

⁶ Cf. J. Rancière, 'Communists without communism', in: C. Douzinas and S. Žižek (eds.), *The Idea of Communism*, London and New York: Verso 2010, 167-177; 'Communism: From Actuality to Inactuality', in: J. Rancière, *Dissensus. On Politics and Aesthetics*, edited and translated by S. Corcoran, London and New York: Continuum 2010, 76-83.

In my view, this is fundamentally at odds with Rancière's insistence on collective or 'communist intelligence'. ⁶ When Rancière claims 'collective understanding of emancipation is not the comprehension of a total process of subjection. It is the collectivization of capacities invested in scenes of dissensus' ⁷, I do not see how far such collectivization is more than a concatenation of autonomous acts of strong individuals.

⁷ Rancière, J., 'The Emancipated Spectator', in: J. Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, translated by G. Elliott, London and New York: Verso 2009, 1-23, 49.

What I would like to suggest against the backdrop of this paradoxically individualist understanding of collective intelligence is that we allow for practices of mutually teaching faith in equality instead of hastily banning all kinds of teachers. For the rejection of teachers who claim to know more than their students does not imply that teaching by way of motivating and encouraging efforts to learn plus teaching in the sense of intensifying the belief in one's ability to learn are no longer important. Moreover, such teaching, respectively the necessity thereof, should not be restricted to rather crass contexts of subalternity and inequality. If we take into account how tempting it is to believe in the hierarchies of rated and ranked knowledges, talents, universities, journals etc. everybody is currently in need of encouragement as far as faith in universal and equal intelligence is concerned – teachers no less than students.

To my mind, Jacotot's lessons almost logically imply a strong mutual dynamics between the emancipatory teacher and those encouraged by her, i.e. the interchangeability of their roles. Whereas pupils who are unable to realise their equality need encouragement in faith, those who already have faith in universal intelligence and claim to be followers of Jacotot need actual demonstrations of emancipation – particularly where they least expect such demonstration. In other words:

emancipated subjects need others who let encouragement happen and

emancipate themselves with the help of such encouragement.

Otherwise even Jacotot's followers would risk losing their faith. For all they have in terms of 'proofs' of the presupposed universal intelligence are actual verifications of equality. To put it differently:

only as long as teachers and students interact and exchange their roles, can finite subjects who teach and are being taught keep alive what I would like to call the active atmosphere of emancipation and collective autonomy.

The classical both rationalist and individualist understanding of autonomy however, which I see at work in Rancière's theory of emancipation, overestimates both the power of the individual subject and the stability of achieved autonomous subjectivity – as if one could not lose the status of being emancipated!

⁸ For the emancipatory potential and its entanglement with structures of domination cf. P. Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude*, translated by I. Bertoletti, J. Cascaito, and A. Casson, New York: Semiotext(e) 2004; Tony Smith, 'The "General Intellect" in the *Grundrisse and Beyond*', retrieved on Jan. 17, 2012 from: <http://www.public.iastate.edu/~tonys/10%20The%20General%20Intellect.pdf>

However, even if we have established by now that universal equality and intelligence are collective enterprises, or, rather, practices based on multidimensional exchanges, this does by no means imply that such exchanges are beyond coercion, exploitation, or the process of the valorisation of capital. As Marx has shown convincingly in his *Grundrisse*, the 'general intellect' is being appropriated despite its emancipatory potential by the capitalist machinery not just since the advance of immaterial labour.⁸ In order to re-appropriate processes of knowledge production, of learning and subjectivation, it is therefore not enough to acknowledge the trans-subjective – or communist, if you will – dynamics of learning, knowledge and intelligence. In order to become autonomous in the emancipatory sense of the word, such dynamics need to be complemented if not disrupted by efforts of questioning and analysing whether one really learns and knows what one wants to learn and know; or, rather, whether the many really engage in the knowledge production they desire to produce. As far as such analytic disruption is concerned, the paradoxical imperatives of contemporary and only partly cognitive capitalism – be flexible but have a stable family background! Learn endlessly but be aware of the fact only very few contents count as worthy of being learned! etc. – might be interesting points of departure. As no one can live up to these paradoxes they are prone to ignite reflections on what and when we really want to learn, i.e. on all questions of (micro-)ideology. Such reflections could, in their turn, reveal that unlearning and not learning are occurrences of universal intelligence, too, and very timely ones.





How do you see the validity and measure the spheres of possibility that are suggested by the term 'autonomy'?

Autonomy is not one of my words. My words tend to indicate a movement out of a situation. I prefer terms such as: dis-identification, dissensus and emancipation. My ground words don't relate to the idea of an *autos*, but refer to the idea of a move –from a situation, from a place, from an identity, from an *autos*. What I can do here is a kind of exercise of translation, from my own concerns and notions into the language of autonomy.

Jacques Rancière

In the etymology of autonomous, you have two words – *autos* which means self, and *nomos* which first means: a part, a portion, a territory and, in the end, *nomos* comes to mean “the law”. Then there is the whole question of the relation between three terms: territory, selfhood and self-legislation. So, for instance, from my point of view, the notion of the autonomy of art goes against one of my main affirmations – art never gives itself its own law. There is art to the extent that art is identified within a regime of identification that allows us to perceive that this specific tune or that particular painting belong to a certain sphere of experience that can be named “art”. Art never exists by itself. We are now quite accustomed to the name art. It is something that we now take for granted. But it is only in the last two centuries that the term starts to refer no more to some kinds of techniques and skills but to a specific sphere of experience. For instance, the earlier distinction between liberal arts and mechanical arts, basically meant that there was difference between the kind of skill that can be practiced by noble people, as opposed to the kind of practice exercised by mechanical people.

What I think is important in Kant’s idea of aesthetic judgement, Schiller’s idea of aesthetic education is the analytic of the beautiful. That is, the description of the condition of a possibility on which we can say this is beautiful. This has nothing to do with the rules of art. If there were a tradition in which it was possible to say, these are the rules of art, they are good rules, so if the artist does art in this way, then the people will love it. Then there would be a correspondence between the practice of art and the sphere of experience within which art is accepted, received, appreciated etc. But aesthetics doesn’t define art as a domain of self-legislation. Hence I would add, in relation to Peter Osborne, that we cannot say that the idea of the aesthetic education in Schiller comes from Kant’s idea of moral self-legislation. There is a tension in Schiller’s idea of aesthetic autonomy. Schiller is looking for a form of autonomy that is not the form of self-legislation of reason. In the aesthetic experience there is an embodiment of freedom. But the embodiment in freedom occurs in the tension of the experience of standing in front of an object that is, in a way, out of reach. So there is a kind of an embodiment of freedom, which is here in front of us, but we cannot possess it. In this tension there the idea of disinterestedness – what does it mean basically, it means that we are in front of something that we know and that we don’t know what to do with.

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Sven Lütticken – Summer School 2011
Location: Dutch Art Institute, Arnhem

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what Rancière calls the aesthetic regime.

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The Puzzling Spectrum Between and Life

The Autonomy Symposium

JESSE AHLER

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The original Dutch version of this essay was published in a special “emergency issue” of the journal *Open*, which was published in September 2011 in response to the drastic Dutch funding cuts in the arts. Those cuts also affected *Open* itself: the co-publisher, SKOR, was one of a number of institutions that had to close down. Almost one year later, the future of *Open* is still uncertain, as potential publishing partners are themselves struggling to survive.

‘At last, less art’ ran the huge letters of the headline in the cheeky post-quality newspaper NRC Next, following the announcement of Zijlstra’s plans. But this is not about reducing a surplus, as when getting rid of a mountain of butter. We are dealing here with a political attack, an ideological move. When high ideals are invoked to legitimise a policy, as with the invasion of Iraq, it is often best to search for material motives – to follow the money. In this case, the opposite is true: a policy that is presented as the result of financial necessity is actually being driven by ideology, although this ideology is serving a policy that in fact constitutes as much a form of economic plundering as the invasion of Iraq.

During the long years of liberal-social democratic coalitions in the Netherlands, the Left discarded the notion of class struggle as an embarrassing relic of the past in the museum of outdated concepts. Rutte and his counterparts in other European countries, however, are deliberately engaged in a class struggle – although they do not use the actual term, of course. In an ailing Europe that racks up debts while officially continuing to bet on perpetual economic growth, however unrealistic that might be, the redistribution of wealth actually took over from the role played by growth long ago. Unlike old-style social-democratic redistribution, however, from top to bottom, this redistribution is taking place from the bottom to the top. Capitalism always pushes for expansion, for the securing of new markets; now that this no longer appears an option for Europe, either from a geographical or a technological perspective, the last frontier is to be found in society itself.

A few years ago, Oliver Curry of the London School of Economics developed a somewhat bizarre-sounding neo-Darwinist scenario: he suggested that in view of the fact that humanity is increasingly becoming divided into two parts, one prosperous and healthy and the other poor and unhealthy, the human race will ultimately split into two different species. ¹

¹ See, among others, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/6057734.stm>

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what Rancière calls the aesthetic regime.

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This fantasy seems to be a biological version of an all-too-real development: the growing divide between fearful and angry mortgage-holders who identify with Rutte's offensive term, 'the hardworking Dutch', on the one hand; and a many-coloured medley of benefits claimants, the long-term sick, Muslims and other immigrants on the other, along with left-wing hobbyists in the arts and cultural sector.

The attack on so-called 'left-wing hobbies' in the Netherlands does not constitute a serious attempt to scrape together a few millions; everything in the measures is directed towards securing control over the definition of art and culture. While the treasury will see little financial return from the cuts, the ideological victory is potentially great. Art is presented as the rightful property of the privileged upper class; art is a gift, a favour. Long live the patron, the new hero! Anyone who recently visited the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen would have entered a kind of propaganda machine for the patron, with its special gallery extolling the praises of Han Nefkens' H+F Collection in glorious detail, and captions guiding visitors along the permanent exhibition route that laud the museum's historical founders and donors for their superior sensibility, which could not be equalled by salaried public officials. At the end, in the pathetic little museum shop, the visitor would have been able to purchase pseudo-sociological agitprop on 'the new patron', dashed off by second-rate art critics.

The private collector appears to be a solution, for surely taxpayers benefit from the fact that private funds, and not their money, are used to pay for art? It seems so simple, but as the artist Andrea Fraser argues in the new issue of *Texte zur Kunst*, drawing on statistical research by economists from Yale and Tilburg University, periods during which the price of art shoots upwards and in which the significance of rich private collectors thereby increases are those in which income inequality gains the upper hand. The fact is that these are the periods in which the price of art soars:

'we can expect art booms whenever income inequality rises quickly.'²

Of course, the aim here is not to create a kind of negative equivalent of today's odes to 'the collector' and criticise everything that he or she does. In principle,

² Here I am relying on a provisional version (August 2011) of Andrea Fraser, 'L'1%, c'est moi', to be published in *Texte zur Kunst* no. 83 (September 2011). Fraser refers to William N. Goetzmann, Luc Renneboog and Christophe Spaenjers, 'Art and Money', in: *American Economic Review* 101 (no. 3), pp. 222–26.

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private enterprise is fantastic, and collectors can, of course, make a valuable contribution to art. The problem lies at the level of a discourse that identifies art, particularly visual art, with prohibitively expensive artefacts that are in principle reserved for a select group of privileged individuals, who might be prepared to donate work to “the people” or to sell it for knock-down prices – often under conditions that are anything but attractive for the taxpayer. In this way, art is reduced to being a gift (and an expensive one at that) or favour. Other conceptions of art, namely those that are practised in the institutions under threat, are marginalised: they commit the sin of conceiving of art not as an object of prestige, but as an intervention in the visible world, such as that shaped by the Ruttes and the Wilders’s, and its invisible underside.

The populists have adopted and radicalised an economic approach to art that already prevailed during the liberal-social democratic coalitions and the Balkenende governments. Are we thus now reaping the rewards of a creeping instrumentalisation of art and the undermining of its autonomy? For many, Zijlstra’s moment of truth seems to create a nostalgic longing, calling for a mythical time when autonomy, just like happiness, was still the norm. Would we be better off if the ‘autonomy of art’ had been better defended? In my opinion, this would be jumping to conclusions. The problem is neither ‘too little’ nor ‘too much’ autonomy; rather, it is the question of what kind of concept (and practice) of autonomy can be used today. For a long time, autonomy in art has been identified with its modernist interpretation, such as that propagated in the Netherlands by Jan Dibbets, Rudi Fuchs and company at the former Ateliers’ 63 in Haarlem: tribute was paid to the cult of the great (preferably male) painter who wrestled with the Medium and Tradition, alone in his studio like a pseudo-monk.

Since the late 1960s, the limits of this modernist notion of autonomy have been stressed by artists who are often grouped under the term ‘institutional critique’ – a tradition that includes the above-mentioned Andrea Fraser. Autonomy means having the freedom to determine your own law. The classic modernist conception of autonomy in both art and science started from the notion of social sectors and disciplines that develop in line with their own internal logic – that write and rewrite their own laws. This was the way in which Kant postulated the autonomy of philosophy as a discipline, and the renowned art critic Clement Greenberg based his definition of modernism in the visual arts on Kant’s ‘transcendental logic’ in *The Critique of Pure Reason*:

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The essence of Modernism lies, as I see it, in the use of characteristic methods of a discipline to criticise the discipline itself, not in order to subvert it but in order to entrench it more firmly in its area of competence. Kant used logic to establish the limits of logic, and while he withdrew much from its old jurisdiction, logic was left all the more secure in what there remained to it. ³

The problem with this kind of pre-programmed autonomy is that for those operating in that field, it ultimately appears to be a form of heteronomy, albeit an ingeniously packaged one. The practitioner is defeated by the discipline; he or she is programmed by the field, and is subordinate, in very concrete fashion, to all kinds of institutional and market mechanisms. This was the line taken by institutional critique. It is perhaps no coincidence that the most outspoken and energetic practitioners of institutional critique, such as Hans Haacke and Andrea Fraser, operate in the American cultural context, where Zijlstra's ideals have long been reality.

While it is correct to say that we have seen the further instrumentalisation of art under recent cabinets in the Netherlands, it would be naïve to assume that there was previously some kind of blissful autonomy. In fact, successive government ministers (from Rick van der Ploeg to Halbe Zijlstra) have practised institutional critique in a perverse manner: with their ever-increasing bullying of both art and science, and these disciplines' subjugation to the imperatives of a 'market' that is presented as a natural phenomenon, they have shattered a number of illusions. The current erosion of the autonomy of the university and scientific research, for example, also brings advantages. Of course the university has been part and parcel of the capitalist modernization of society, producing the required specialists in various sciences and the law. However, the distance of certain specialisms from economic practice was part of the ideology of *Bildung*. In the past, an academic could study Assyrian epigrams for thirty years and imagine himself autonomous because society appeared to ascribe an intrinsic value to academic research.

³ Clement Greenberg, 'Modernist Painting' (1960), in: Greenberg, *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, vol. 4: *Modernism with a Vengeance*, 1957-1969, ed. John O'Brian (Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, 1993), p. 85.

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IMAGINING A PLACE WHERE WE CAN BE OVERSOWN

JOHN BYRNE

JB. During the summer school, I tried to reclaim language for the body "so that it can expand on the

JB. Could you see a connection?

JB. If this struggle for autonomy and overcoding is to be a lover, is to be a relationship, an interpersonal paradigm for the Internet, it seems to be that they are ema

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At present, neither artists nor scientists entertain any illusions about the structural heteronomy of their disciplines, which they must practise in a political-economic battlefield. In any case, things are clear now. *Dies alles gibt es also.*

Autonomy plays yet a second crucial role in Kant's work. It does not concern the autonomy of the discipline, thus of philosophy, but that of the subject – the thinking and judging self.⁴ In the domain of practical reason, a person is a freely-acting moral subject who determines his or her own course. However, the Kantian moral subject is a philosophical abstraction, disconnected from the sensory world. Also for Hegel, the subject retained this spiritual dimension; for Hegel, people are subjects insofar as they take part in the dialectical adventure of the *Geist*, and insofar as they converge with the self-developed *Begriff*. The young Hegelians of the 1830s and 1840s, Marx among them, kept this historical approach to the subject, but they redefined it decisively in terms of human activity in the material, sensory world. One is not a subject because one philosophises and thereby contributes a little more to the development of the *Geist*, but insofar as one manages to match one's thoughts to one's actions, and insofar as one builds a bridge from reflection to action and acts reflectively – something that would later be called *praxis*.

Praxis is autonomy in action, and this seems to me a concept of autonomy that is still fruitful in our current, real heteronomy. Autonomy as reflective action is not property, nor a given; more an exception than a rule, but nevertheless valuable as a guiding principle. 'Business as usual' is no longer an option. In academia, in the art world, and also in the legal world and elsewhere, autonomy is hanging in the balance. Productive practices reflect upon this, such as the filmmaker and essayist, Hito Steyerl, for example, in the afterword to her book, *Die Farbe der Wahrheit*, in which she reflects on the ways in which the texts were shaped by the economic conditions in which they were created – often in the framework of short-lived projects and residencies.⁵

Reflecting on, dealing with and going against the limits of one's own practice is more necessary than ever, and the advantage of the current situation is that

⁴ Karl Ameriks, *Kant and the Fate of Philosophy: Appropriation of the Critical Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp.1-23. Ameriks also contrasts Kant's 'answers' with the more radical claims made by Reinhold, Fichte and Hegel, who, according to him, had a distorted reception of Kant's concept of autonomy on their conscience.

⁵ Hito Steyerl, *Die Farbe der Wahrheit. Dokumentarismen im Kunstfeld* (Vienna: Turia + Kant, 2008), pp. 139-142.

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everyone, one would hope, has woken up to this fact. This is autonomy in 2011: no property, no permanent ownership, but the often-evasive goal of a life that views work in a different way from that propagated in the Rutte-esque rhetoric about 'the hardworking Dutch.' How can we get our work back, work that is governed by conditions that we do not determine?

In the words of the philosopher Hannah Arendt, quoted elsewhere in this issue by Arnoud Holleman:

how can we make work into action?

Such an enterprise is always risky, since we are unable to survey the consequences of our actions. However, the dangers of continuing with business as usual, and of muddling through in the context of frameworks that are presented to us as *fait accompli*, are many times greater.

While an operative and reflective praxis assumes different forms when it concerns art from those it assumes in the case of science or law, nevertheless forms of collaboration and coalitions are possible, beside and beyond pre-programmed programmes for 'interdisciplinary collaboration.'

In the words of the cultural critic Brian Holmes:

the attempt to give oneself one's own law
becomes a collective adventure. ⁶

Autonomy requires self-organisation, producing 'selves' that are post-Kantian, non-identical and manifold.

⁶ Brian Holmes, 'Artistic Autonomy and the Communication Society' (2003), <http://www.nettime.org/Lists-Archives/nettime-l-0310/msg00192.html>



Where do you stand in relation to the resurgence of complaints against art as having become too ‘aesthetic’ – which of course implies, that it is simply too ‘pretty’ too easily commodified – and the claim that art should merge closer with life?

There is a tension between this complaint and this claim. First it is not so clear when aestheticisation begins or when the merging of art and life begins.

If we think of the work of Thomas Hirschhorn and his proposition, ‘I produce moments of beauty’, which doesn’t mean I make pretty things, there is a commitment to some kind of sensory experience which is not in line with either “aestheticization” or just dissipation of experience. Similarly, with the work of Lissitzky that is held in this museum, here is someone who created forms that cannot be identified as being painting or being architecture. Nor can it be identified exactly what it is there for. Is it simply as a kind of flight into the future? Is it dream, a utopia, or is it a proposition to build things? Is it something that is supposed to be the décor of our life? The frontier between merging art and life and aestheticization is not clear...

When I think of the work of Thomas Hirschhorn what captures my imagination is not how, as an the artist, he seeks to play the role of the collective, or to play the role of the one who creates some kind of collective space, which, of course, meets much resistance. But rather it is the way he uses his artistic practice to create either objects, or discourse, or spaces that were not expected. So, as I said, we are put in a situation in which we don’t know exactly how to behave with, we don’t exactly how to use them.

Sometimes, we have the idea that artists are really making such big efforts to create those spaces, meanwhile those spaces can be created by people who don't want to create any art, but just want to go out and take to the streets.

There is a correlation between the two things. I am thinking, of course, of the case of this musician and performer, Ahmed Basiony, who was killed in Cairo during the first days of the Revolution – and was the subject of the work presented by the Egypt pavilion in Venice Biennale. There is a conjunction between the type of interactive performance invented by this artist and the collective action. Although there is no direct cause and effect relation, there may be some link between the Arab spring and the efforts made by so many artists in Arab countries. These are artists that are trying to restage events differently, present situations without playing the victims, that is, to re-think history and not complain about the disaster of war, to have some kind of irony of the situation and try to get out of this kind of situation of misery and depression by the manifestation of capacity. Probably, at this point in time, there is more creation in politics than there is in art.

Jacques Rancière



The Puzzling Spectrum Between Art and Life

The Autonomy Project Symposium

JESSE AHLERS

At the Autonomy Project Symposium in the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven the debate on the undefinable concept of autonomy inevitably dwelt upon the impossible question of the meaning of art. And like that answer, the notion of “autonomy” seems, even after three days of thorough thinking and discussing, just as elusive. Autonomy seems to be trapped in what Charles Esche called

*“this puzzling spectrum” between art and life.*¹

Art is accused of over-aestheticising, even occupying life and in doing so “hiding reality”, as Rancière put it in his address to the Eindhoven audience. Art’s autonomy supposedly resides in its independence from life, while at the same time there is a constant push to merge the two.

“I don’t think there is a way out of the paradox,”

Rancière stated in one of the discussions.

*

Thomas Hirschhorn’s presentation, on his *Bijlmer Spinoza Festival* which took place in

¹ All citations in this paper, unless otherwise stated, were personally transcribed during the Autonomy Project Symposium. For some I am able to refer to the live streaming of the symposium, broadcast and still available on the Van Abbemuseum website. Unfortunately Hirschhorn’s presentation was not available.

Amsterdam in 2009, made clear that the poles in this paradox are only seemingly contradictory. Moreover, he was able to show how Rancière’s ideas of autonomy can actually also function in life. Although Hirschhorn and Rancière might not fully embrace each other’s methods, they do both point out the freedom of thought that can be experienced in an encounter with an artwork and which is at the core of an individual’s autonomy – a freedom in which the heteronomous is not exorcised or terminated, neither is it determinative. Two highly important notions in the Rancièrian understanding of aesthetics are that art gives form to the sensible and that it is identified within a certain regime of perception. This implies on the one hand that art gives form to possible perceptions of life and, in that sense, is itself the bridge between the two. On the other hand, it means that art can never exist completely by itself. It is never fully self-legislative, because it is identified within a network of conventions and rules,

“[...] that makes the laws to perceive what can be named art, what can belong to a certain sphere of experience.”

This regime in its own turn is alterable and Rancière even went so far as to state, during the discussion at the conference, that

“the aesthetic precedes the political, the political is formed through the aesthetic. This is a radical inversion in the history of thinking about aesthetics and truth [...]”

Thus, art functions in a certain regime of laws and rules, but its power lies in the fact that it can resist and reconfigure these laws and rules precisely because art distributes what is thinkable, visible, sensible inside the regime. Art can establish a break with normal order and publicly manifest what remained invisible first. Aestheticising for Rancière doesn’t simply refer to making beautiful, but first and foremost to this distribution of the sensible.

Contemporary art specifically, operates in

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what Rancière calls the aesthetic regime. In this regime art no longer leads an isolated, separate existence, it no longer has an assigned place within society. Any object can potentially be art and any activity can lead to an artwork, as there are no fixed criteria which have to be met in order for something to be identified as art. Instead, contemporary art is defined as a mode of experience, a specific sensorium that offers the possibility of a shift in seeing and thinking within the dominant regime of the sensible.

Thomas Hirschhorn stated that, in his work, his intention is not to make pretty things, but rather that

“to make a beautiful work you have to create conditions that enable precarious moments of beauty to arise.”

This comment could be linked with Rancière’s notion of the effect of the artwork as a mode of experience.

“The beauty and absoluteness of the artwork,”

Hirschhorn said in his presentation,

“is in fact its autonomy. You can’t achieve it by analysing aesthetics; you can’t think it out beforehand, sitting at the kitchen table. You cannot anticipate.”

Art’s possible effects are always unpredictable. This statement conforms to Rancière’s thinking that the break between the artist’s intention and the interpretation of the viewer is exactly the essence of the aesthetic regime, caused by the disposing of the rules of representation, and the prerequisite for the aesthetic experience to take place.

Those moments of precarious beauty for Hirschhorn lie in ‘the contact with the people.’ He seems to give of himself, in the

form of “presence and production”, in order to challenge others to give too. He engages in a project, with such commitment and enthusiasm, that others are almost forced to do the same. It’s a tactic.

‘I worked with those people, not for some kind of identity or social thing, but because they were my neighbours. They were already an audience.’²

It’s this sense of radical inclusion that draws Hirschhorn close to Rancière once again. The ‘non-exclusive audience,’ as Hirschhorn calls it, displays ‘autonomy as something universal.’ This echoes the democratic promise that Rancière elaborates as he explains the political activity of art as ‘the symbolic and social transformation arising from active involvement of people who are normally excluded from the process of defining the rules of the everyday, and their ability to create

new terms of perception and interaction. It’s the interplay between the formation of these new subjects and the emergence of new knowledge.’ But, even though he might, Hirschhorn underlines with zest that he himself does not set out to emancipate the people, it is in fact, his own autonomy that he finds in the collaboration.

The only way to make such moments of experience possible is to be open, to enable yourself and your co-workers

‘to touch the unexpected’,

Hirschhorn says.

It means acknowledging the risk of failure, whereby autonomy is to be found precisely in the possible lack of a result, in the lack of guarantee.



**Art is
accused of over-
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so “hiding reality”**

² Buchloh, Benjamin. “Interview with Thomas Hirschhorn” in *OCTOBER*, issue 113, Summer 2005, 77-100.

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What Hirschhorn's art does is give a part of its autonomy away – handing it down to unexpected, contingent elements and an outcome that cannot be foreseen. Paradoxical as it is, by doing so his works confirm their own autonomy as a mode of experience. Or as Joost de Bloois reframes:

"[Hirschhorn's] effects are always indirect and incomplete, but also not completely contingent."

The material out of which Hirschhorn's Spinoza Festival-artwork is built does not have an aestheticised look to it. It's chaos, but that too is a given form.

'I don't want to create volumes. I only want to work in the third dimension. [...] I want to make sculpture with the thinking, the conceiving, the various plans and the planning.'

Hirschhorn tells Benjamin Buchloh about his choice to work with such seemingly random material.

'It addresses the viewers quite directly.'

It's forceful and impossible to step back from.

'I want spectators to be part of this world surrounding them in this moment. Then they have to deal with it. That's way it looks the way it does.' ³

Once again Hirschhorn touches upon Rancière's thinking, as the latter formulates the effect of the artwork as an embodiment of freedom as follows:

"The autonomy of art is not autonomy of practice giving itself its own rules, but it [the autonomy] is that we are in front of an artwork and we don't know what to do with it, we don't know how to handle it."

The subversive component of an artwork, Rancière would say, lies not in its subject, but is generated by the way in which the content is organised.

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³

Buchloh, 2005.

So is autonomy a public event? It surely seems to be so for Thomas Hirschhorn. However Hito Steyerl, in her presentation on autonomy and "occupation" at the Autonomy Project Symposium, takes a completely different position. Autonomy for her means autonomy of life from art. Like Hirschhorn however, Steyerl too stresses the importance of the moment of experience. What she seems to say is that in a world that is totally occupied by art, where art spreads out from the gallery, all over the streets, over the whole of public life, where

'politics are not only aestheticised but have become aesthetical as such, as they work (through) the senses.' ⁴

the only way for art to distinguish itself from life is through a specific mode of experience: as a moment of absolute respite. Every artist has his or her own means to create such a moment. Art doesn't solve anything, but it's a gesture of resistance, useless as it may seem, that goes beyond the realm of usefulness.

"Occupation,"

which Steyerl explained in the discussion following her presentation, in reverse terms is a way of de-territorialising, de-institutionalising, de-congesting art's space, or any space, in order to salvage life from art,

"is the experiences it generates and nothing else. On the other hand these are the experiences it generates and that's not nothing. [...] Experience won't make the system collapse, on the other hand there's no other way to do it."

It's no solution, but there is a promise in it. And if we connect this back with Hirschhorn:

"Art is not sacred, but it is a contribution to an ongoing discussion." ⁵

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Steyerl, Hito. "Documentary Uncertainty" in *A Prior Magazine*, issue 15, 2007. Online: <http://www.aprior.org/texts/apm15_steyerl_doc>

⁵

Buchloh, 2005.

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After all, the most important question raised in the symposium wasn't so much a question of the nature or the function of art or its autonomy. Rather it was a question of how to think autonomy. As Hirschhorn explained in an interview in the newspaper *Trouw* in 2009, as his Bijlmer Spinoza Festival was just taking off:

*'What I find important, and what we can learn from Spinoza, is that it's not about 'believing in God', but about the human capacity 'to think God'. [...] Spinoza wasn't interested in religion, but in this intellectual ability. [...] Just to think God is more than enough, you touch upon something entirely human, something huge.'*⁶

Can we "think autonomy" in such a way?

⁶ Leeuwen, Anna van. "Spinoza leert ons God te denken" in: *Trouw*. May 2, 2009 <<http://www.trouw.nl/tr/nl/4324/Nieuws/article/detail/1138984/2009/05/02/Spinoza-leert-ons-om-rsquo-God-te-denken-rsquo.dhtml>>



The Relevance of Collective Autonomy

JUDITH WESTERVELD

The starting point for this essay on collective autonomy stems from the discussion between Thomas Hirschhorn and Isabell Lorey, mediated by Jeroen Boomgaard during the second day of the Autonomy Project Symposium held from 7 to 9 October 2011. Hirschhorn presented his work *The Bijlmer Spinoza Festival* that took place in 2009 and Lorey theorised the recent and on-going protests by groups of people on the central squares of many European cities. I believe that both their standpoints, as well as the discussion that followed, nuance an understanding of collective autonomy. Before looking into the positions presented in the symposium however, I will contextualise the discussion relating to collective autonomy – its urgency and forms – put forward in previous Autonomy Project newspapers by Sven Lütticken and John Byrne.

Critical Autonomy

In his article entitled “*Critical Autonomy: “Inside out” and “outside in” – provisional autonomous communities*”, published in the Autonomy Project Newspaper #1: *Positioning*, John Byrne reformulates autonomy as a response to ‘deeper underlying changes within our culture’. Issues such as globalisation, the increasingly unstable economic situation and the changing political and social practices as a result of that, all contribute to these shifts that change our culture.



Thomas Hirschhorn – Masterclass 2011
Location: Vanabbemuseum, Eindhoven
Photo: Emilio Moreno

Byrne suggests that this creates a critical autonomy that is different from the more traditional notions of autonomy, such as within the Enlightenment thought. He does not wish to discard it but instead re-thinks and re-negotiates traditional autonomy in the Kantian sense – elements such as independent thought and free will are, after all, still important to this day.

The fundamental problem when doing this revision of autonomy is that one is also confronted with the split between an

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‘observing and isolated subject and a supposedly exterior and observable object.’ Such a division no longer exists in the world of today, which is commoditized and formed by globalization and neoliberalism, according to Byrne. There is no longer a clear inside where one can hide, operate and critique an external outside. And on the other hand, there is also no longer a clear outside that can attack such insides. Byrne suggests that when one accepts this, and instead begins to see

‘the idea of autonomy as a process of continual negotiations and exchange’

relationships, communities and forms of resistance become new forms of autonomy.

Byrne thus implies that a decentred role of the individual and a dialogue of continual collective negotiations form the autonomy that he sees emerging. By placing the emphasis for this new form of autonomy on the act of negotiation – an act that requires multiple parties – Byrne highlights the need for collective autonomy. As it is no longer possible to say that change starts on the outside, and we know that negotiation always brings with it continuous shifts, Byrne’s collective autonomy emerges from within the very structures of our globalised world. This causes internal fractures wherein we can, to use his words,

‘rethink ourselves radically, imagine ourselves differently and re-figure our collective futures.’

Lütticken’s Performative Autonomy

In his paper entitled *“Three autonomies and more”*, published in the same Autonomy Project publication, Sven Lütticken describes four forms of autonomy. And it is in his description of ‘performative autonomy’ where autonomy transcends its traditional boundaries. In the context of this text performativity refers to the acts that every one of us carries out to sustain

a social daily life. In problematizing such performativity and assigning it an autonomous character Lütticken was inspired by writer, Jan Verwoert’s reflections on this topic.

Verwoert states that more than ever before we live in a society that pressurizes us to perform to such an extent that this type of behaviour has become something natural. It feels impossible and futile to resist. And simply because of that it becomes more and more necessary, as Verwoert writes, to restore dignity to the “I can’t”. Negating performativity in this way should not be seen as negative however as, in the words of Lütticken,

‘You act because you care.’

In Herman Melville’s story of Bartleby, which Lütticken also refers to, Bartleby’s ‘refusal to play the role of a “proper” and well-behaved subject becomes, paradoxically, a real act.’ It is through Bartleby’s disruption of the norm that the performance is turned back into an act. According to Lütticken, Verwoert takes this even one step further and proposes to develop strategies to achieve this. Lütticken furthermore states that the autonomy of the act should not only be articulated and practised on an individual level, but also on a collective one. In this instance the collective level of autonomy is equated with the political in that: ‘While a “classical” revolution may not be on the agenda, what should be attempted is the creation of a montage of different groups and their activities. The specificity of individual practices needs to be incorporated...’ Here once again a form of collective autonomy emerges. When considering this, I can’t help but draw a link to the motives and activities of the groups of protestors that Isabell Lorey brought forward in her lecture on *“Non-representationist, Presentist Democracy”* at the Autonomy Project Symposium and the presentation which followed it by Thomas Hirschhorn.

Collective Autonomy – a discussion

In Lorey's lecture she theorised the recent and ongoing collective uprising against the political, economic and social developments in Europe. She focused on the self-organisation of these collectives, yet in the discussion refused to use the word "autonomy" as Lorey believes that this is not what these new political groups are seeking. Lorey linked the notion of autonomy to the Enlightenment period in which it stood for sovereignty and in turn, power over the other.

Hirschhorn chose to present his work *The Bijlmer Spinoza Festival* (2009). He reflected upon the different forms of autonomy that surfaced during the different phases of this work. And in an attempt to start a productive discussion between the two positions, Jeroen Boomgaard suggested to focus on the role that self-invention plays in both Lorey's precarious groups of protestors and Hirschhorn's precarious groups of participants and spectators.

To Boomgaard's suggested equation of self-invention with autonomy, Lorey immediately objected.

She argued that within the political agency that the groups of protestors practise, there is no focus on the self, as this would commit the idea of sovereignty to an individual – a form of politics that they are against.

But what about the self-invention of a group? Are the efforts of self-organisation and the common striving for a new kind of democracy not also forms of self-invention on a collective scale? And could this not be a reformulated notion of autonomy?

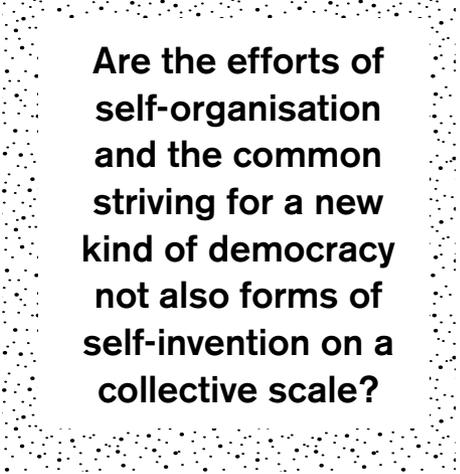
Hirschhorn's work in *The Bijlmer Spinoza Festival* however, is a good example where forms of collective autonomy could be seen emerging. And the way in which Lorey described the actions that groups of protestors are undertaking urged me to reconsider those as another example. By clarifying the conception of collective autonomy through the work of Hirschhorn, we could not only enrich and broaden the discussion around autonomy itself, but also inform our thinking around current societal movements: i.e. the groups of Lorey's focus.

Hirschhorn's Bijlmer Spinoza Festival

The Bijlmer Spinoza Festival is an artwork that ran for 60 days in 2009. The work which took the form of a pavilion where multiple activities such as lectures and theatrical performances, and services such as a library, internet and a bar were accessible and taking place everyday. The work started out as the artist's individual project based on the wish to create a new kind of festival, creating a place and a framework where one could meet others and the unexpected could happen. Hirschhorn's artistic approach was based on the practice of 'Presence and Production' in the sense that the artist was physically there everyday, committed to every phase of the project: the preparation, the set-up, the

exhibition and the dismantling. Hirschhorn organised, built and was present throughout all the different parts of the festival, when there were participants and when there was no one around. Slowly the project turned into a collective one as people from the neighbourhood made their contributions during the 60 days, sometimes paid and sometimes voluntarily. They started to call it their project.

What is striking is that Hirschhorn calls this collective project an autonomous



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artwork as, according to him, it is built on the notion of self-invention. What interests the artist is what forms of autonomy come from this self-invention, what they can do, mean and become within the public domain. In this process he does not deny the autonomy of the individual. Nor of himself as an artist, nor of the individual people from the Bijlmer neighbourhood. Each person leaves their own free will intact and through a decided commitment and responsibility to a common cause create a collective. But this was not a cause to which everyone had to agree, by being in one place and acting in a similar fashion.

Hirschhorn's cause was flexible, both physically and psychologically – it could shift and change. In this way the self, the individual autonomy of Hirschhorn, was used to invent, to plan, to secure funding, to receive permission, and to recognise the individual autonomy of neighbours, thus enabling a collective autonomy to emerge. This collective autonomy based on self-invention, emancipated the project as a whole from a number of problematic issues usually accompanying public or “community focused” artworks. This collective autonomy was one where the other, co-existence, generosity, intensity of participation and experience, were the most important elements, as in Hirschhorn's case, autonomy is never based on self-sufficiency or self-enclosure.



In your book, *The Emancipated Spectator*, you state:
—— ‘Collective understanding of emancipation is not the comprehension of the total process of subjection it is the collectivisation of capacities invested in scenes of dissensus’.

Given this discussion on the manifestation of a break and the formation of a new subject, does this mean that the collectivity is merely the sum of individual acts of dissensus, or does the association of individual acts of dissensus qualitatively change the seemingly discrete acts, if so, in what sense? In what sense is a community different from an aggregation of translators?

The relation between individual and collective is not an opposition but about the very sense of the collective.

What I was criticising was a certain idea of the collective as if it were endowed by the historical process itself, with the understanding of the collective process. Hence, the idea that collective intelligence means the effectuation of, for instance, what Marx called the education of the factory. There was that moment when the proletariat was supposed to be educated by the factory. The discipline of the proletariat was meant to embrace the whole complexity of power relations and thereby produce its own critique before it could actually do anything. And of course, the result is that you can never reach the end, because if you never embrace the totality of conditions, you never actually do anything. My point on the relation of the individual to the collective is directed to the empowerment of a specific intellectual capacity that is the capacity of anybody. This passage was more or less a kind of answer to the conception by Tony Negri of the collective intellect. I stressed that it is not the process of capitalism that creates a specific place for the position of the general intellect. Rather it is a matter of collectivising, the multiplicity of capacities. The multiplicity of capacities is not a multiplicity of individuals. It's a matter of uniting the forms of the singular manifestation of capacity. Hence, in the protests that lead to the taking of the square from Tunis to Athens, there are two kinds of capacity: the capacity to illegal action and the capacity of organisation of daily life. I think really what's important is this collectivisation of forms, of manifestation of capacity, and these manifestations of capacity are not reducible to this one individual or the group.



Do you see this in relation to the current demands that are summed up in the slogan 'real democracy now'!. The tension between representation and democracy here is not a usual one of direct versus representative democracy, but more that of an anarchistic democracy in your terms – an anarchy without the point of origin. One of the central practices of this movement of democracy are the emergence of assemblies, not only in a central place but much more in the districts and townships, their function is not to prove demands to government but to discuss about the political, social and economic situation and act in local struggles.

With your concepts of politics and democracy, how would you estimate or theorise such assemblies, would you call this process of self-organisation autonomy?

Jacques Rancière



I would prefer to name it dissensus rather than autonomy. For it involves more than a definition of a common territory.

This creation of spaces, that occurs as the square is occupied by transgression, can be understood in relation to autonomy. However, I think that autonomy is a category that has to be related to actions, rather than to a group of people. I always have a problem with this idea of a political group as a kind of self. If you remember, I was criticised by my colleague Alain Badiou because, he said politics has to be judged from the point of view of the militant. For him the member of the militant group is a participant in collective subjectivity. For me subjectivation does not designate so much the constitution of a group as the manifestation of a certain set of actions. As regards the popular assemblies, we cannot simply identify collective power with the discussion in a collective assembly. For people of my generation who have known general assemblies where normally everybody could speak freely, it was also commonly known that after twenty minutes it was obvious that the general assembly could be a place for manipulation. The militants of some leftist groups received special training for this kind of job. So now in my generation there is a repulsion against the idea of identifying collective power with those kinds of assemblies. One of the interesting things that has been mentioned by Isabell Lorey about the assemblies in Madrid or in Athens, is the idea of drawing lots for the right to speak in the assembly. I think it's very important that these popular assemblies find a way to block the professionals in the manipulation of the assemblies...

It's not a matter of explosion and then institutionalisation, no, I think at every moment there is and in every assembly there is the problem of inventing a kind of anarchic discipline of the assembly. I think there are two points that are difficult to link: the emergence of spontaneous forms, and also giving a proper temporality to those movements. I think that a duration can be won, only if it is possible to break from the very beginning, the work of the professionals.



AUTONOMY AND USE VALUE: CONNECTION AND CONJUNCTION

JOHN BYRNE (JB.) & FRANCO "BIFO" BERARDI (FB.)

This interview originated from the discussions which followed Franco Berardi's talk at the Autonomy Symposium in Eindhoven. During his talk, Berardi stressed the importance of re-negotiating the language of global financial capitalism; a language which has been instrumentalised through the pernicious mechanisms of neo-liberal deregulation, a language which has been systematically stripped of its meaning and reduced to the standardised interchangeability of operational code. Against this, Berardi posed the reclamation of language as the 'job of the poet', the necessity to restore ambiguity, fluidity and metaphor to the languages we use in representing ourselves to ourselves and each other. This poetry, Berardi argued, would return an abstracted and deracinated language to a body which is both physically personal and socially contingent. What seemed interesting about this point was its proximity to a distinction that Marx attempted to make in *Das Kapital* between a use value which was visceral, qualitative and contingent upon community and a commodity value which was abstracted, reified and quantitative. After raising this issue briefly with him during our Autonomy Symposium discussion, Berardi was kind enough to offer an email interview which has been reproduced below (for which, on behalf of the Autonomy Project's Editorial Panel, I'd like to offer our gratitude and sincere thanks) (JB)



John Byrne — Workshop 2011
Location: Vanabbemuseum, Eindhoven
Photo: Emilio Moreno

JB. During the Autonomy Symposium, you argued that the job of the poet was to reclaim language from the chain of semiocapital signification and to return it to the body "so we can imagine a place where we can again be lovers." Could you expand on this notion?

FB. The process of change underway in our time is centered on the shift from conjunction to connection as the paradigm of exchange between conscious organisms. The leading factor of this change is the insertion of the electronic in the organic, the proliferation of artificial devices in the organic universe, the body, communication and society. But the effect of this change is a transformation of the relationship between consciousness and sensibility, and the increasing desensitization in the exchange of signs. The digitalization of communicative processes induces a sort of desensitization to the curve, the continuous process of slow becoming; and a sort of sensitization to the code, sudden changes of state and series of discrete signs. In order to understand this anthropological shift we should focus on the meaning of conjunction and connection. Conjunction is a becoming other. In contrast, in connection each element remains distinct and interacts only functionally. Singularities change when they conjoin, they become something other than what they were before their conjunction.

Love changes the lover and the combination of a-signifying signs gives rise to the emergence of a previously inexistent meaning.

JB. Could you expand a little more on this difference between conjunction and connection?

Conjunction is the meeting and fusion of round and irregular shapes that are continuously weaseling their way about with no precision, repetition or perfection. Connection is the punctual and repeatable interaction of algorithmic functions, straight lines and points that overlap perfectly, and plug in or out according to discrete modes of interaction that render the different parts compatible to a pre-established standard. The shift from conjunction to connection as the predominant mode of interaction of conscious organisms is a consequence of the gradual digitalization of signs and the increasing mediatization of relations.

JB. If this is the case, it seems to me that you are saying our current struggles for autonomy are taking place within an already overdetermined and overcoded space? That the act of conjunction, the act of the poet or the lover, is to re-imagine the possibility of the other from complex processes of interpersonal communication. Over the last fifteen years or so, the utopian paradigm for sharing and recombining communication has been the open space of the Internet. Yet the negative connotations of your use of the term 'connection' seems to be suggesting that digital forms of communication are as limiting as they are emancipatory?

FB. The spreading of the connective modality in social life (the network), creates the condition of an anthropological shift that we cannot yet fully understand. This shift is involving a mutation of the conscious organism: in order to make the conscious organism compatible with the connective machine, cognitive system has to be reformatted. Conscious and sensitive organisms are so subjected to a process of mutation that is involving attention, processing, decision and expression. Info flows have to be accelerated, and connective capacity has to be empowered, in order to comply with the recombinant technology of the global net. This mutation is provoking a sort of dulling of conjunctive ability of human cognition, particularly of sensibility, the essential conjunctive faculty in the first connective generation, the generation that has learned more words from a machine than from the mother.

JB. Do you see any palpable long-term effects of this mutation from conjunction to connection, this dulling of cognition and sensibility?

FB. This mutation is actually provoking painful effects on the conscious organism, and these effects can be interpreted with the categories of psychopathology: dyslexia, anxiety and apathy, panic and depression. However, the pathological description is not grasping the deep meaning of the question. What is more important, in fact, is the attempt of adaptation of the conscious organism to a changing environment. In these late modern times we are experiencing a growing pollution of air, water and food. Industrial fallout is provoking an increase in asthma, lung-cancer, and respiratory diseases. But there is an other kind of pollution which concerns the psychic breathing of individual and collective organisms. Semiotic flows which are spread in the Infosphere by the media system are polluting the psychosphere and provoking disharmony: fear, anxiety, panic, depression are the pathological symptoms of this kind of pollution.

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JB. If, as you say, semiotic flows are polluting the psychosphere, then it seems to me that any struggle for autonomy now hinges on a struggle over the re-coding of the individual body within the linguistic flow of neo-liberal globalization, the very syntax and grammar of continual deregulation – or semiocapitalism as you have previously termed it? Within this framework, is the role of connection always one of delimitation and confinement?

FB. Connection in this sense requires a criterion of interpretation that is purely syntactic. The interpreter must recognize a sequence and be able to carry out the operation foreseen by the 'general syntax' (or operating system); there can be no margins for ambiguity in the exchange of messages, nor can the intention be manifest though nuances. The gradual translation of semantic differences into syntactic differences is the process that led from modern scientific rationalism to cybernetics and eventually made the creation of a digital web possible. Rather than a fusion of segments, connection entails a simple effect of machine functionality. The functionality of the materials that connect is implicit in the connection as a functional modeling that prepares them for interfacing and inter-operability. In order for connection to be possible, segments must be linguistically compatible. Connection requires a prior process whereby the elements that need to connect are made compatible. Indeed the digital web extends through the progressive reduction of an increasing number of elements to a format, a standard and a code that makes compatible different elements.

JB. How much do these ideas of returning language to the body, to the re-vivification of languages heterogeneity, owe to your working friendship with Felix Guattari and, in particular, to the kind of ideas he outlined in *Chaosmosis* about machinic assemblage and montage?

FB: Guattari spoke of 'retournel' or refrains. The refrain is an obsessive ritual that allows the individual – the conscious organism in continuous variation – to find identification points, and to territorialize oneself and to represent oneself in relation to the surrounding world. The refrain is the modality of semiotization that allows an individual (a group, a people, a nation, a sub-culture, a movement) to receive and project the world according to reproducible and communicable formats.

The main cultural transformation of modern capitalism that we are speaking about has been the creation of refrains of temporal perception that pervade and discipline society: the refrain of factory work, the refrain of the salary, the refrain of production line. The digital transition has brought along with it new refrains: electronic fragmentation, information overload, acceleration of the semiotic exchange.

JB: As you have previously pointed out, these temporal refrains of semiocapital – the social act of making the world commensurable through the imposition of cognitive systems - must be having some effect on our collective ability to imagine and produce acts of social conjunction as opposed to disciplined frameworks that govern individual connectivity. If so, what are they?

FB: In order to efficiently interact with the connective environment, the conscious and sensitive organism starts to suppress at a certain degree what we call sensibility. This is in my opinion the core of cognitive reformatting that is underway. Sensibility, i.e. the ability to interpret and understand what cannot be expressed in verbal or digital signs, can be useless and also dangerous in an integrated system of connective nature



Franco "Bifo" Berardi – Symposium 2011
Location: Vanabbemuseum, Eindhoven
Photo: Emilio Moreno

. Sensibility is slowing the interpretation procedures, and making de-codification aleatory, ambiguous, uncertain, so reducing the competitive efficiency of the semiotic agent. The ethical dimension is involved in this process: a sort of ethical insensibility seems to mark the behavior of the humans of the last generation. But if we want to understand the disturbance in the ethical sphere we should displace our attention towards the aesthetic field. The ethical disorder, the inability to ethically manage individual and collective life seems to follow to a disturbance of the aesthesia, perception of the other and of the self.

JB. If, as you say, acts of sensibility, of conjunctivity, are able to slow down the processes of competitive efficiency within the frameworks of semiocapital, then surely this is in itself an ethico-aesthetic imperative, a need to act on behalf of the socius for the sake of imagining forms of collective autonomy?

FB. Social solidarity is not an ethical or ideological value: it depends on the continuousness of the relation between individuals in time and in space. The material foundation of solidarity is the perception of the continuity of the body in the body, of the consistency of my interest and your interest. Since the '80s precarity provoked a process of de-solidarization and a process of disaggregation of the social composition of work. Virtualization has been a complementary cause of de-solidarization: precarization makes the social body frail at the level of work, while virtualization makes the social body frail at the level of affection. Collectivity starts to be fragmented, submitted to the accelerating rhythms of the virtual machine, and this process is parallel and complementary to the fractalization of financial capital. Financial capitalism is deterritorialized and virtual, and acts as a constant recombination of virtual fragments of abstract ownership.

JB. During the Autonomy Project Symposium, much was made of the uprisings of the Arab Spring and the re-claim movements of Wall Street and London's Square Mile. This is understandable; they seemed to provide a model for social cohesion as opposition to governmental terrorism and violent form of coercion and control. However, little or no mention was made (except by yourself) of the more messy, violent and inchoate protesters that happened across the UK during the summer of 2011. This is also understandable as, to many, they seemed to make no sense. They seemed to be based on little more than looting and the public posturing of juvenile gangs. In the light of our discussion so far, would you be kind enough to finish off this interview by saying something about your point of view on these "commodity riots" as I have begun to call them?

FB. The uprising that emerged during the year 2011 can be seen as a Mantra, a re-activation of the conjunctive body. Upheaval, uprising, insurrection and riots: these words should not be intended in a military way. We should not be surprised, we should not condemn these acts as criminal. It's useless to preach a sermon to those who can only express their revolt in a violent way.

What we should be able to communicate to the rioters, the looters, is a truth that we have to build together and to spread: a collective mantra chanted by millions of people will tear down the walls of Jericho much better than a pickaxe or a bomb. The uprising is a therapy for this kind of psychopathology. The uprising is not judging, but healing. And the healing is made possible by a mantra that rises, stronger and stronger, as solidarity re-surfaces in daily life.

'FOR TO END YET AGAIN...'

WILLEM VAN WEELDEN

THE END

Two years after the dust of the 9/11 attacks had settled down, Jean Baudrillard published an introduction and testament to his thought. As a carefully constructed collection of 16 short texts, his Passwords offer the reader entry points, vehicles of ideas, that allow admittance to the various belvederes of the writer's thoughts on the ever-greater mediatization of technological society, by way of the concepts he uses throughout his work.

Offering the bundle lately to a friend as a gift, I was reminded of the fact that we live in a moment of fundamental shifts and transformations, in which cultural "passwords" are being disabled, or have expired. It seems that former cultural codes have been overhauled by new ones; or that the domains behind these walls of authentication have ceased to exist. With the reconfiguration of the "system" comes the denial of service: all the things you believed you had rightful access to are blocked. A future, a career, a certain way of conducting and celebrating life, and even, maybe, access to the domain of the risky belief in a certain fairness. So I guess, "passwords" used within a culture that seems to hinge on a strange combination of suspicion and greed, must have a magnetic effect on the minds of the people. Those people are kept in a nasty mudfight of trying to get access or regain access to those services – due to their clear and forcefully implanted desirability, as well as the system's manifestation of controlled austere exhibitionism.

So getting comfortable and cozy with this prudish conception, why not have a swift look at one of the truly kinky passwords Baudrillard included in his collection? Let's pick one that has the capacity to inspire us interminably: The **End**.

With this word, it is the question of time that is posed, the question of its linearity, of this- perhaps conventional- representation we have of it as past, present and future, with an origin and an **end**. There is an origin-**end** couple in the same way as there are causes and effects, subjects and object : all these reassuring things. But, from now on, we are in a kind of process of limitlessness in which the **end** can no longer be located. I have spoken, in this connection, of a 'final solution', in the sense of an extermination.

But the **end** is also the finality or purpose of something, that which gives it a meaning. And when you are in processes developing in a chain reaction, which, beyond a certain critical mass, become exponential, they no longer have the finality or meaning.'

In what sense can this overtly disenchanting description of a static infinity be conceived as a password? How does it give access, and to what? Other passwords?

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Or is it the access to the true experience of the horror of infinity without meaning? According to Baudrillard, Fukuyama is, in his assumption that time has come to an end, wrong. Instead Baudrillard stresses the opposite: time will have **NO END**, hence no longer a finality, any purpose, any meaning!

But then again how grim is his analysis? Is it an analysis of our current 'cybernetic conditions'? Or is Mr Baudrillard just politely warning that, just because time has become something else, we mustn't think that things will not fundamentally change over time?

Seen from a certain angle, Baudrillard could be suggesting that we are frozen in spacetime! As if we passed through an as yet unknown event-horizon and have been pulled in by a paralysing black hole that awaited us beyond.

ENDING AFTER POST-MODERNISM

Suppose this image of time is a forceful denial. An image of not lightning up to the rest! What could it be the denial of? Is it a denial that infinity is, for a thinker, a nasty thing to incorporate in his theory? Or that time *per se* is incomprehensible? Or is it the willfully evil denial of change (WEDC) *par excellence*? If so: is this conception the ultimate mark of an infinite arrest of political action or emancipation?

Baudrillard developed this line of thinking already in the Eighties, culminating in his famous *Les Stratégies Fatales*. After the big challenging impact that *Simulations* had, this work functioned as a chaotic strange attractor in the debates on the post-modern condition in the arts. In Baudrillard's view the fatal strategy (meant here as a situationist-inspired tactic) could only consist of giving in to the mechanisms of the virtual valorisation that the neo-liberal market of ideas had globally deployed. Art could no longer be seen as an emancipatory force but as a '*Fremdkörper*' intrinsically woven into the dizzying design of the global economy tapestry of signs.

The work's strangeness lay in the fact that it set itself the task of becoming a fatalistic, embalmed escape from the ecstasy of communication. Shortly after the *Simulations* publication came the proclamation of the so-called 'End of Art'. Baudrillard-inspired debates about this End popped up like mushrooms in the fall. But, given the passion and monumentality of the work's treatment, it was already clear that it would be at least a substantial End. An End with a certain Grandeur! A long, winding, dramatic, tragic End perhaps followed at its culmination point by a sudden BANG. Although everyone could feel that something new would emerge, the anticipation on the context in which this new paradigm would take place was still rather blurry and vague to most of the most prolific debaters.

The End engendered in some ways the already sombre prelude to his ideas on *The Conspiracy of Art* in which he questions the privilege to art by its practitioners, and points in the direction of a transaesthetic position for the arts, explaining that the whole of society has become exactly that: transaesthetic. This 'transaesthetic turn' signaled the 'return of the repressed' among the art world.

In a sense, the transaesthetic is the logical outcome of Baudrillard's earlier deduction: that 'the meta-narratives of emancipation' (Lyotard) had mutated into a monumental disjuncture between the rhetoric and ruling paradigms of political praxis in the then new social movements that survived the post-punk era. Baudrillard considered this to have affected the theoretical and epistemological commitments of most of the leading intellectuals who saw themselves aligned with those movements. This shift all happened in the wake of another End that had already taken place in the emancipatory camps around Europe.

In Italy, this rise of neo-liberal policy had announced itself in the early Eighties during which time the processual quality of the Autonomia movement – thriving in part on drugs, Mao-Dadaism, transversalist linguistics, a libidinal, surrealist flow of direct action, while ridiculing all forms of organised politics, and celebrating the situationist marriage between art and daily life – was brutally put down by the totalising repression of the Christian Democratic powers who witch-hunted the movement using mock trials, incarcerations and heavy intimidation. This historical moment can be seen as a real end, not the somersault of infinity that Baudrillard talks about in his *Password* text, but a true end of the libertarian, anti-authoritarian flow, that had started in the early Seventies with its opposition to workerist reformism. The Autonomist fest without end had come to a grinding halt!

ESCAPING THE CYBERNETIC IMPASSE

For Félix Guattari, this historical shift led him to describe the Eighties as 'Les Années d'Hiver', 'The Winter Years'. In the introductory text of the collection of essays that bears the same title, Guattari describes himself as someone that lived through the Sixties as if these years of springtime would last interminably. But without dwelling in the past and certainly not being unaware of the naiveté of the revolutionary era in the late Sixties, it is clear that Guattari valued that naiveté even more than the emergence of the cynical beast of post-modernism rearing its ugly head. In the depths of disenchantment with the collapse of the Autonomia movement, facing a world turning into a sphere of Integrated World Capitalism (IWC), Guattari co-authored texts with Antonio Negri and Eric Alliez that aimed to forge new alliances, new spaces for liberty, and hack out a new practice of subversion based not on the cynical notion of 'being against', but more on the vitalist force of 'being for'. This force was described by Guattari as 'a processual passion', as a collective recapturing of the dynamics which could destratify the moribund structures that this reterritorialising strategy of IWC had brought forth.

This passion meant for Guattari an engagement with new fronts e.g. extra European (Third World) contexts that offered him the promise of creating a renewed symbiotic micro-political form within alternative social force fields, incorporating both theory and practice; his so called chaosophy (e.g. in the contexts of Brazil, and later to his commitment to the Green parties and environmentalists in France that became the context for him to develop his radical ecological theory).

Guattari's ecological turn had already its precedent in his interest in Gregory Bateson: anthropologist, second-wave cybernetician and social thinker, as well as author of his seminal book *Towards an Ecology of Mind*.

Guattari introduced the book to Deleuze while writing their *Mille Plateaux* (the title of which, as you might know originates from Bateson's anthropological work in Bali). Bateson's books gave the two a grand entrance into an experimental field of connecting philosophy with "natural" life; to bridge the humanities with the sciences in an experimental melting pot of concepts and transversalist approaches. This mingling inspired a lot of the original concepts proposed in *Mille Plateaux*. One of them being their idea of a "Geology of Morals": an idea that expressed the desire to create an ontology that can use the same concept to address physical, organic, and social systems.

**"Geology of Morals":
an idea that expressed
the desire to create an
ontology that can use
the same concept to
address physical, organic,
and social systems.**

What Second Order cybernetics did was to put pressure on the relationship between the paradox of circular causality (or recursivity) and the contingency of all observations and interpretations. This notion of relativity concerning scientific knowledge brought Varela and Maturana to their First-Person's approach in their scientific work, trying to pass beyond the philosophical impasse of realism versus idealism, but dangerously moving into the direction of total arbitrariness. It gives you the impression that systems theory can only lead to a fundamental acceptance that however complex or even unpredictable a system is, it tends to move into a direction that allows no political antagonism.

Yet, for Deleuze and Guattari their transversal cutting across of knowledge domains had a political motivation and underpinning. For them it was a way to de-stratify the determinism of the bodies of knowledge, by demonstrating the fundamental unstable nature of any thought construct that could only give rise to embracing the emission of singularities, hence their emphasis on art and its potential for soft subversions.

To escape this fatum of arbitrariness, anticipated by Guattari in his last works, his radical ecosophy proposed to transversally connect the domains of the mind, the social and the environmental (Trois Ecologies) and to focus on the study of the production of subjectivity. In their attention to the process of subjectification both Deleuze and Guattari could reject all models that negate or enclose what is new, or that stress regularities and signifying means. Their approach is a radical focus on process, the irreversible, and singularization.

In this unstable, impermanent approach, this shift of attention, the analyses by Deleuze and Guattari bear the features of what a networked context of communication and thus subjectivation calls for. It is the focus on the rhizomatic, interconnecting lines of communication and reciprocal influencing that of the two address successfully.

It was the work of Pierre Levy that further inspired Guattari to understand machinic enunciation. He found in Levy the affirmation that it is impossible to reduce the notion of the machine as something solely mechanical, and something that is primarily concerned with functionalist operations. All machines have in some part an 'abstract machine', (referring also to the 1970s work of Kafka in terms of a writing machine), for it is not only an extension of the human intellect, but on a deeper level it must be understood that the ontological 'iron curtain' between mind and matter is no longer pertinent.

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Summer School — Group Presentation 2011
Location: De gang, Arnhem

Guattari's last book *Chaosmosis, an ethico-aesthetic paradigm* (1992), proposed to extend Francisco Varela's biological notions of autopoiesis: referring to organisms that engender their own operation and specific limits, to social systems, technical machines, and their interactions. Having disputed the Saussurean notion of the split between language and speech, demonstrating their complete intertwining, Guattari was able to define his aesthetic paradigm. With this fundamental departure point in his analysis, he could only conclude that with the rise of machinic enunciation, the aesthetising relationship between modern human beings and the world would only grow in strength and dominance. 'The aesthetic power to feel seems about to take precedence in the collective arrangements of enunciations of our period.'

Subjectivity is no more a given than water or air, so 'how can we work to free it, which is to say; to resingularize it, how can we work on becoming?'. And what if this infinite, vitalist becoming is the end of art?

May 30, 2012



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AUTONOMY AND CORRUPTION IN ITALY

MICHELLE FRANKE

¹ Oxford English
Dictionary Online,
Oxford University
Press, 2009.

I started to think about the relationship between autonomy and corruption in the summer of 2010, during the first Autonomy Project Summer School. During this week at the Van Abbemuseum, autonomy was being defined as a relational, critical space; as an island within the 'system', where art is able to question or contest assumptions without being consumed or internalised. It is within this context that I examined the concept of corruption in relation to critical art practices. Eighteen months on, this may be a good moment to revisit this concept in light of the huge social, political, and economic changes that have taken place. The so-called Arabic Spring, the Euro-American Occupy movements, the worsening of the economic crisis in the 'Western' world, and the almost-failure of the European economic system, are some of the most remarkable events of the last year and a half. I believe that a discussion on corruption can lead to a productive reflection on the relationship between art and our contemporary socio-cultural environment. Usually regarded as a negative term, corruption is understood as "moral deterioration or decay," and as "the perversion of anything from an original state of purity".¹ Can such a highly criticised practice be a critical tool itself?

² Berardi, Franco,
*Autonomy Project
Symposium*, 9 October
2011. Video recording of
the lecture available at:
<http://vanabbemuseum.nl/audio-video>

The focus of this text is on Italy where, in November 2011, under the weight of the country's debt and the pressure of the European Union, Silvio Berlusconi resigned and Mario Monti was appointed as Italy's new prime minister. It is within the country's tumultuous reorganisation that corruption may be appropriated; not as a tool for economic swindling but as a critical attitude that may help build a different relationship to the "blackmail of money, of competition [and] of profit," as Franco Bifo Berardi has described our contemporary version of financial capitalism.²

³ Settis, Salvatore,
"Un grande Patrimonio
assaltato dai vandali."
La Repubblica,
24 February 2011

As a teenager, I grew up in the Italy of the 1990s. Shortly after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the subsequent weakening of the East-West dichotomy, this was the time in which the neoliberal ideology swept over Italy. The country made the turn towards privatisation, introducing the rules of international private capitalism into the public sector. Within this context, Italy's public expenses on art and culture rank among the lowest in Europe.³ A major (and worsening) problem in Italy is the poorly regulated and unintelligible privatisation of the cultural heritage, which becomes a speculative instrument for investors. The latest cuts announced by Monti's technocratic government are not new, nor surprising. And in the meantime, the citizens' trust in their government has been reduced to a minimum.

⁴ To know more
about the issue, see for
instance: "Palazzo
Madama, licenziati
cuochi e camerieri.
Personale occupa il
ristorante del Senato."
La Repubblica, 20
December 2011
(<http://www.repubblica.it>)
; or: Sergio Rizzo,
"Il prezzo è giusto, il
ristorante si svuota. E
al Senato i camerieri
perdonano il posto." *Il
Corriere della Sera*, 21
December 2011
(<http://www.corriere.it>).

During my last visit to Italy in December 2011, my sister told me a truly fascinating story that is exemplary for the relationship between Italian citizens and government officials. Below is the version of the story as it came to me through my sister. I am not so much interested in the veracity of the facts,⁴ but in how this story has grown to become a rumour and stands for people's frustration about the high and unnecessary governmental spending, the officials' privileged position, and the unequal impact of the crisis upon the Italian population.

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The parliament's building in Rome has a restaurant where ministers can enjoy luxurious meals for ridiculously low prices. For less than five euros, they eat lobster and caviar, and drink wine. In times of crisis the restaurant saw itself forced to increase the prices. This resulted in protests by the ministers who started to boycott the place. The restaurant now risks bankruptcy. The fact that during the economic crisis some people are unable to buy food while others are lamenting a few euros more for a lobster is what makes this episode scandalous to many Italians.

⁵ Bakhtin, Mikhail, *Rebels and his world*. Cambridge, 1968, pp 10-19

⁶ Mbembe, Achilles, *On the Postcolony*. University of California Press: Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 2001, p 104

This story about the excesses of state officials, reminds me of the banquets described by Achille Mbembe in his study of power relations in postcolonial settings. Mbembe took as his starting point Mikhail Bakhtin's grotesque aesthetics as the language of vulgarity and excess that characterise carnival, banquets and popular feasts. Bakhtin saw the grotesque—with its focus on abundance, the body, food, drinking and swallowing— as a popular form of resistance to the dominant order. ⁵ As Mbembe argues, however, in the postcolony the grotesque belongs to everyone, both the oppressors and the oppressed: 'the postcolonial relationship is not primarily a relationship of resistance or of collaboration but can best be characterized as convivial, a relationship fraught by the fact of the commandment and its "subjects" having to share the same living space.' ⁶ Consequently, the grotesque can be ascribed to the masses' laughing and mocking of the authorities as well as to the exaggerated ceremonies organised by the abusive and corrupted authorities. Corruption is a vital part of this aesthetics of vulgarity, excess, obscenity, and materialism that is associated with the postcolonial grotesque.

⁷ Original Italian text from Gian Antonio Stella e Sergio Rizzo, *Vandali: L'assalto alle Bellezze d'Italia*. Milan: Rizzoli, 2011: "la cattiva politica è tutta concentrata su se stessa. I suoi riti. Le sue risse. E si tiene stretti tutti i privilegi. Le sole auto blu costano due volte e mezzo l'intero stanziamento per i Beni culturali, dimezzato in 10 anni. E con le doppie pensioni da parlamentare e deputato regionale c'è chi prende 10 volte lo stipendio di un archeologo..."

Needless to say, Italy is not a postcolony. However, there are some parallels between the excesses and privileges described by Mbembe and Italy, where, 'bad politics is totally concentrated on itself. Its rites. Its riots. And it keeps all the privileges. The auto blu alone [auto blu are state-paid vehicles made available to government officials, judges, etc.] cost two and a half times the cultural heritage's total allocation, which has been halved within 10 years. Ministers and regional officials, with their double pensions, earn 10 times the salary of an archeologist ...' ⁷ At the same time, corruption and excess are not only present on the side of the authorities: the evasion of taxes by Italian citizens is enormous, amounting an estimated 280 billion a year.

⁸ Benedikter, Roland, "15 anni di privatizzazioni del patrimonio culturale italiano. Intervista a Salvatore Settis." Stanford University Working Paper, May 2011. Available at: <http://www.limen.org/BBCC/tutela/Conservazione%20delle%20citt%E0/Censimento%20patrimonio/SETTIS%20BENEDIKTER%20ITA.htm>

Another parallel between Mbembe's grotesque and Italy is the symbolic manner in which power shows itself. A notable example was the publication in 2011 of the taxation of the Dolomites. The mountains and its natural parks are listed on the UNESCO World Heritage List. With the publication of the Dolomite's price of approximately 1.5 million euro, the Italian government wanted to make clear that theoretically all public patrimony is saleable, marketable, and alienable. ⁸ This symbolic manoeuvre results in surreal scenarios, in which not only national monuments such as the Colosseum in Rome but Italy itself could potentially get a price tag. There is a fundamental exaggeration in the process of privatisation in Italy. As a result, it turns against itself becoming a grotesque parody of the capitalist system.

According to Mbembe, we need to go beyond the binary categories used in standard interpretations of domination such as resistance versus passivity or autonomy versus subjection, not only in the context of party politics but also in

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⁹ Mbembe, Achille, "Provisional Notes on the Postcolony." in *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, Vol. 62, No. 1 (1992), p 25

issues of art and heritage. Because both authorities and subjects use the same language of vulgarity, corruption and excess, apparent compliance may prove to be the best way to play with the system and modify it whenever possible. ⁹ In other words, it is not in dichotomies that the possibility of subversion arises. It is from this perspective that corruption may become a critical tool.

¹⁰ Bergamini, Matteo, "Il MACRO diventerá fondazione: Rischio o salvezza per l'arte contemporanea a Roma?" *Exibart*, published online Friday 30 December 2011: <http://www.exibart.com>

We may consider the move towards private funding made by artists and art institutions (in Italy as elsewhere) as an example of the last point. MACRO in Rome for instance has become an art foundation; and MAXXI, the museum for the arts of the 21st century in Rome, has formed a collaboration with the Fondazione Ermanno Casoli which includes a lively programme geared specifically for corporate management groups. Are these strategies of coping with the economic crisis? Or are they just the nth example of the transformation of museums to an investment ethos? ¹⁰ These questions are extremely interesting in that they alert us to the possibilities of art's appropriating and modifying the rules of the market, while apparently complying with them. Corruption is a way of functioning within the system, yet without fully complying with its rules. Thinking through corruption in a sense asks us to:

¹¹ Mbembe (2001), pp.103.

... examine: how the world of meanings thus produced is ordered; the types of institutions, the knowledges, norms, and practices structuring ... "common sense"; the light that the use of visual imagery and discourse throws on the nature of domination and subordination. ¹¹



In what ways are the events of the Arab spring similar or different to the movements of the 1960s?

Let us try to start from the obvious similarities. The first important similarity, is the fact of people occupying a space and their mode of occupying it without being the expression of any specific group, any specific organisation, any specific class.

It was just the fact of people being there as “the people”, a kind of anonymous collection of the people without any specificity and simply manifesting their existence by the occupation of a space. This act is linked to this notion of autonomy, that is the task of creating a territory and not just affirming a self. By occupying a space, which means perverting the normal use of the space – be it the Sorbonne in ‘68 or Athens now, there is the idea of democratic self-manifestation. But it is a self-manifestation in the sense that it is not addressing the state, or addressing any other party with a demand for something. In ‘68 there was a cartoon that depicted a scene with workers, in the factory, and of course the representative of the union comes to say, “well, you are there, what do you want?” And they say, “we want nothing, we want to do the revolution.” And of course he answered, “you are crazy, because the government and the capitalists will never accept it.” This is this kind of gap that we now see again.

AUTONO



Jacques Rancière

After the Arab spring the idea of self-manifestation appears as if it's either us, or them, it's not a matter of demanding something. In '68 there was that famous manifestation that went just along the National Assembly. And nobody had the idea to get in. You know in the Revolution of 1848, the Parisian workers got into the National Assembly. But now there was the idea that we have nothing to do with those people, we are not in the same world. So I think we see this opposition of two worlds, I think is something that is very similar to the current events. However, the situation is also quite different. In '68 there was a different political background – the anti-colonialist wars, independence wars, Cuban revolution, and the Chinese cultural revolution. There was a sense of a second wave of revolution. There was a theoretical background on the horizon, that linked students with the proletariat, and the proletariat who were represented as the mass of the big factories, and the revolutionary process was forged through the idea that people knew what the communist world would be. I think this is the main difference.

Now there is no sense of history, in the sense that history is leading to socialism or communism. On the contrary, the schema of historical necessity has been in fact captured by the neo-liberal order. The free market has taken the place of the end of the historical evolution which was before the place of Revolution. We are told to go further, to move further, to really be in the new world, where archaic things will disappear and there will be only a free market. So socialism or communism is no longer on the horizon. I think this is the main difference. There is also something which is strange for us French people because it is the effect of a pamphlet that was published in France but was much more efficient abroad: the phenomenon of those people that occupy the streets not because they think they are part of revolutionary process, but rather because they are outraged, "*indignados*". I think this is very important and they are there just as, as the people, as a kind of anonymous collection of people. What has happened in Tunisia, in Egypt, is a marker of the courage to take to the streets without specific demands that are in themselves linked to a certain analysis of the situation of capitalism. Rather it is a moment when the people say enough, is enough! The only question now is do we have the courage just to take to the streets, which means also do we trust the other people.

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Brief notes on the black box and the street

ALEXANDRA FERREIRA & BETTINA WIND

After the three-day symposium in Eindhoven, organised by the Autonomy Project, we returned to Berlin – still under the impression of the last day of debates.

One question repeated in our minds: how to relate that inside discursive space to an outside; or, more specifically, how to relate the black box to the street? In a regard to social action and the alternative use of power/desire lines that cross through spaces, both topoi contain their own tradition of references and imagination. How to bridge the gap between those “topoi”, on a physical and a conceptual level?

Maybe the dilemma starts already here, in the wish to bring the two spaces together: to transpose the experience of sitting for days in a conference or presentation space; of listening, thinking and talking to an exterior space where movements appear more vital, more in touch with life.

Maybe you know this creeping sense of discomfort that spreads out each time the mind is being activated when the body stays attached to a chair in a black box. Theatre uses the silenced seated mass of people to show how dynamics and mechanisms in society affect the individual, in situations where we should be stimulated to action. Often in these contexts however, doubts, long-

learnt patterns of behaviour, and the fear of breaking unwritten rules, silence and immobilise us. Experiencing those forces in the temporary space of a theatre might transpose a sense of what is going on with us outside. But does this transfer really work?

Each black box is different, of course, black is not only a non-colour, but also a lack of transparency designed to make us forget that there is a whole machine, a whole structure of activity surrounding us, producing and keeping up the mise-en-scene that allows us to concentrate on and conceive an outside. You do not need to travel to Greece or Turkey in your mind to do so – if you just have a close look around or leave through the backdoor, it might be enough to reach the outside...but maybe not your outside. You are coming from somewhere else.

We came from Tunisia. We had spent three weeks there, travelling to the coast and through the interior of the country. Being in the street meant, for us, an entirely different notion of Tunisia: at least for

two women on their own. It was the lived translation of Jean-Luc Nancy’s definition of the communal as “être exposé”: being exposed to the heat of early September, but more than that, being exposed to the gazes and calls of a public space dominated by a male presence. This was perhaps to be expected in a Muslim country. And yet, the conscious step into the outside from an inside of far away imagination reversed the way we perceived our own presence, strengths and fragility, curiosity and need of protection. The social body is not (only) a joyful one, and occupation is



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a tiresome enterprise if there is no space granted to one's own needs and activities. Fortunately, we found some moments of rest, when standing in front of the walls of the former party headquarter in Le Kef, or sitting on a bench in the shadow, discussing the potential of the revolution and its pitfalls with a lively local pensioner.

How did it feel then to enter the black box and to immerse ourselves in the dense web of thoughts and social contacts offered by the space of the symposium? In some ways, it felt like an oasis. But careful: from walks through the big oasis of Douz and Tozeur we learnt that the oasis is a space of work, of intense productivity, of private territories and shared corridors. It is not a place to stroll around and linger in dreams.

At a certain point we snuck out of the auditorium and found ourselves in the middle of the ambitious Eindhoven city marathon – standing there in shock and clasp our trolley bags we were easily identified as intruders and chased away from the street so as not to obstruct the continuous flow of energy, of activity, competition and endurance.

The next weekend, we found ourselves joining the demonstration in Berlin for the international day of mobilisation against the financial regime – it seemed like a Sunday stroll in comparison. Maybe it was. Maybe in the future, there will be different ways to make use of the two topoi, the black box and the street.

Berlin, January 2012

Photos:
Alexandra Ferreira & Bettina Wind



Summer School 2011 – some impressions by way of an introduction (and a little Greece lightnin’)

CLARE BUTCHER

With that number from Greece (not the country, but the musical) stuck in my head, you know the one: “*Summer loving, happened so fast...*”, we walked the lazy late night steps across the Sonsbeek Park in Arnhem – heading back to our hostel on the other side of town. What would a Summer School be without a bit of romance, the occasional impromptu dance party, and the heated discussions held officially across seminar rooms and less officially over skype, meal tables, and a circle of beanbags? Not even a week long, the second Autonomy Project Summer School (6-10th July, 2011) had been filled to bursting by the invited coordinators Laurie

Cluitmans, Arnisa Zeqo and Joris Lindhout. With over 25 participants and a few more usual Autonomy suspects, each workshop, seminar, artist’s talk, group project and evening salon conversation found its way, organically and often quite subtly, under the programme’s banner ‘*Mediating Autonomy*’.

Of course the first half of 2011 had been quite a year for “*young people*” instantiating their own sense of autonomy in various political contexts around the Mediterranean – all of this broadcast in a diversity of forms to the rest of the world: Twitter, Facebook, Youtube, to name only a few

platforms. In the UK, slashes to education subsidies had resulted in student occupations of various libraries and common rooms where self-organised classes took place for months on end. And in the Netherlands only weeks before the Summer School began, the government had announced a brutal set of cuts to its national cultural, as well as public health/transport funds. Students and members of the community (for indeed we could call this a community suddenly called into being) had taken to the streets in the Hague, Rotterdam and elsewhere, getting sunburnt and going public with art as a fact in the world and not merely a by-product of it.

This atmosphere lent our gatherings a certain urgency which hadn’t been present in our first Summer School back in June 2010. That year, we’d tried to map out a kind of blueprint for an engaged rather than evasive autonomous artistic practice. Frustrated by the lack of definition possible in a sea of floating terms and philosophical notions, we needed to know how and why this stuff could... should be put to work. Thankfully, many of us were able to reconvene at the 2011 edition,

with the addition of some newcomers. And in light of the recent circumstances mentioned above, this gathering served to recompose many of those old ideas with current situations, words with real life experiences, and abstract notions with a kind of gravity that brought them down to earth.

Comprising a range of topics from pirate radio and the history of autonomedia, to the making of Free Schools and self-organised forms of education; from the role of technology in cultural identity, to building and mediating the archive –



Summer School - workgroup
Location: de Gang, Arnhem

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the Summer School’s generous presenters began to embed the terms of autonomy into specifically useful contexts, bringing personal approaches together with public resonances. These terms were then taken up and bashed about by the Summer School’s dynamic participants who worked as groups to process and potentially produce a set of responses. While non-emphatic, the prospect of a final presentation was enough to galvanise a certain amount of catharsis, analysis and action in each of us – attempting to come to grips with the technical equipment presented by workshop leader and media artist Tina Bastajian, and the interlinking philosophical, poetic elements offered by the Summer School’s moderator, Willem van Weelden, amongst other guests.

Having “*happened so fast*”, what came out of that week together cannot be distilled here in a matter of pages. You’ve already heard from a number of the contributors in this newspaper issue and will get an insight into some of the thinking going into and coming out of the Summer School 2011 in what follows my flimsy attempt at an overview. Needless to say, it was a privilege and pleasure to be rejoined by many of the school’s participants in October’s Autonomy Project Symposium. The generational and geographical mix represented within such settings is one of the core strengths of this project. It motivates us to keep finding ways to mediate the very context-specific idea and practice of autonomy not only from the so-called “*art world*” to society “*out there*”, but also to look for the circuits along which stories, histories, and imaginaries can be activated between person and person, inhabiting different times and spaces.



Summer School 2011
Location: Location: Arnhem Centrum

Despite its somewhat colonial inference, this is what we could perhaps call an Indian Summer loving: where a period of warmth continues for an unusually long time. And this is what I believe Homi Bhabha meant when he spoke about the ongoing mediate-ness, the intimate longevity,

of creative work in the realm of realpolitik. Art offers us, he says, the means of a psychic survival in which a profound desire for joining, for rejoining, for solidarity, can be broadcast, and hopefully fulfilled.

A long, warm thanks thus goes to each of the Summer School’s participants for your lively contributions and ongoing investment in the project of autonomy. And also to the practitioners who shared their time, space and experience last July: Willem van Weelden and Tina Bastajian for your facilitation, Sven Lütticken, Arnisa Zeqo, Laurie Cluitmans and Joris Lindhout for your tireless coordination and preparation; and to our presenters, Adelita Husni Bey, Rosella Biscotti, Paul Chan, Charles Esche, Zachary Formwalt, David Garcia, Kritische Studenten Utrecht & Jos Scheren, Jack Segbars, Jorinde Seijdel, and Mirjam Westen.



Presentation Charles Esche and Steven ten Thije
– Summer School
Location: de Gang, Arnhem

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| Date | Time | Program | Guests | Location |
|-------|-------------|--|---------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| 06-07 | 12.00 | Lunch & Summer School tutors/students arrive | | DAi |
| WED | 14.00-14.30 | Opening Negotiating Equity | | Showroom |
| | 14.30 | Small break | | |
| | 15.00-15.15 | Opening Reading for Writing or How to do Things with Theory | | DAi |
| | 15.30-16.30 | Publishing Class lecture performance | | Showroom |
| | 16.45-17.30 | Opening Re-reading Public Images | | Showroom |
| | 17.30-18.00 | Book Launch Pressing Issues in DAI - Drinks/official opening | | DAi |
| | 18.00 | Dinner | | Showroom |
| | 19.00 | Opening lecture Summer School | Charles Esche, Steven ten Thije | Showroom |
| | 20.00-22.00 | Affect/Production | | Outside on the parkinglot |
| | 21.00-24.00 | DJ PaulusP | | Showroom |
| 07-07 | | Breakfast | | Hostel |
| THUR | 10.30 | General introduction & introduction to <i>Autonopedia</i> | Willem van Weelden | DAi |
| | 12.30 | Lunch | | DAi |
| | 01.30 | Introduction Studio | Tina Bastaijan | Showroom |
| | 2.30 | Groupwork | | Showroom / DAi |
| | 4.30 | Small lecture | Sven Lutticken | |
| | 5.15 | Skype conversation | Paul Chan, Sven Lutticken | DAi |
| | 6.00 | Oxygen | | |
| | 6.30 | Dinner | | Showroom |
| | 8.00 | Salon | Jorinde Seydel Radna Rumping (t.b.c.) | Showroom |
| | 10.00 | | | |
| 08-07 | 9.00 | Breakfast | | Hostel |
| FRID | 10.00 | Introduction to <i>Autonomous School</i> | Willem van Weelden Adelita Husni Bey | DAi |
| | 12.30 | Lunch | | DAi |
| | 01.30 | Groupwork | | Showroom / DAi |
| | 4.30 | Skype lecture David Garcia | | DAi |
| | 6.00 | Oxygen | | |
| | 6.30 | Dinner | | Showroom |
| | 8.30 | Salon | Mirjam Westen | Showroom |

At work

The Symposium and
2nd Summer School



Dinner conversations

Location: Dutch Art Institute, Arnhem



**Group presentation - Stein meets Google
image search**

Location: de Gang, Arnhem



**Adelita Husni Bey presented this film
from the 1950s**

Film still, youtube.com



Sven Lütticken skypes with Paul Chan

Location: Dutch Art Institute, Arnhem



Summer School Live Stream

At work
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GROUP PRESENTATION (1/2)

AUTONOMY WHICH
ACCEPTS THE RULES OF THE
SYSTEM IT WANTS TO RESIST
AND BE CRITICAL OF ...



At work
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GROUP PRESENTATION(2/2)

Excerpts from presentation made by Patty Jansen,
Jesse van Winden, Boris Čučković and Urok Shirhan



... IS A **REACTIONARY**
AUTONOMY

At work
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Summer School Salon
Location: De gang, Arnhem

At work
The Symposium and
2nd Summer School

Room [for] Tone

TINA BASTAJIAN

Note: In this aural/textual postscript inspired from the Autonomy Project Summer School (2011), I attempted to create certain “sweet spots”. In acoustics, the sweet spot refers to the focal point between speakers for the best stereo listening from the vantage point of an audio mixer. It can also refer to an instrument’s own sweet spot whereby via the placement of a microphone, its best sound is produced.

I prefer to posit these sweet spots as emergent, contingent and multi-focal, using the tenor of the Oblique Strategies* which form laconic, cryptic, yet resonant aphorisms; a cluster of indirect and non-orientable spaces. These sweet spots in resonant listening and speaking take on the shape of varying proximities, somewhat akin to filmmaker and theorist Trinh T. Minh-ha’s notion of ‘speaking nearby’: ‘In other words, a speaking that does not objectify, does not point to an object as if it is distant from the speaking subject or absent from the speaking place.’ Oscillating from speaking to listening, a sweet spot like speaking nearby,

reflects on itself and can come very close to a subject without, however, seizing or claiming it. A speaking in brief, whose closures are only moments of transition opening up to other possible moments of transition [...]. ¹

¹ Chen, Nancy. (1992), “Speaking Nearby: A Conversation with Trinh T. Minh-ha.” *Visual Anthropology Review* 8, no. 1: 87.

At work
The Symposium and
2nd Summer School

r o m t o n e

experiment #1

Reflect on the modus of radio--and all that hovers in between the bandwidths. Consider the notion of the lead-in, that is to say an aural picture relayed by radio announcers and/or journalists that offer a brief description of their proximate surroundings. Speculated, factual, and other such wireless imaginings at a not yet determined frequency- in the spirit of autonomous, free and pirate radio forms.

experiment #2

Apply a variation of the Oblique Strategy Cards* to the frequencies overheard, circulated, misheard, and re-distributed from the 2011 Autonomy Summer School.

- ambience as punctuation
- think a radio gesture, then undo it
- evoke a warm colour
- remove one element, then change the order
- sounds proximity is inherently unstable
- bend an invisible antennae to tune dissonance when necessary
- no one listening doesn't mean it is not heard
- apply movement to static conditions
- activating the spatial focuses the echo
- telepathic listening needs no amplification

*In 1975 Brian Eno and Peter Schmidt created the first edition of the Oblique Strategy Cards. Each card contains a phrase, aphorism or cryptic remark, which can be used to break a deadlock or complex situation. While some are specific to music composition and were used while in the recording studio, others are more general [e.g. Repetition is a form of change; Honour thy error as a hidden intention; Use an old idea, etc.].

At work
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We had reached the limit of what
is possible just using words.
- Franco (Bifo) Berardi on Radio Alice

Radio urges and allows us to find some other
principle of holding-together, some other
writing-in-thin-air, tightrope-walking continuity. [...]
By looking away from the image or visual object,
one begins to nudge it from the order of the
instantaneous and the altogether to that of the
serial and the emergent. - Steven Conner

- untether the refrain
- repetition has many frequencies.
- the cadence of applause cannot be measured
- record the source on another medium in real time slowing down the pitch
- modulate an ellipsis [...]
- a robotic voice misinterprets hidden intonations
- liberate meandering whispers
- revisit your initial response
- add polyphonic whimsy
- listen to the feedback loop from a distance
- re-distribute the harmony
- consider nano resonances
- take a walk in the shape of a conversation

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At work
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Ingeborg Entrop - 'Untitled',
Acrylic on canvas, 170x80 cm, 2010

At work
The Symposium and
2nd Summer School

AUTONOMOUS ART GOES MPFFT !?

INGEBORG ENTROP

1
—

It all started to materialise after the artist bought wooden stretchers and a piece of canvas. Back in her studio she made a frame out of the stretchers. I have been told that it was no easy job to get the stretchers exactly perpendicular; putting the canvas onto the frame wasn't easy either. But then, isn't any birth a painful occurrence? Finally there, blank and clean, I remember the artist giving me a look that revealed a strange mixture of pride and compassion.

Her job wasn't finished though. During the next days layers of paint were applied. In each layer shapes were left blank at different positions; together they constituted a series of characters. I didn't recognise it as a word in the traditional sense, the characters represented a mere sound. A sound that you make when somebody is holding a hand in front of your face, to prevent you from talking: mpfft.

And indeed, I couldn't express myself clearly yet. I only just came into existence, I didn't even know what I was at that moment: still tacked together, or carrier of an artist's idea? And did that make me an art piece? By and by I learned that art is a place where the invisible is made visible, the inaudible audible, or vice versa; a place where relationships between bodies, images, spaces and times are all redistributed. Either by tearing experience from ordinariness, by striving for a contrast between the common world and an otherness (some call it even the sublime), or by striving for a more modest approach of rearranging the ordinary into micro-situations that eventually modify the gaze. Symbolic distance or resembling proximity. Where does that leave me?

I felt like an empty shell, perhaps a shell containing the sublime, but still empty. I felt myself a shifter, a trace in need of a context, of a proximity that could give my existence some meaning. Of course, I have siblings, I am part of a larger family of works. That already suggests a particular reading. Also, I am a piece of painted canvas on stretchers, which frames me in a certain art historical tradition; undoubtedly, this gives rise to interpretations as well. Of course, everybody is embedded from the start in some spatial context or historical substrate, from where it has to unfold itself. I also felt that urge to become more than only a piece of material, to become more than one element in history. I wanted my muffled voice to be heard.

2
—

I spoke my first words in public at a music school. As part of a small exhibition, I hung at a wall, behind which students were rehearsing their daily etudes, sonatas and suites. The presence of the musical sounds affirmed my apparent silence at first. Only shortly thereafter, I realised that I actually questioned the difference between disregarded sound and acclaimed music. The classification is not harmless, it determines our appraisal of the audible.

The series of characters on my canvas suddenly turned from a smothered sound into the unwanted noise that any player of a wind instrument fears to make during performance; it turned into an indication of failure: “Mpfft!”.

I felt a little less empty. The surroundings of the musical school gave me substance; it made me bear upon the arbitrariness of classifications and its inevitable influence on human experience. Not by proximity – I am too much of a painting to achieve that. Nor by total symbolic distance – the environment of the music school was too essential to give sense to my existence. Apparently, I operated in a zone between those extremes.

More important is that I could not have achieved this moment of public speech by myself. The exhibition at the music school was initiated by the artist. She wanted to see her silent paintings in a noisy environment. After she found out that the music school offered the opportunity to exhibit in their building, she made her desire manifest. Together with the staff of the school she organised the small exhibition where I uttered my first meaningful words. I know now that articulation is never a standalone operation. In spite of the painted works' invisibility in the end, the actions of others are a fundamental part of the process.

3
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Another public moment, this time in a much more institutional environment than before. The artist had been approached to take part in a group exhibition, curated by a museum. To be or not to be in a museum might be for some a thorny issue; even so the artist agreed to participate. That is not all, however. That group exhibition is taking place in a building belonging to a bank. The large entrance hall with three levels of balconies serve both as exhibition space and as corridors for bank employees and customers. And that's where I am now.

Not only the spatial context of the situation is peculiar, also the timing of the exhibition is oddly interesting. The streets outside are in deep economic and financial crisis – causing most to cut down their expenses. Cultural budgets are reduced disproportionately thanks to depraved powers that be. It forces cultural institutions to collaborate more directly with the holders of private capital. For example: banks. Indeed, those same banks whose risky business induced the crisis in the first place. Perpetrators that act like saviors? Private money that patronises public culture? Are we back to Renaissance? Or have we indeed, never been modern?

I am confused and upset. I feel the distance between myself and the exhibition space. I am not sure if I want to engage with the situation to give my empty existence a particular content related to it.

I fear that I have become mere decoration, that not only is my ability to speak reduced but also my voice deliberately ignored. I even have a price tag. This must be the life of a commodity.

The series of characters on my canvas is no longer indicating a muted cry of a new voice. Nor is it a sign of failure; it represents a sound of contempt, of indignation, of restrained anger: “MPFFT!”

4

But then, my family has to be sustained, it has to grow and develop. Material has to be bought. The artist requires food for body and mind that is seldom for free. We are all embedded in a system where money is needed to survive. The only thing we can do is to act together from within, and try to make good choices. Being heard once does not mean being heard always. There are no givens. Whatever you think you have achieved has to be accomplished over and over again, at each moment in time, at each position in space. Perhaps not an easy prospect, but for sure an exciting one.

“I am sorry that I upset you.”

“Oh, never mind, I understand why you agreed to go along with this exhibition.”

“You do?”

“I think so. You'll have to make choices. And it is of course a nice opportunity for showing your work.”

“Yeah, well, I guess so...Still, can I do something to make it up to you?”

“Eh, let me think...There is something. Up til now, you have exposed me in public twice. The circumstances of these public moments vary a lot, but both are fixed in space and time. Wouldn't it be interesting to find another way of going public, beyond the boundaries of space and time?”

“That would be great! But how?”

“Don't know, but I am sure you will find a way. Perhaps you could think of showing me not as a physical object but in another form of being, a thing? Then I wouldn't be visible, or at least not tangible, so the public can really concentrate on the invisible part of the story, like my thoughts, my feelings...”

“If this will cheer you up, I will work on it. But I definitely have to think about the how...Probably it will still involve space and time, but not in the usual sense...I have to think of something with a different spatiality, different temporality, something resisting what's given... Well, as soon as I have an idea, I let you know.”

“Thanks. And if I can help, please let me know.... ”
[silence]

“Oh, something else. I think I misunderstood that look you gave me.”

“What look?”

“The look you gave me when you finished my construction. I read it as a mixture of pride and compassion. I don't think it was compassion though.”

“What do you think it was then?”

“Solidarity?”

At work
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I turn the video camera on

ERIC PHILIPPOZ

I turn the video camera on, set up the white balance, the shutter, the speed, the focus. Through the viewfinder, I record him inspecting the slopes, searching for mountain-goats. I frame his posture, his gestures : crawling to the next hill, putting the riffle down, the bag down, covering his face with a camouflage cloth, taking out the binoculars, laying on the ground, then checking again, setting the gun in the right position and, eventually, shooting. Both of us are busy observing, both with our own tools. He glances back at me sometimes, to make sure I am hiding carefully enough. It irritates me : does he really think I would deliberately ruin his plans? He knows of course that I have never been in favour of hunting; as a child, I used to be horrified with the idea of blood. Still, I decided to join him consciously; I am gathering images for an art work. Thus, I cooperate : I kneel like him, crawl like him, I walk in his footsteps, in the snow, to avoid making noise.

After he shot the first mountain goat, kissed the animal on the head and emptied the viscera, I stopped filming and put the camera in my backpack. My dad took me in his arms. He hugged me so strong it was almost painful. He was sobbing; it was one of the most beautiful days in his life, he said. He couldn't believe I was there with him; he was so glad and so happy. I wasn't crying.

I was surprised : until that moment, my main concern was to frame an image; for a while, I had forgotten I was also a son following his father.

I am walking in the plain, pulling a dead mountain goat. I notice the diversity of soundings that emanate from the corpse, from the friction of the fur on a rock, to the humid rubbing on snow. They mingle with the regular noise of my feet crushing the snow's crusty surface. I stop: the animal spun around again, neck twisted. I am terrified of hearing the sound of broken bones. I release the head; it falls on the ground and finds its natural position again. I consider the slashed paunch, the impact of the bullet on the shoulder. The glazed and inexpressive look. I pat the animal's head, out of the sheer curiosity of touching a wild animal, to evaluate the softness of its fur, it's woolly texture. I talk to the animal, tell it that we have to go, now, he must be waiting for us. I grab its horns and start walking again.

I can't believe this is really happening.

I was surprised: until that moment, my main concern was to frame an image; for a while I had forgotten I was also a son following his father.

At work

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46° 20' 14.35" N, 7° 23' 42.79" E. 04-07-2009.
(Coming-out 7: mom and dad)
Eric Philippoz, 2012

At work
The Symposium and
2nd Summer School



Steven ten Thije
Location: Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven
Photo: Emilio Moreno

COLOPHON

The Autonomy Project Newspaper 3: At work

Onomatopée 43.3

This newspaper is part of a series of three published by the Autonomy Project. The editorial team consists of **John Byrne** (Programme Leader BA (Hons) Fine Art, Liverpool School of Art and Design, co-directeur Static), **Steven ten Thije** (research curator Van Abbemuseum/Universiteit Hildesheim) and **Clare Butcher** (curator and cook, Cape Town, South Africa)

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The Autonomy Project

Newspaper 3: At work

Onomatopée 43.3