butchers blätter

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English version

PARLIAMENT, ART AND THE MANY. THE SECOND WAVE OF REFLECTIONS

In 2017, theatre director Milo Rau organized a collective performance in Berlin's government district. Entitled 'Sturm auf den Reichstag' (The Storming of the Reichstag), it was intended as a central part of a project called 'General Assembly', dedicated to representing the idea of a democratic world parliament. On August 29th, 2020, a 'storm' on the Reichstag of an entirely different nature came to pass during a so-called 'Querdenker' demonstration against Covid-19 measures. This was initiated and led by nationalist, far-right protest members, who spent few, but media-effective minutes waving 'Reich' flags – the former German imperial, nationalist colours of black, red and white – on the steps of parliament. Only three police officers confronted the right-wing protesters. Later, they were formally honoured as heroic defenders of democracy by the Federal President at Schloss Bellevue. The attack had justifiably caused public outrage among the political class. Taking an idea of the political left and misappropriating it to the ends of right-wing causes, stunting its original intent, is not new. And yet, this incident can, and should, be regarded as a wake-up call. Casting doubt on parliament, the heart chamber of representative democracy, calls into question democracy as a whole. Whenever this kind of attack is launched by the nationalist right, our reaction is palpably alarmed, because despite our critical challenges to the current political system, we by no means support pivoting towards a patronizing, authoritarian state. Rather, we want to push the state towards progressive development in the sense of 'daring more democracy'. However, it is becoming increasingly clear that the question whether our current system is willing or capable of taking such a trajectory is still open. In short, we need to talk: about our relation to the representative system, to parliament, and how we move and situate ourselves in society.

after the butcher. ausstellungsraum für zeitgenössische kunst und soziale fragen, in collaboration with Belgian philosopher Dieter Lesage, has seized the initiative to invite a number of authors, artists, theorists and cultural workers to reflect these questions. Originally planned as a series

of events spanning several months and covering the topic ‘Parliament, Art and the Many’, the pandemic has called for a change in arrangements. Instead, we will be releasing different texts on the subject, the first of which appeared in December 2020 in *butchers blätter #1*, with interventions by Milo Rau & IIPM, Alice Creischer and Andreas Siekmann, as well as Dieter Lesage. In *butchers blätter #2*, we now present statements by Nora Sternfeld and Margarita Tsomou. We hope you enjoy reading and thinking – and to continue our lively discussion, which has become all the more timely with the events in Washington and the storming of the Capitol on January 6, 2021.

Thomas Kilpper, Franziska Böhmer & Ina Wudtke

The term the ‘many’ in the context of the real democracy movements

Margarita Tsomou

The term the ‘many’ experienced a discursive resurgence as a result of the real democracy movements after 2011 (such as Tahrir Square, Puerta del Sol, Syntagma Square, the occupy protests) with the theoretical syntheses of the disciplines of theory of democracy, post-Fordist diagnoses of precarity, research on forms and compositions of collectivities - be it masses, swarms, multitudes or mobs - as well as social media analyses. In this, the ‘many’ functioned as a (discursive fashionable) connotation of social diversity, appearing as a fragmented formation of many parts, which evades or refuses political or media representation. In my view this term became popular in this specific historical context because it was particularly suited to describing the social movements of the time. Its added value lies in the fact that ‘many’ is first and foremost an analytical term from the theory of democracy, which pulls in different political diagnoses—of how social movements in post-Fordism organise themselves under current media conditions as well as how democracy is negotiated in such cases. And finally because democracy, as is well known, has been a kind of empty signifier since it emerged, the practice of which constantly readjusts to the power relationships of each epoch. It is in this context and specifically against the backdrop of the Greek occupation of Syntagma Square in 2011 that I would like to situate this analysis.

The 'many' as rival concept to the masses or the people under post-Fordism

Paolo Virno's explanations of the 'many' in *A Grammar of the Multitude*, or Negri and Hardt's writings, suggest that the 'many' is not a quantitative but a qualitative concept. This means that 'many' is not about claiming a lot or 'more than' or being a majority, but rather that its composition and structure differ from terms connoting a unity, such as 'masses' and 'people'. The 'many', also called the 'multitude', is for Virno more or less the historical counter term to the Hobbesian concept of 'people'. The 'many' or the 'multitude'—the usual term at the time—consists for Hobbes in its natural state as individuals pursuing purely their own private interests in constant conflict. Through the tool of the social contract however, the 'many', with their multiple and irreconcilable interests unite to form a common voice, becoming, through this contract, a collective subject, capable of articulating its own will and acting: "A Multitude of men, are made *One* Person, when they are by one man, or one Person, Represented [...]. For it is the *Unity* of the Representer, not the Unity of the Represented, that maketh the Person *One*".[1] The reason they elude representation then, or that they are, as Virno says 'pre-representative', is because it is impossible to encapsulate them because of their heterogeneity.

The 'many', moreover, is not a timeless ontological concept either, but historically embedded in the post-Fordist age. In post-Fordist neoliberalism, they are the precarious: differentiated in their ways of working and living, maintaining only loose connections to state institutions and, not having permanent jobs, are thus required to 'govern themselves' biopolitically. According to Virno, the suppressed political concept of the 'many' has to be reexamined because, in light of the shift in our mode of production from industrial capitalism to post-Fordism since the 1970s, it has become the current social entity and mode of being and can be extremely helpful in understanding a 'series of contemporary behaviours'[2] that would stay incomprehensible if the concept of the 'people' was applied to them. The differentiation of life and work caused by post-Fordism in fact shifts away from the homogeneous entities of the industrial age such as 'class,' 'mass,' 'citizen,' and 'people'.

Against a background of this type of diagnosis of our times, the concept of the 'many' has become an attractive one in social, cultural and media studies to describe a non-homogeneous social diversity characterised by the singularity of its different entities. The 'many', therefore, describes above all the socio-political structure of a multitude which as a multiplicity is in itself different and heterogeneous—a kind of accumulation of singularities that is only comprehensible in its plurality, making it for precisely this reason, hard to represent, be it in its juridical-democratic sense or in the sense of identity politics.

[1] Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. with an intr. C.B. Macpherson, London (1651), 1981, pp. 220-221 [p. 82, Ch. XVI].

[2] Paolo Virno, *Exodus,* Vienna 2005, p. 155.

Looking at the Real Democracy movements after 2011, the 'many' seemed to many of us at the time a good term to describe the composition of the multitudes on the occupied public squares, because there were activists there who would not have found their way to those places as part of conventional political or social identities. Students, pensioners, football and motorcycle fans, hippies and dignified middle-class people were all to be found on the Greek squares, for example. It was difficult for the Greek public to clearly determine the identity of this multitude. It does not seem surprising, therefore, that this "mixture"[3] between "nobody" and "becoming everyone"[4] could not accept representative attributions and labels for itself. They invented new terms, such as "Aganaktismenoi" (i.e. the indignant) or "squatters"—in this way they could identify themselves solely with what *they felt* or concretely *did,* i.e. with terms that concerned their daily practice, their experiences and affects. This emphasis on practice and affect is a further reason for the difficulty of representation as these things can only be carried out by oneself and performatively and not through representation in the context of our juridical democracy.

Forms of action of the 'many'—political but not representable

It is precisely the importance of the dimensions of practice that the concept of the 'many' acknowledges as political and not simply social or cultural. According to Virno, the types of political action that the 'many' comprise are not in "'taking power', building a new state or creating a new monopoly of political decision making but rather to defend experiences in their diversity, types of non-representational democracy, non-state customs and habits".[5] It is typical of the 'many' that it "pushes forward the breakdown of political representation; not as an anarchist gesture, but as a search for new political forms"[6] in which "mentalities and forms of organization"[7] can change—in this sense, the 'many' are a political 'way of being'. Virno goes beyond the thesis that the 'many' seek alternative 'non-representative' concepts of democracy or behave antagonistically to parliament. Rather, they invent "non-representative forms of politics" that operate independently of the currently prevailing democratic organisation of the state.

This means at the same time that Virno understands non-representative forms as political acts not because they explicitly question the degree of participation in the parliamentary political arena. Rather, their practice is an implicit counter proposal to representation and must be considered political because in its self organisation, it harbours the potential of transformation through concrete forms of 'doing'. That is at least how the concept of the 'many' has been used in the context of the occupied public squares after 2011: in its potential to generate new experiential knowledge and new relations between heterogeneous people in terms of mutual care, reproduction and the mutual coping with daily life.

[3] Christos Giovanopoulos, 'Empört über die Massenmedien oder Aufstand in den Medien? Zwischen digitaler und realer "Agora"!', in: Christos Giovanopoulos (Hg.), *Von den Straßen auf die Plätze,* Edition Provo 11, unpublished e-book 2017, pp. 247-295, p. 273.

[4] Vassilis S. Tsianos, Dimitris Papadopoulos, Niamh Stephenson, 'This is class war from above and they are winning it. What is to be done', 2012, online: www.academia.edu/3375425/ (last accessed December 4, 2020).

[5] Paolo Virno, *Exodus,* Vienna 2005, p. 55.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid.

The 'many' and digital connectivity

The concept of the 'many' has also generated interest in media studies—above all in connection with the way that the occupiers of public squares were mobilised through social media channels. There was discussion that a structural similarity could be detected between the organisational structure in the use of network based media and social formations that can be described in terms like 'swarms', 'networks' and 'multitudes'—and even the term the 'many' itself. The media do not function as a supplement to the social formation of the 'many', but can be understood as an integral part of their cohesion. Sharing personalised content makes it easier for the 'many' to act together as a "crowd of individuals"[8] while still operating in their singularity. In a sense, network-based media are appropriate tools for the 'many' to organise politically without requiring the help of traditional political agents such as trade unions, associations and NGOs—no organisation called for the occupation of the square in Athens, the idea simply went viral on the net.

The use of new digital networking media corresponds to daily practices in the post-Fordist condition: the experience of having to act outside of representative contexts, but also of being able to do so at all, is reinforced and promoted by the possibilities that digital communication offers for self-representation, but also for effective organisation. Without the infrastructure of network based media this type of spontaneous mobilisation of such a heterogeneous multitude would not have happened, coming as they did, to the squares with a swarm dynamic, representing a new social formation. These network based media confirmed the impression as well as the experience that political organisation beyond representative instances is possible.

The 'many'—an ambivalent crowd?

The 'many' are "united by the absolute risk that emerges from the 'un-home,' from the universal 'exposure to the world.'"[9] The quest for refuge that emerges can be thoroughly "dangerous". By no means do the 'many' always have to be on the side of the political progressives. They can also tip over into a mob, a fascist crowd. "One only needs to think, for example, of the desire to submit to a sovereign, to indulge in merciless competition over one's career, or to seek refuge in xenophobia".[10]

This too can be observed by examining the occupied squares: the degeneration of Tahrir Square for example, or the nationalist and patriotic forces in Syntagma Square. However, this is a question of 'becoming' in time and depends on which power relations and political discourses become hegemonic and which of these could be a political proposal to the 'many'. This question

[8] Jeffrey Juris, 'Reflections on #Occupy Everywhere', in: *American Ethnologist* 39 (12), 2012, pp. 259-279.

[9] Paolo Virno, *Exodus,* Vienna 2005, p. 40.

[10] Paolo Virno, *Exodus,* Vienna 2005, p. 41.

however, is not solved by the essential nature of the 'many' as a crowd but depends on the subjective power of political intervention and whether these forces turn towards and address the 'many' or exclude them because they are 'extra-parliamentary' and therefore 'undemocratic'. In any case, the fascist crowd is not formed from heterogeneity but desires uniformity, homogeneity and authoritarian representation.

The double crisis of representation—from 'above' and from 'below'

The argument that parliamentary democracy is being attacked by the concept of the 'many' seems plausible in light of my remarks about the occupied squares in 2011. Not least, this is expressed in the 'you don't represent us' attitude of the protesters. In view of the slogan "Real democracy. Now!", however, it can be assumed that this was not a fundamental criticism of democracy as such, but a criticism of its representative structure, motivated by the desire not for less, but for *more* democracy.[11] During the occupy protests, the alienation from existing forms of representative democracy was not equivalent to an anti-democratic attitude. There was a "simultaneity of loss of trust in democratic processes and institutions on the one hand and a rise in democratic demands on the other".[12] A growing political self-confidence and its accompanying demand for autonomy was set against the limits of representative democracy. The limitations of the current democratic form however, were not caused by the new movement of the 'many'. The crisis of representation 'from below', that is, the crisis of confidence in parliamentary credibility, goes back to the gradual erosion of democratic apparatuses—what I would call the crisis of representation 'from above', which was exposed in the aftermath of the financial crisis in 2008.

During the Euro crisis in 2010-2015, we saw the systematic transfer of power from legislative organs and parliaments to independent business and financial agencies. In his book on "The Sovereignty Effect", Joseph Vogl describes examples of these mechanisms of dismantling democracy in the course of economising contemporary government practices.[13] He notes an increasing shift of decision making powers from parliaments to a network of intergovernmental agents consisting of financial markets, bureaucrats, transnational bodies, central banks and bankers who, as a "para-democratic exceptional power", establish a kind of emergency policy under the constant threat of the collapse of the financial markets, which legitimises the circumvention and subversion of the rules and powers of the parliamentary arena. According to Vogl, the crisis of representation is understood here to be the weakening of representative bodies by transferring rights of sovereignty to a newly created financial economic system of representation. This in no way happened without the authorisation of state apparatuses - the

[11] See Isabell Lorey, 'Non-representationist, Presentist Democracy', 2011, online unter: eipcp.net/transversal/1011/lorey/en (last accessed December 5, 2020).

[12] Ingolfur Blühdorn, *Simulative Demokratie. Neue Politik nach der postdemokratischen Wende,* Berlin 2013, p. 160.

[13] Joseph Vogl, *Der Souveränitätseffekt,* Zürich 2015.

[14] Rosa Luxemburg, 'Sozialdemokratie und Parlamentarismus', *Gesammelte Werke* Bd. 12, Berlin 1988 [1905], pp. 447-455.

[15] Karl Marx, *Der achtzehnte Brumaire des Louis Bonaparte,* Marx-Engels-Gesamtausgabe, Abt.I., Bd.11, Berlin 1975 [1852], pp. 96-189; Johannes Agnoli, *Die Transformation der Demokratie und verwandte Schriften* (edited by Barbara Görres Agnoli), Hamburg 2004.

[16] Sonja Buckel, 'Dialektik von Kapitalismus und Demokratie heute', in: Oliver Eberl und David Salomon (Hg.), *Perspektiven sozialer Demokratie in der Postdemokratie. Staat-Souveränität-Nation,* Munich 2017, pp. 19-41, p. 24.

[17] Ibid.

parliamentary executive engaged in a form of voluntary self-subversion or self-disempowerment.

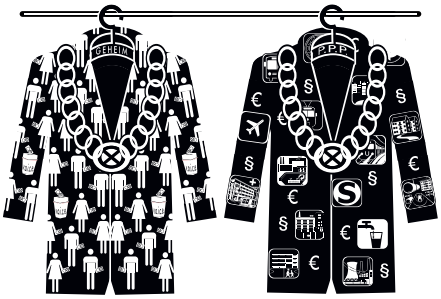
Something that can be observed in times of crisis in capitalism is the fact that the parliamentary form of government limits itself and adopts authoritarian forms of rule. Rosa Luxemburg would probably say that it is important to defend parliamentary and democratic rights from the bourgeois state by overcoming it with the aim of protecting precisely this parliamentarism that has a tendency to harm itself.[14] The starting point of this position is Marx's analysis in his essay *The Eighteenth Brumaire* on the tendency of bourgeois parliamentarism to what Johannes Agnoli calls "involution".[15] This refers to the process of the "regression of the democratic states in pre or anti-democratic forms"[16] in times of crisis. "In order to preserve the social power of the bourgeois class, according to the central thesis of the *Eighteenth Brumaire,* this class is prepared to relinquish democratic achievements and ultimately even its political power in the context of a political crisis".[17] The experiences of the world economic crisis of the 1920s and 1930s as well as the financial crisis and the phenomenon of the New Right confirm these hypotheses. The 'many' are at most a reaction of this crisis of representation 'from above' and not the initiators of a crisis immanent to the dialectic between capitalism and parliamentary democracy.

Interest in the concept of the 'many' is therefore not anti-democratic but rather symptomatic of a contemporary historical context in which, on the one hand, post-Fordist conditioned subjects are exploring the potentials of the call to self-government and on the other hand, are reacting to the obvious dismantling of democracy with the practical construction of their own spaces of communication, life, and democracy equipped with the infrastructures of network-based media. The 'many' in the occupied squares can be historically classified both as a timely symptom of the double crisis of representation and of the interconnection of post-Fordist lifestyles and the Internet age.

These social conditions are still in effect today and so it is understandable that the crisis of confidence in parliaments has not gone away but rather increased—by both progressive as well as authoritarian powers. We can look for the 'many' of today in the feminist, ecological or *Black Lives Matter* movements. However, in order to apply the concept of the 'many' to them, there would need to be operational alliances between these movements in practice (as yet undeveloped), common experiences and the emergence of new social relations among them, and finally a desire to re-articulate what we call democratic participation — the expansion of democracy into the sphere of production and everyday life, beyond its limitation to the juridical field and the tendency of its self-sabotage in the face of capitalist dynamics.

Do we want total presentism?

Nora Sternfeld



Let's begin by travelling back in time to the previous century, taking two episodes from the history of the Viennese parliament. On October 1st 1920, two weeks before the new elections of the first Republic of Austria, the first federal constitutional law of the Constituent National Assembly was passed. The draft was elaborated by Hans Kelsen and, with fascist interruptions, applies to this day. Article 1 of this constitution states: "Austria is a democratic republic. Its right emanates from the people *(Volk).*"[1] But who is meant by 'the people'? The decidedly antisemitic campaign poster of the Christian Social Party who won the elections of October 17th 1920 advertised the slogan 'German Christians, save Austria'.

18 years later, on May 1st 1938, the parliament building is closed, but festively decorated. The Nazis have declared the day a 'national holiday of the German People', and a banner emblazoned on its front on Wiener Ringstraße now reads: 'Rule by the people'. Austria no longer exists. Following the brutal antisemitic acts of violence of the *Anschluss* (annexation) pogroms on its cities' streets, where Jews were forced, through participation of fellow citizens, to wash away slogans by the Council of States with acid lye – many of them not far from parliament,[2] following the looting of the violent Aryanisation process, enriching the local population at the cost of Jewish proprietors in a series of private raids, Tag der Arbeit (Labour Day) has become a 'holiday of the German People', the National Assembly has been dissolved, and the people, with no representative mediation, are directly called upon by the Nazis. 'Rule by the people'. *Volk* – the people – and Führer are now one.

Both instances underline the extent to which the meaning of the concept *Volk* ('the people') is imbued with democratic, but also ethnic levels,[3] as well as the variations of direct or indirect interpretation regarding 'the people's right'. This echo from the past serves as a prelude to discussing the current crisis of representation in politics. A century later, *butchers blätter* takes the events surrounding the Berlin Reichstag as an occasion to reflect on the question of representation. Once again, democratic subjectification is appropriated by social actors. In August 2020, a group of right-wing protestors storm the Reichstag building during a rally against the government's policies on Covid-19 – carrying the same black, white and red *Reichsflaggen,* the flag of the Third Reich used by Nazis from 1933 to 1935.

In recent years, however, parliamentary politics have been questioned not only by the right. Milo Rau was likely more concerned with an act of re-

[1] Law of October 1, 1920, establishing the Republic of Austria as a federal state (Federal Constitutional Law), http://www.verfassungen.at/at18-34/index20.htm.

[2] See Martin Krenn, *Österreich ist ein wunderbares Land,* video installation 2020, from the exhibition *Stories of Traumatic Pasts. Counter-Archives for Future Memories,* Weltmuseum Wien 2020.

[3] See Stefan Nowotny, 'Ethnos oder Demos?', in: *transversal texts* 09/2000, https://transversal.at/transversal/1100/nowotny/de.

politicization from the left when he called for a 'storming of the Reichstag' in 2017 as a finale to his theatre project *Weltparlament,* 100 years after the storming of the Winter Palace – which, under no circumstances, however, could be called a parliament. In the field of art, also in 2017, the Public Programs of the documenta 14, titled *The Parliament of Bodies,* seemed to have little faith left in the 'real existent' parliaments of the present. Lead by philosopher, queer theorist and curator Paul B. Preciado, it was introduced as follows: "The Parliament of Bodies, the Public Programs of documenta 14, emerged from the experience of the so-called long summer of migration in Europe, which revealed the simultaneous failure not only of modern representative democratic institutions but also of ethical practices of hospitality. The Parliament was in ruins. The real Parliament was on the streets, constituted by unrepresented and undocumented bodies resisting austerity measures and xenophobic policies."[4] Given this amount of scepticism towards contemporary parliaments, the current situation is often referred to as 'crisis of representation'.

Crisis of Representation

What does this actually mean? When social movements began to redefine and claim the idea of the public sphere during the 1960s, direct action, street protests and sit-ins were formed and articulated opposition running at cross-purposes to parliamentary division. Thus, if we can speak of post-representational activism today, it has its precursors in the movements of 1968.[5] These new social movements and their actionist modes of protest – in which artistic and political strategies intersect – question representation itself as post-representational politics, acting in the sense of Jacques Rancière's *disagreement:*[6] Their demands and strategies thwart existing structures and the logic of hegemony. This post-representative activism reached its peak during the Occupy Movement[7] Using the slogan 'Occupy Everything. Demand nothing', it foregoes any traditional political address: "In this horizon only a 'disorganised' repertoire of direct and immediate political actions enables people to be 'heard' as opposed to being subsumed within the machinic meta-mobilism of 'normal' politics. 'Not in my Name' is an emblematic expression of this winding back of the representative paradigm. It says that I will not be annexed for a larger purpose. I must myself speak to and embody the changes we need in order to address inequality."[8]

This critique can be read twofold: as a scepticism of representation as such or as criticizing a specific form of representation with its respective exclusions and blind spots – as a critique of representation in general or as a critique of a lack of representation.

[4] https://www.documenta14.de/en/public-programs/ (last accessed January 14, 2021), see also a presentation at the opening in Kassel: https://www.documenta14.de/de/calendar/19396/how-does-it-feel-to-be-a-problem (last accessed January 14, 2021).

[5] "1968, the year of disorganised revolts and insurrections, is an important way marker for change in the nature of the political. It marked the first step in the decline of the representational paradigm, and the re-emergence of non- or 'post-representative' political repertoires: direct action, squatting, affinity groups, protests, carnivals. Many of these initiatives are sparked by a self-conscious rejection of 'normal' or mainstream political processes. They turn their face on parties, elections, and manifestos in favour of the immediacy of action, of doing, in the here and now – not saving our energies for some scripted 'crisis of capitalism'. The 1970s and 1980s were periods when much of this kind of activity was subsumed within what became known as 'new social movements', which included movements against war, the nuclear bomb, environmental degradation, race and identity discrimination. They were immediate, direct, and 'dis'-organised in the sense of not being tied to a permanent bureaucracy or set of offices. Often leaderless, acephalous, sometimes spontaneous, unruly and difficult to predict." Simon Tormey, 'Occupy Wall Street: From Representation to Post-Representation', in: *Journal of Critical Globalisation Studies,* 5, 2012, pp. 132-137: p. 133.

[6] Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement. Politics and Philosophy,* Minneapolis 1999.

[7] "Occupy Wall Street (OWS) is part of this story. It offers further evidence that the paradigm of representative politics, the politics of political parties, elections and voting is on the wane. Participants in OWS proclaim that they are not programmatic, that it has no answers, even that it is not 'politically affiliated'. It contrasts itself with the style and manner of forms of representation that by contrast proclaim an analysis, an ideology, a programme, an organisation representing distinct interests, viewpoints and actors." Simon Tormey, 'Occupy Wall Street', 2012, p. 133.

[8] Ibid.

Post-democratic Infrastructures

However, suspicion towards parliaments is not reduced to the right or the left. Increasingly, post-democratic infrastructures in the shape of ongoing economization of all sectors and contexts of the public cause parliaments to lose their significance. Indeed, this all-encompassing advance of neoliberalism has effectively undermined democratic structures in all areas of society. Economic interests tend to assert themselves, often silencing political conflict. Using catchphrases such as 'participation', 'transparency', 'diversity' or even 'democratization', criteria of measurement and predictability have been implemented, replacing democratic decision-making processes with so-called independent experts.[9] In a setting where democracy itself seems contested, the question of representation becomes an essential element at stake. This also begs the question whether a seemingly imminent future society[10] will rely on speculative algorithms and computer systems, abolishing the need for mediation altogether. The dystopia of total presentism, which fares better without representation ... The artist and media theorist Hito Steyerl remains doubtful of any progress on the level of representation within today's capitalist system based on technologized financialization.[11]

As representation is hollowed out through the economization of the social, it is simultaneously questioned and occupied by activists. Occupy Wall Street activists proclaimed "that no form of representative politics, no political party, can change the basic coordinates of the liberal-democratic capitalist system".[12] However, this was not met without self-reflection when the movement stumbled over the paradox of post-representation, which has no alternative but to represent: "This however is the easy part, for a paradoxical feature of post-representative politics is that it does not, as the post-prefix reminds us, escape the pragmatics of representation; it brings it into question. 'We are the 99%' is after all a quintessential representative claim ('We are you', a slogan borrowed from the Zapatistas, is another equally direct example). Here we see also a potential immobilising quality of OWS, one that infects all post-representative initiatives. If it cannot but represent, then how to do this without becoming itself a symptom of the politics it so sets its face against – i.e. representative politics [...]? How does OWS escape the trap of opposing representative modes of political engagement in a non-representative way? How to escape the apparently futile and self-denying gesture of 'post-representative' representation?"[13]

No Democracy Without Representation

The crisis of representation reveals that, in a democracy, neither the possibility of detachment from representation, nor an immediate and complete

[9] See ibid.

[10] See Dirk Baecker, *Studien zur nächsten Gesellschaft,* Berlin 2007.

[11] Hito Steyerl, 'The Spam of the Earth: Withdrawal from Representation'. 2012, http://www.e-flux.com/journal/the-spam-of-the-earth/ (last accessed January 20, 2018).

[12] Simon Tormey, 'Occupy Wall Street', 2012, p. 133.

[13] Ibid.

accordance between demos and its representatives are possible. The only available solution that remains is a form of partisan mediation. In this sense, hegemony theorist Ernesto Laclau speaks of the lack of a solid ground of the social. According to Laclau, there can be no complete form of representability. Representation, as he points out, never fills what it stands in for, thus removing any possibility of the immediacy or transparency. Instead, the sphere of political agency is to Laclau a space of contingency (which can neither be predetermined nor calculated).[14] As Chantal Mouffe makes clear in a similar vein: "Pluralist *democracy* cannot exist *without representation.*"[15]

From a perspective of radical democracy, then, we do not – as Hito Steyerl suggests – find ourselves in a totalizing representational regime dictated by algorithms to which any resistance is futile. In fact, radical democracy refuses to recognize or advance any abolition of representation as propagated by both neoliberalism and anti-representative activism. Rather than mimicking post-democracy, it is a matter of re-politicization, of acknowledging the inconclusiveness of politics and the necessity of representation for the partisan, antagonistic negotiation of power structures. Let us return to Ernesto Laclau's term of representation by examining it more closely. Whenever something or someone is depicted, substituted or replaced, it implies a gap: someone or something stands in for someone or something else.[16] Thus, the notion of representation, combined with the impossibility of total immediacy and transparency, involves an element of mediation. Ernesto Laclau puts it this way: "There is an opaqueness, an essential impurity in the process of representation, which is at the same time its condition of both possibility and impossibility."[17] This aspect of representation is true for depiction as well as substitution. If taken seriously, representation in and of itself remains necessarily contested and contestable.[18]

What does 'everyone' mean?

Since the beginning of the 20th century, representational critique within art in particular has developed forms of dealing with representation which seem notably relevant if we recall that these were never reduced to representation as depiction, but representation as a process of political negotiation. This process remains necessary, since there will never be an assembly or parliament where 'everyone' is meant when 'everyone' is called upon. Judith Butler writes: "Even when we say 'everyone' in an effort to posit an all-inclusive group, we are still making implicit assumptions about who is included, and so we hardly overcome what Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau so aptly describe as 'the constitutive exclusion' by which any particular notion of inclusion is established."[19]

[14] See Ernesto Laclau, 'Power and Representation', in: *Emancipation(s),* London 2007 [1996], pp. 84-104.

[15] Chantal Mouffe, *In Defence of Democracy,* Lecture at Columbia University, Avery Hall, Wood Auditorium, New York, March 27th 2014, http://www.in-terms-of.com/in-defense-of-democracy/ (last accessed January 20, 2018).

[16] Etymologically, the term developed from the Latin representatio, and played a role in Roman law, as well as Christianity, court theater and court law.

[17] Ernesto Laclau, *Emancipation(s),* London 2007, p. 98.

[18] See Oliver Marchart, 'Don Alejandros Problem. Zum Verhältnis von Repräsentation, Souveränität und radikaler Demokratie', in Gruppe demopunk (eds.), *Indeterminate/Communism,* Münster 2005, pp. 68-95.

[19] Judith Butler, *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly,* Cambridge, Massachusetts 2015, p. 4.

Artistic or para-museum strategies are radically democratic, not in the sense that they ridicule or question representation itself, but by continually creating a new and different space in which the existing order can be interrogated and shifted. For as important as representation is, as much as its opacity needs to be acknowledged, its exclusions are constitutive and must remain negotiable. The question we find resonating in artistic and institutional spaces is, "What does 'everyone' mean?" This query is the aesthetic opposite of total presence, as it insists, in its performativity, on the impossible possibility of representation that underlies democracy.

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