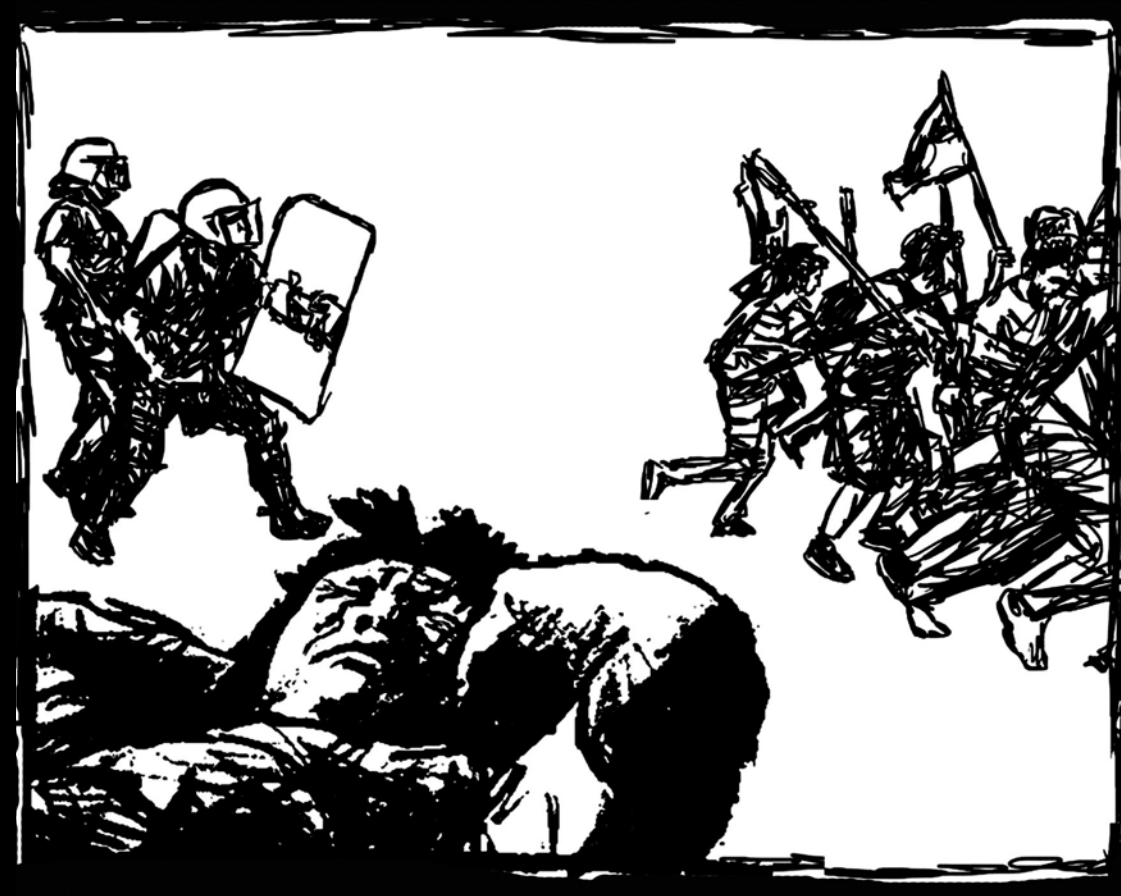

in defense of REPRESENTATION

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In Defense of Representation

1

This issue of *Chto Delat* is a reaction to the current discussion on the necessity and potential of political and aesthetic representation. This problem, already elaborated by Plato in his time, remains the focus of debates about art and politics today. In the present situation, where anti-representational strategies dominate both within the new political movements and in politically engaged art, it seems that the entire debate is reducible to a clear and simple scheme: representation equals hierarchy and is thus bad. The corresponding antithesis is that a rejection of representation equals the absence of hierarchy and is thus a good thing.

In this issue, we want to show that this problem demands a more detailed analysis.

This is worth doing not for the sake of an academic review of how certain terms are used, but to resolve the most pressing issues surrounding the continuation of emancipatory practices in a world gripped by a serious, protracted crisis when it comes to the emergence of political consciousness. We believe that one should start with the old maxim (whose sense fades with every passing day) that the acquisition of consciousness is the prerequisite of all progress and emancipation, and that all conscious awareness of the status quo and the totality of the world is a representational act.

In the specific historical situation of March 2012, when we are forced to bid farewell to the euphoria generated by the wave of popular uprisings from Russia to Egypt, we see that the "scoundrels are celebrating victory" again (to paraphrase Alain Badiou). And so we try to understand what it is that leads, again and again, to the end of the most brilliant, courageous, radical and honest civic movements. Could it have been otherwise? What should have been done differently? Where were mistakes made? We pose these same questions in the realm of culture. How has it happened that, after many long years of socially engaged art practices, we see that people simply have not noticed their presence and impact on societal life, while the insolent domination of the art market has grown to a previously unimaginable scale, having proven capable of instrumentalizing the most radical forms of politically engaged art.

To give even an approximate answer to these difficult questions, we need once again to examine the problem of political and aesthetic representation.

2

The rise of mass protest movements in recent years has clearly shown that neither Putin nor Mubarak and Ben Ali, neither the bankers on Wall Street nor the IMF, neither the media elite nor the political parties, neither the deputies nor the artists and intellectuals – none of them – represents "us," nor can they or should they represent "us." They cannot represent this "us" that presents itself as a multitude of citizens who refuse formalized modes of political unity, who insist on a singularity fundamentally irreducible to all forms of representation, who seek to preserve their individual autonomy to make and pursue decisions while simultaneously attempting to acquire a new experience of collectivity, of unity around a common cause.

"*You cannot even imagine/represent us*" *(Вы нас даже не представляете*) has become the operative slogan of the moment, the ultimate expression of the demand to end a system based on the principle of delegation, and of the recognition of symbolic representation's impossibility. The protest movements have been dominated by a tendency about which Jodi Dean and Jason Jones write in this publication, "*Rather than recognizing representation as an unavoidable feature of language, process for forming and aggregating preferences (always open to contestation and revision), or means of producing and expressing a common will, these tendencies construe representation as unavoidably hierarchical, distancing, and repressive (and they think of hierarchy, distance, and repression as negative rather than potentially generative attributes.*" We could analyze this tendency and show how its take on representation continues a debate, long familiar to emancipatory movements, on the nature and sources of authority and power. Paraphrasing the well-known question, "How to change the world without taking power?" we might ask, "Can we change the world without resorting to a politics of representation?" This central question, which has long haunted all civic movements and activist art, is largely a symptom of the political dysfunction that afflicts new movements, rendering them hostages of the traditional anti-authoritarian trend that has led to organizational paralysis on the part of emancipatory practices when faced with neoliberal expansion and economic crisis.

Meanwhile, neoliberalism is busy solving completely different problems and has proven more politically sophisticated. Its spread is largely due to its flexibility in combining different, seemingly mutually exclusive concepts of democracy, governance and sovereignty. At a time when the left is incapable of elaborating and pursuing its own politics of hegemony as "paradox," capitalism is quite well prepared to tactically mix different principles – direct and representative models, corporate governance principles and open source, rigid authoritarian methods of suppression and soft regulation. Thus, in false guise it adheres to the formal ambivalence found in the constitutional bases of any modern democratic system. [1]

3

If we translate these processes into the realm of art and culture, we discover a profound similarity. We see how the neoliberal policy of privatizing and manipulating the commons also wields its authority in the field of symbolic production and consumption, subjecting them to a unified attention economy. [2]

In contemporary critical art theory, representational practices have been questioned and, as a rule, accused of manipulating images, interpretations and attitudes in order to preserve the exclusive power of a privileged minority of experts. Reacting to this state of affairs, a number of progressive cultural institutions developed various methods in order to implement a policy by which they rejected their traditional representative role and strove to become places where different individuals and groups (primarily those excluded from the representative spaces of public politics) could deliver their messages to society in the most unmediated way. Relational aesthetics, community-based art, art therapy, interventionism and many other civically engaged art practices have reduced the role of the artist or curator to that of a professional mediator who opens up these spaces to "facilitate" spontaneous utterances and participation. As in politics, we are dealing here with the same questions about forms of power and the relationship between the principle of democracy and delegation.

In art, this is revealed as a clash between the sovereignty of immediate manifestations of creativity and the established regime for their representation by art institutions. As in politics, this essentially democratic conflict has always been the main driving force behind the development of art, setting down new boundaries between the realms of what is recognized and what is not, between what has already been represented and what is struggling to be represented. Indeed, the radicalization of this issue has always consisted in the complete rejection of representation, which is tantamount to a rejection of the project of art. [3]

The question of whether the project of art has been completed vis-à-vis the forms in which it established itself during the emergence of modernity is more pressing than at any time in history. This conclusion is forced on us, first of all, by an analysis of new forms of production and the distribution of artistic utterances in the context of globalization. It is likewise clear that all forms of ideology are historically conditioned and finite. The debate about representation must thus also be a debate about what new system of creative production might arise from the old, and to what extent it would be able to inherit the highest expressions of art's emancipatory spirit rather than become an inexhaustible resource of unaccounted creative excess, channeled free of charge into the creative industry's bulging projects.

In art, as in politics, we see that the constitutive impulse of movements that refuse to develop their own politics of representation is delegated by default to institutions of power. It is for this reason that the "occupation" of art spaces by direct manifestations of social activism operates more in opposition to the idea of "occupy everything," serving rather to encourage the unlimited expansion of the "attention economy" as it encroaches on the sovereignty of creativity.

4

Taken as a whole, the essays in this issue of our newspaper tell us that a change in perspective in art and politics is needed as never before.

Rather than endlessly rehashing debates about how we can escape from the clutches of all power relationships, we should try to imagine and begin to establish new forms of power relationships that would be subordinated to the common good and that society would be able to control and change when they require revision.

Rather than endlessly appealing to the mythical consensus of direct democracy and assemblies that represent no one knows whom, perhaps it would be wise to worry about developing systems of representation, forms of hegemony, democratic centralism and elected institutions for organizing structures of another kind, ones based on the dialectic of participation and representation.

Rather than believing that people's imaginations can be inspired only by the immediacy of actions "here and now," we should try and create images representing situations "there and someday" that would inspire them to fight no less intensely and passionately than any "here and now."

Together, all these things might lead us to experience an event in whose aftermath history's course would run differently from the way it is now.

Notes

Thanks to David Riff and Alexander Skidan for their invaluable help in writing this text.

1. It is interesting to note how paradoxically the principle of sovereignty is formulated in Article 3 of the Russian Federation Constitution: "The people shall exercise their power directly, and also through the bodies of state power and local self-government."

2. See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Attention_economy. The most important aspect of attention economy theory is the notion that there is a limited supply of human attention and different players in the market compete to possess this resource. This is a quite accurate description of how value is produced in contemporary art.

3. See any number of texts by Boris Groys in which he provides a brilliant, detailed analysis of this problem.

Steve Edwards

*Two critiques of representation (against lamination)**

A little story has developed in the circles of the political and artistic avant-garde. It is more often spoken and heard than written and read, but it constitutes the background common sense for much thinking about politics today. This assumption suggests that the critique of representation and the critique of parliamentary representation (bourgeois democracy) are equivalent and coeval. In politics (the Occupy movement, for example) this entails the rejection of any representative or spokesperson, in favour of horizontal decision-making, whereas the rejection of bourgeois formal democracy for some contemporary artists and critics suggests the necessity of an exodus from the bourgeois art world of museums, galleries and all their trimmings. Involvement in this system is imagined to be undemocratic, since it entails working in hierarchical institutions, dependence on capital (whether state or private in form) and assuming to represent, or speak for, others. Autonomy in politics is equated with autonomy in art. Followed through, the alternative would be something like direct democracy in art: soviets of artists, workers and soldiers deputies, which would certainly not be a bad thing. However, the story rests on an imaginative process that laminates distinct critiques (practices and ideas). In order to think about this composite we need to begin by examining the constituent layers.

The first critique

The first critique counterposes direct democracy to parliamentary or representative democracy. Consideration of the state form aside, revolutionary socialists presuppose a basic criticism of parliamentary or representative democracy. [1] Liberal capitalism has bought for the citizens of most western states constitutional rights (formal equality of citizens, freedom of contract, equality before the law, freedom from arbitrary arrest, freedom of assembly and freedom of speech) and universal suffrage (one person one vote, secret ballot, payment of representatives, set terms of office and so forth). In this form of democracy, politicians 'represent' blocs of voters, and governments are formed from alliances of politicians in parties. The politicians are usually educated middle-class professionals (often lawyers) and businessmen who are closely connected to their class. Domenico Losurdo has argued liberalism, which constitutes the backbone of this system, is, in fact, a *Herrenvolk* democracy or a democracy of gentlemen. It is predicated on what he calls a 'community of the free', a select group — typically property-owning gentlemen — to whom democratic rights are believed to apply exclusively. [2] The democracy of these gentlemen is a democracy of property. The separation of public and private life is at the core of this politics, with property and economic activity reserved for the private sphere. The democratic gentlemen could be, and often were, slave owners, employers of factory children, domestic tyrants. But for liberalism, these are private matters, beyond the reach of the state. The gentlemen could espouse democracy and uphold slavery at the same time, because slaves were not thought to be part of the community. The same might apply to workers and women. Those outside this elite community had no rights or possessed strictly delimited rights. Capitalism can work perfectly well without democratic representation, but liberal democracy comes with exclusion clauses of its own.

What Losurdo does not consider is that this liberal democracy is predicated on a theory of representation. This is the idea of coverage or *couverture* (as it was outlined in relation to women's property) in Blackstone's *Commentaries on the Laws of England* in the eighteenth century. This philosophy of coverage was central to the exclusion clauses of liberal thought and practice. Workers, women, slaves (and even the middle class) were denied political representation, because their interests were deemed to be covered by propertied gentleman better qualified to make decisions on their behalf. So in liberal thought and practice, workers, women and slaves are deemed to be represented, whether they possess the vote or not, because the presence of superior gentlemen in government already encompasses their welfare and happiness. Struggles for democracy in the nineteenth and twentieth century extended the franchise to the excluded, but bourgeois democracy retained the model of coverage. Elected politicians are stewards for the people they represent, and political sovereignty is vested in these representatives and not in the people. From the outset Marx understood this:
'it is not possible for *all* as individuals to take part in the legislature. The political state leads an existence *divorced* from civil society. For its part, civil society would cease to exist if everyone became a legislator. On the other hand, it is opposed by a political state which can only tolerate a civil society that conforms to its own *standards*. In other words, the fact that civil society takes part in the political state through its deputies is the expression of the *separation* and of the merely dualistic unity'. [3]

Representation as coverage — a 'dualistic unity' — produces a split subject: an active economic subject and a passive (anti)political subject. Liberal democracy reserves politics for parliament and representatives; the people are simply an externality through which legitimacy for government is secured. The universal claims of liberal democracy are predicated on coverage and, as a consequence, any mass political activity outside the sphere of the executive can be deemed interfering, obstructive or even illegitimate. Liberal democracy is democracy in the metaphoric mode.

The tradition of socialism from below is based on an entirely other principle of representation. Direct democracy has a long history, arguably reaching back to ancient Athens, but it was the event of the Paris Commune that fused this political form with socialism. Marx grasped that the political innovations inaugurated by the Commune as a 'working body' created the basis for the socialist democracy to come, calling it 'a new point of departure of world-wide importance'. [4] In a key passage that indicates some relevant principles he wrote:

> *The Commune was formed of the municipal councillors, chosen by universal [male] suffrage in the various wards of the town, responsible and revocable at short terms. The majority of its members were naturally working men, or acknowledged representatives of the working class. The Commune was to be a working, not a parliamentary body, executive and legislative at the same time. Instead of continuing to be the agent of the Central Government, the police was at once stripped of its political attributes, and turned into the responsible, and at all times revocable, agent of the Commune. So were the officials of all other branches of the Administration. From the members of the Commune downwards, the public service had to be done at workman's wages. [5]*

Mandated delegates, subject to recall, on a worker's wage — the event of the Commune has to be seen in the future anterior; it became the prism through which revolutionary democracy, subordinating property rights to life, was perceived and measured. This council form of democracy became the constitutive space of all those who live under the domination of capital.

It was probably the Dutch Social Democrat Anton Pannekoek who revived and propagated this conception, which was taken up by Lenin and the Bolsheviks. In any case, soviets of soldiers and workers deputies sprang up during the 1905 revolution in Russia and again in 1917. In the revolutionary upheavals that followed, workers councils developed in Germany, Hungary, Italy, Ireland, China and Spain. Every serious social upheaval since has thrown up workers councils as the nucleus of another democracy. [6] The politics of socialism from below, in its Leninist descent (continued today by various Trotskyist and post-Trotskyist groups) or the alternative council communist or Tribunist lineage (Pannekoek, Hermann Gorter, Otto Rühle, Slyvia Pankhurst and their anarcho-communist and ultra-left progeny), contrasts this active democracy to the separation and passivity endemic to the democracy of the gentlemen. [7] So far, this is familiar enough history.

The point is that this version of representation differs markedly from liberal democracy, not only in the active involvement of the excluded, but also in the way it constitutes politics and political subjects. Council democracy has often been a fleeting form crushed by the powers of capital, so my account considers this experience in its ideal form. Representation in council form is not predicated on coverage, but on delegation. The delegate from workplace, local area or oppressed group (we can easily imagine LGBT delegates) is mandated to represent the views and interests of those who nominate them. The delegate is a cipher, a speaking embodiment of the working majority. This synecdochic process of delegation gives another meaning for the proletariat's 'radical chains'; it generates politics at each of its interconnecting links through to its base, because the process of mandating delegates creates debate, dispute and conflict at each point. The council is a constitutive forum of antagonism, both in opposition to the gentlemen and in the labouring demos itself. But the council form of politics, as a practice of synecdochic representation, is a form of contiguity not partition. This means that the political authority of the demos is in two places at once: it is vested in the supreme council of delegates and in the dispersed and differentiated active constituency. In contrast to liberal democracy, this does not suppose a formal separation of economic from political subjects or any necessary active/passive split. Scandalously from the perspective of the liberal gentleman, public and private life are not sundered.

The General Assemblies of today continue this critique of representative democracy and claim to extend direct democracy beyond the council form to mass participation in which a totality of participants emerges without leadership or tribune. As one report on the G8 protests put it:

> *Many people in the protest movement reject the notion of representation altogether, arguing instead that the only adequate representative of the population is the population itself. The wish for a kind of non-sovereign power constituted by the collective 'will of the multitude' is behind various aspects of the culture of G8 protest, from the scrupulously non-hierarchical, non-majoritarian decision making in the camp to the anger at the presumption of those leftists who presume to act as the voice of those standing behind them in the march. [8]*

In so far as this passage makes a universal claim, it is through reference to the 'population'. However, appeal to the 'population', Marx argues, is precisely the wrong place from which to begin; it is a 'chaotic conception of the whole'. It is against this empty 'abstraction' that he made his call for 'a rich totality of many determinations and relations' [9]; a formulation that has been the basis for an anti-reductionist conception of totality in Althusser, E.P. Thompson and many other thinkers on the left. [10] Nevertheless, the utopian dimension of this non-representational democracy is its strength; it envisages an active polity of fully engaged subjects. What is more, it attempts to practice this form of anti-representational and anti-hierarchical politics here and now. In its actuality it suggests a vision

of another future. By rejecting representation this politics postulates autonomy for the subject; the creation of active life outside or beyond the interpellative processes of capital and the state. This imaginary political subject is not only autopoetic, but autotelic.

The second critique

The second critique is the artistic or philosophical critique of representation. From Plato on, suspicion of representation as a form of artifice and seduction has played a significant role in western thought. Questioning the logic of representation has been central to much post-Kantian philosophy and, in an important sense, modern art in its totality entailed a break with mimetic picturing. In the interests of clarity I simply want to outline three forms of this critique prominent today.

As the first thread we can take the political modernist critique of representation (across its three moments: the inter-war years; the 1970s; and the early twenty-first century). Political modernism challenges naturalised forms of representation with the aim of calling into being an actively engaged and critical audience. This encompasses such classic avant-garde ideas as the shift from composition to construction or from portrait to series; revealing the apparatus and laying bare the device; disjunction of image/text; breaking up diegesis; pictorial fragmentation and montage; direct address to the beholder; breaking empathy or identification; and dispersing point of view. These are the techniques of alienation, estrangement and the *Verfremundungs-effekt* associated with the names Brecht and Godard among many others. In the place of soporific naturalised representation, political modernism attempts to create a politics of disturbance that might build a new critical realism.

In opposition to the scientific pretensions of structuralism, a wave of poststructuralist thinkers questioned the possibility of representation. Whether it be the analysis of rhetorical effects and the focus on the false coherence of images and texts, the critique of transcendental signifiers, the focus on disintegrating chains of signification or the claims for an endless parade of simulacra without origin or prior ground, a profound suspicion of representation underpins poststructuralist thought. From the inaccessibility of the Real in Lacanian psychoanalysis to Lyotard's version of the sublime as a scene of 'disaster', in which the history of the twentieth century turns around the calculated annihilation of the European Jews, poststructuralism (in all its variety) finds the same story everywhere, constantly reiterating an account about the fundamental inadequacy of representation.

The third thread, which may draw on the Brechtian political variant or the poststructuralist one, or both, is the ethical challenge to representation, which came to prominence across a range of disciplines during the 1970s, including art practice. The central question here is: who claims the right to speak in the name of the subaltern other? At its most simplistic the ethical critique turns on the idea of 'misrepresentation'. In some more sophisticated instances, such as history from below or subaltern studies, it draws political impetus from Gramsci to interrogate the coded presence of the subaltern in the archives of power and state; in others, it shades towards a Nietzschean suspicion of representation as a ruse of the will to power. In its different versions this perspective suggests that representation substitutes one voice for another more authentic or oppressed one. Representation appears as ventriloquism, a mystagogic throwing of the voice.

Against lamination

We thus have two political critiques of liberal democracy and three philosophical or artistic critiques of representation. Potentially, they can be conjoined in any permutation and there is nothing necessarily immanent in these combinations. For instance, political modernism has always drawn force and energy from the actuality of the council form. We need to pay attention to the possible configurations to see if they will bond, and what problems and contradictions result from particular laminations. No doubt, part of the issue here is the translation or conflation of *Darstellung* (to show, portray or depict), *Vorstellung* (presentation or 'placing before') and *Repräsentanz* (a 'representative' or 'delegate'). In the case of the current anti-representational politics, I envisage several problems with the current lamination.

First, the current anti-representational politics runs together distinct kinds of project and claim: proceeding by analogy or metaphor, it laminates the communist critique of representative democracy with the ethical critique (the edict against speaking for others) or epistemological, and cultural critiques of representation. But what exactly is meant to be commensurable in, let us say, Lyotard's claim that the Holocaust is unrepresentable, a realist photographic practice and an electoral process? And while political modernism denaturalises representation and calls for active engagement, in its best articulations it remains realist. It is worth noting that the ethical critique is not a moratorium on speaking for others, but a point of interrogation into who exactly claims the right to speak in the name of the subaltern subject and the form of politics this legitimates. Jacques Rancière has rightly noted that if we abandon the categories of people or class, 'forms of naked, unsymbolizable hatred of the other' occupy the vacated space; these alternative visions of 'the people' are usually 'racist, xenophobic resurgences, based on the claim to identity'. [11] When socialists abandon hegemonic claims (representation) there are often very serious consequences.

Secondly, drawing on the participation/representation opposition in post-relational aesthetics, some artists and theorists advocate a move beyond the representation — said to be passive — into unmediated action. Here, depiction in any form (representation in painting, photographs or video) is equated with bourgeois democracy. In this case, the claim in art for participation in opposition to representation involves the repetition of a certain modernist fantasy of an escape from language into a realm of immediate experience. This is not without its charms. [12] It is, though, deeply paradoxical given that the theoretical resources mobilised to support such a proposition are themselves suspicious of any appeal to a realm of experience outside of representation. It is also contains a performative contradiction. Participation in art or even in the current General Assemblies is a metaphoric activity: it is a synecdoche for an alternative active democracy. (It is not the least power of the workers councils that they are representative in this other sense — symbolisations of another power.). This elision need not in itself become a problem: the claims of the radical avant-garde have often been based on such conflations. It is important to understand, however, that the current critique of political/artistic representation is a metaphoric process of 'seeing as'. Representative democracy is seen as if it were a language form or an image; cultural practice is seen as if it were mass democratic politics. Representation will always re-emerge in any art or politics that seeks to leave it behind.

Thirdly, there is what we might call the logistical problem. Modern societies with large populations necessarily require complex economic and logistical planning. Even under the cloak of laissez faire, this means managing flows of resources, goods and people; dealing with health and welfare provision; scheduling and controlling roads, railways, shipping and air traffic; responsibility for national defence; monitoring food standards, environmental impact, health and safety at work, governing anti-social activity and a thousand-and-one other things. In his 1843 critique of Hegel's doctrine of state, Marx wrote: 'a cobbler is my representative in so far as he satisfies a social need'. [13] This certainly applies to air traffic-controllers and container-terminal operators. Here we face the problem discussed by Engels in his important essay 'On Authority'. Engels insists, against those he calls 'autonomists', that 'a certain authority' and with it 'a certain subordination' are necessitated by 'the material conditions under which we produce and make products circulate'. He suggests 'authority and autonomy are relative things', and 'the autonomists', rather than reject authority, really ought to restrict 'themselves to saying that the social organisation of the future would restrict authority solely to the limits within which the conditions of production render it inevitable.' [14] Equality and non-hierarchical social forms call for delegated authority. [15] The General Assemblies of the Occupy movement are, in one dimension, a powerful invocation of a possible democracy, but to imagine them as a general model for a future society is to toy with a breakdown of social reproduction and subsistence crisis. This is a model for people with time on their hands. Implicit in this conception is a primitivism that (openly or not) envisages a return to the village commune with its immediacy and simplicity of social relations. The dialogue at the heart of this democratic procedure is based on proximity, on face-to-face discussion. New technology and social media might be invoked here, but we are then cast back on the terrain of representation. (It is odd that phone technology is not seen as a representational form in this politics). A communist society can be much more democratic than anything we have previously seen, but it is also likely to be more not less complex and involve delegation and the utilisation of specialist skills. It is just silly to imagine that these logistical matters can be decided on the model of the assembly: the food would perish in the time it takes to make the decision. Those who genuinely wish to build a new society face difficult decisions, often entailing responsibility for the lives of many others.

Finally, the rejection of representation and fetishisation of consensus makes it difficult to envisage a collective force capable of challenging capital; unanimity tends to replace unity in action and real conflicts of interests are masked. It is not obvious how anti-representational politics can found such a politics, because naming collective life entails recourse to both figuration and exemplification. In opposition to horizontal decision-making, Bruno Bosteels has argued that we need once more to be able to speak the collective, to be able to say 'we'. Drawing his example from the poetry of Pablo Neruda, Bosteels argues that the public expression of 'we', instead of displacing the people, creates a constitutive space in which the people (or other collectives) can emerge. To employ the collective pronoun is to represent. It necessarily entails claiming to speak for more than the self. For Bosteels, the slogan 'We are the 99%' creates such a space for collective struggle in a way that anti-representational politics cannot. [16] In contradistinction to Bosteels, I continue to believe that the 'proletariat' names the antagonism at the heart of capitalism and the slogan 'We are the 99%' postulates a false unity, but his insistence on the collective pronoun is right and necessary. Radical thought in art, and beyond it, now needs to be able to consider the legacies of the distinct critiques of representation in their specificity. Creating the space for collective action against capitalism will involve a process of delamination. That is just to say we need to think politically about representation.

Footnotes

** Special thanks to Alberto Toscano for all his comments and suggestions.*

1. For an excellent account of socialism from below as the politics of working-class self-emancipation in opposition to statist and parliamentary socialism, see Hal Draper, 'Two Souls of Socialism' (1966), published as a pamphlet by Bookmarks, 1997, or available on the Marxist Internet Archive at http://www.marxists.org/archive/draper/1966/twosouls/index.htm.
2. Domenico Losurdo, Liberalism: A Counter History, London: Verso, 2011.
3. Karl Marx, 'Critique of Hegel's Doctrine of the State', Early Writings, Penguin, 1975, p. 189.
4. Karl Marx, Letter to Ludwig Kugelmann, April 17, 1871, in Marx and Engels, Selected Correspondence, Progress Publishers, 1975, p. 248.
5. Karl Marx, The Civil War in France, in Karl Marx and Fredrick Engels, Writings on the Paris Commune, Hal Draper, ed., Monthly Review Press, 1971, p. 73.
6. For an overview of the history of workers councils since 1968, see Colin Barker, Revolutionary Rehearsals, Chicago: Haymarket, 2008.
7. Incidentally, it is worth noting for the ultra-left critics of representation that 'tribunes' are representatives, too.
8. Hari Kunzru, ELAM and Mute, 'Make Representation History (G8 Report)', 21 July 2005, accessed at http://www.metamute.org/editorial/articles/make-representation-history-g8-report.
9. Karl Marx, Grundrisse: Foundation of the Critique of Political Economy (Rough Draft), (1857–58), Penguin, 1973, p. 100.
10. I am not convinced that politics can entail a 'non-sovereign power' and it is not at all clear that a non-representative practice can be equated with 'the collective will of the multitude'. A multitude is by definition a collective and if it possesses a will it must be externalised, that is, represented.
11. Jacques Rancière, 'The Political Form of Democracy', Documenta X: The Book, Cantz Verlag, 1997, p. 804.
12. Roland Barthes, Writing Degree Zero (1953), New York: Hill & Wang, 1968; T.J. Clark, Farewell to an Idea: Episodes from a History of Modernism, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999; and Steve Edwards, Martha Rosler, The Bowery in two inadequate representational systems, Afterall, 2012. See also Stewart Martin's related criticism of the illusions of presence underpinning relational aesthetics: Stewart Martin, 'Critique of Relational Aesthetics', Third Text, vol. 21, no. 4, 2007, pp. 369–86.
13. Karl Marx, 'Critique of Hegel's Doctrine of the State' (1843), Early Writings, Penguin, 1975, p. 189.
14. Frederick Engels, 'On Authority', 1872, accessed at http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1872/10/authority.htm.
15. See, for example, Cinzia Arruzza's critique of the fetishisation of deliberative democratic procedure in the Occupy movement: 'A Road Trip from the West Coast to the East Coast… and Back', Occupy, No. 3, 2011, pp. 28–30.
16. Bruno Bosteels, 'The Leftist Hypothesis: Communism in the Age of Terror', in On the Idea of Communism, Costas Douzinas and Slavoj Žižek, eds., London: Verso, 2010; J.E. Hamilton, '"Criticizing the Critique of Representation": Bruno Bosteels at Occupy Boston', The Boston Occupier, 6 December, 2011, accessed at http://bostonoccupier.com/2011/12/06/criticizing-the-critique-of-representation-bruno-bosteels-at-occupy-boston/. Bosteels also made this argument on the panel 'In the Name of the People' at the 8th Historical Materialism Conference: 'Spaces of Capital, Moments of Struggle' in London, November 2011.

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Jodi Dean and Jason Jones

Occupy Wall Street and the Politics of Representation

September 2011 shattered the ideology of an invincible Wall Street much as September 2001 shattered the illusion of an invulnerable United States. All of a sudden and seemingly out of the blue, people outraged by the fact that "banks got bailed out" and "we got sold out" installed themselves in the financial heart of New York City. Occupying the symbol of capitalist class power, they ruptured it. The ostensible controllers of the global capitalist system, still reeling from the crash of 2008, appeared to have lost control over their own cement neighborhood. Hippies with tents and cops with barricades had turned lower Manhattan into a chaotic mess. Those seeking to combine the people's work, debts, hopes, and futures into speculative instruments for private profit confronted a visible and actual collective counterforce. There in the power of the people where investment banks and hedge funds had already identified an enormous social surplus, a cadre of the newly active located an inexhaustible political potential. It was like a giant hole had been opened up in the steel and glass citadel of the financial class. Through it, traders, brokers, and market-makers—as well as everybody else, even the whole world—could see the possibility of something new, something more, a world without capitalism, a world where people dance, talk, live, and create in common. Wall Street was occupied—and this occupation was producing a new form of political representation.

Debates over demands, tactics, and the ninety-nine percent have featured prominently in Occupy Wall Street since the movement's inception. Movement participants argue over whether Occupy should make demands or whether occupation is its own demand. Activists debate whether the movement should pursue a diversity of tactics or explicitly disavow violence. People with varying degrees of involvement in and acceptance of the most significant political development on the left since the anti-globalization protests ask themselves if they are part of the 99% and what it means if they are. Underpinning these debates is the question of representation. What does the movement represent and to whom?

To present the disagreements simultaneously constituting and rupturing Occupy as fundamentally concerned with representation is already to politicize them, to direct them in one way rather than another, for the question of representation has been distorted to the point of becoming virtually impossible to ask. Strong tendencies in the movement reject a politics of representation. Rather than recognizing representation as an unavoidable feature of language, process for forming and aggregating preferences (always open to contestation and revision), or means of producing and expressing a common will, these tendencies construe representation as unavoidably hierarchical, distancing, and repressive (and they think of hierarchy, distance, and repression as negative rather than potentially generative attributes). For them, the strength of Occupy is in its *break* with representation and its creation of a *new* politics.

Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri contrast Occupy's fight for "real democracy" (which they rightly link to the movement of the Spanish *indignados*) with widespread discontent with current systems of political representation. Occupy isn't fighting to have previously excluded voices and concerns represented in the parliamentary process. It's building an entirely different politics. Marina Sitrin emphasizes the horizontality of the movement, the involvement of people in non-hierarchical democratic associations through which they directly determine what they want to do and how they want to do it. The power of the movement comes from the capacities it unleashes for people to create new associations and territories, to change the shape and space of their common lives. David Graeber highlights Occupy's rejection of political institutions and its prefiguration of a more egalitarian politics. To represent the movement in terms of old divisions would be to fail to recognize the becoming of a new politics. We agree, but argue that this new politics doesn't eclipse representation. It reinvents representation as the active, self-authorizing assertion of division in relation to the appearance of antagonism. Occupy unleashes practices and incites actions, linking them together via the hole in Wall Street. In its new politics of representation, division isn't effaced or overcome. It's asserted and linked to capitalism's fundamental antagonism, class struggle.

Occupy is said to be post or anti-representation with respect to the individual subjects participating in the movement and with respect to the movement's own relation to its setting in communicative capitalism. First, the consensus-based practices of Occupy are premised on a rejection of the idea that anyone can or should speak for another person. To speak for another, it is claimed, effects a kind of violence or exclusion, repressing individual autonomy. Delegated autonomy is not autonomy at all but rather subjection to the opinion, will, and decision of another. Occupy thus rejects the political representation of the subject by insisting that each person speak only for him or herself. Any act or decision taken has to be agreed to by each and every participant. Or, one participates only in those acts with which one agrees, recognizing that multiple heterogeneous processes comprise the movement.

Likewise, not only can no one speak for another but no one can speak for the movement. The movement is leaderless. Thus, the second way that Occupy Wall Street is said to be post-representational moves beyond the practices internal to the movement to emphasize the movement's relation to the system it confronts and seeks to change. Because Occupy is the multiplicity of the ever-changing people and practices comprising it, any attempt to represent the movement would necessarily restrict, judge, and negate it, reducing its potential to the already given terms and expectations of the dominant system. No one set of demands, tactics, interests, or concerns can encompass and stand for the movement as a whole. To proceed otherwise elevates some voices and concerns over others, reinstating the hierarchies the movement works to dismantle.

The rejection of representation—of persons and of the movement—comes up against Occupy Wall Street's powerful slogan, "We Are the 99 Percent." The slogan represents the people and the political message of the movement by asserting division. It interjects the fact of economic inequality into political discussion. It announces that those who protest and occupy parks and other public spaces are acting in the name of the majority of the people. Emphasizing the antagonism between the people and the top one percent, the slogan names the wrong against which the movement mobilizes—inequality, exploitation, and theft. Indeed, that's the difference between the statistic regarding the one percent's degree of prosperity relative to the ninety-nine and the announcement of a *political identification with* the statistic. The former registers an empirical fact. The latter politicizes this fact, separating it out from the information stream as a fact that matters, that is more than simply one among many innumerable facts.

Excising the fact from the stream, insisting that inequality matters, cuts a hole out of the whole. Just as the occupation of Zuccotti Park visibly and materially changes the experience of Wall Street, so the slogan ruptures the fantasy of capitalism. Not all of the people are rich, nor can they be. The many have little. The very, very few have a lot and without the ninety-nine percent, they wouldn't exist at all; they wouldn't be the one percent. Wall Street's financial exploits presuppose, *require*, the productive many. The slogan "We are the 99 Percent" thus represents the power of the collective people economically and politically. When the ninety-nine percent occupy the place of the ones who exploit them, power relations are completely transformed. Far from being post-representation, the movement divisively asserts, repeatedly and with determination, the fundamental economic antagonism at the heart of capitalism. The whole isn't a whole at all and Occupy represents this gap.

Occupy Wall Street politicizes the division between the rich and the rest of us. A key element of occupation is urban camping—bodies sleeping out of doors. This practice by itself is not directly political. Homeless people inhabit the capitalist metropolis. Consumers sometimes sleep on sidewalks and sometimes in tents as they queue up for tickets, sales, and events. Occupy explicitly announces its irreducibility to practices of sleeping out of doors by representing them as political, as deliberate and collective tactics of struggle. The movement is not simply a fluid, inclusive, and variable assortment of people and practices. It is the re-presenting of people and practices as components of a political collectivity via the common name "Occupy." The name marks the gap between practices and their politicization.

Holding open the gap, retaining the power of Occupy to represent actions in and as political struggle against capitalism, is hard. Consider the reactionary moves to evict occupiers. City governments and mainstream media condensed occupation to sleeping out of doors, making occupiers indistinguishable from the homeless (and hence crazy, dirty, and dangerous). Displacing the political message of occupation, they treated the movement as reducible to practices that they described as injurious to public health, as if Occupy didn't represent at all, as if its practice of sleeping out of doors did not and could not confront the particular interests of the privileged with the real of a collective people amassed against them, as if the same old poverty was so sedimented into everyday life that it could not be forced loose and politicized. More concretely, by evicting occupiers from open and public spaces, by smashing their tents and destroying their common kitchens and libraries, city officials attempted to rebuild the barrier of invincibility around Wall Street—no hole, no alternative, *nothing to see here folks, just move along*.

Treatments of Occupy as post or anti-representational disavow division and thereby miss the new form of political representation Occupy is inventing. Those urging that each speak only for him or herself disavow division *within* persons. Assuming that an individual can clearly know and represent her own interests, they avoid confronting the ways subjects are internally divided, not

fully conscious of the desires and drives that motivate them. Furthermore, to the extent that they position the individual as the primary site and ground of political decisions, those arguing against representation fail to acknowledge how subjects are configured under capitalism. Speaking a liberal language of autonomy and a capitalist language of choice, they neglect the biases, misconceptions, and attachments structuring individual subjects. It's almost as if they fail to get their own critique, stopping it too soon—if representation excludes and hierarchizes, then these processes occur within persons as well as between them (an insight found not only in psychoanalysis but also in countless discussions of subject formation, discipline, and normativity).

Those who insist on the unrepresentability of Occupy also disavow division *between* persons. Failing to take division seriously enough, they embrace a nearly populist presumption of organic social totality. As fearful of exclusion and partiality as they are of hierarchy, they avoid confronting fundamental divisions within the movement, circumventing these divisions by focusing on the immediate tasks of occupation—and thereby falling back into the very immediacy on which reactionary forces rely when they evict. The consensus-based practices of Occupy Wall Street illustrate this point insofar as they prioritize the agreement of all over a collectivity capable of encompassing organized factions or a "loyal opposition." The procedure of blocking is a more specific example. As explained in the NYC General Assembly Guide, a person's use of the "block" means that she has serious moral or ethical objection to a proposal and will consider leaving the group if the proposal passes. On the one hand, the possibility of a block gives participants an incentive to search for outcomes that everyone can accept. On the other, it invests agency and responsibility in individuals. Purely an individual decision, the block has no necessary connection to collective plans and principles. It rests on the assumption that interests can converge, that the long term is nothing more than the sequence of short terms, and that a large, inclusive movement is better than one that takes a divisive stand. Compromise is better than exclusion, so whatever appeals to everybody wins (the political philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau might describe the block as a procedure that confuses the will of all with the general will). At any rate, the fantasy at work in the insistence on the unrepresentability of Occupy is a fantasy of multiplicity without antagonism, of difference without division. The fantastic nature of this assumption of underlying unity came out early in the movement as Native Americans contested the language of occupation in the name of their experience of having already been occupied.

The Occupy movement brings together different political tendencies, varying degrees of radicality, and multiple interests and concerns. That the movement encompasses a wide field of tactics and demands, however, does not mean that it evades or moves beyond representation. On the contrary, this broadness points to the unavoidability of representation as well as to its constitutive openness and malleability. What actions fit with the movement, which ones to take, and how directly they link up are ongoing questions. Ever-changing plurality is the condition of representation, not its overcoming. Those who construe Occupy as post and anti-representation misread plurality as the negative limit to representation when they should instead recognize plurality as representation's positive condition. Occupy Wall Street is not *actually* the movement of ninety-nine percent of the population of the United States (or the world) against the top one percent. It is a movement mobilizing itself in the name of the ninety-nine percent. Asserting a division in relation to the fundamental antagonism Occupy make appear, it represents the wrong of the gap between the rich and the rest of us.

Occupy doesn't represent a constituency, position, or interest that could be said to be whole. It asserts division—the division between the ninety-nine and the one, within the ninety-nine, and between the practices of the movement and their place. Critics of representation miss the way Occupy reinvents the politics of representation because their image of representation remains deeply tied to parliamentarianism. It's obviously true that Occupy eschews mainstream electoral politics. It is also true that Occupy rejects the nested hierarchies that conventionally organize political associations. But neither of these facts eliminates representation. Rather, they point to a rejection of the current political and economic system because of its failure adequately to represent the people's will.

Occupy's rejection of conventional politics incites political experimentation. In place of the established sites of politics—the caucus, party meeting, or congressional office—there are assemblies of people out of doors, assemblies open to anyone with the time, inclination, and ability to attend. Participation isn't authorized by prior selection. Participants authorize themselves. What qualifies them to speak is their representation of their speech and action in relation to an occupied Wall Street. They position themselves in their speech and action with respect to the hole opened up by occupation, a hole that is less the emptiness of loss than the emptiness of possibility—our options, our futures, aren't closed off; our practices and procedures aren't already determined for us. We are making them and we don't know what will happen. Differently put, in Occupy, political representation isn't that of persons aggregated according to boundaries and procedures inscribed by the state. It is that of wills mobilized in terms of the antagonism between the people and those who would exploit and control them.

The politics of representation Occupy is inventing installs new institutions in the sites vacated through capitalist dispossession. Institutions represent collective will. The will may be past or present; but as long as an institution functions, it is active. Many working groups mirror crumbling state institutions, groups such as library, town planning, sanitation, security, and medical. Other working groups embody the orientation to equality and collectivity that people will but that capitalism represses or diverts, groups such as the people's kitchen, nonviolent communication, tech-ops, and sustainability. They represent their will for more just and equitable associations by coming up with new practices for distributing work and sharing responsibilities. As with traditional parliamentary representation, not every person directly takes and executes every decision. Labor is divided on the basis of skill, interest, and opportunity. People self-delegate.

Representing themselves and their actions in relation to the hole of an occupied Wall Street, working groups collectively take on previously public functions that have been monetized, privatized, and neglected. A striking instance was in October 2011 when New York's Mayor Bloomberg threatened to evict Zuccotti Park because it was filthy and needed to be cleaned; thousands took up brooms and dust pans to perform the work. After the eviction in November, Bloomberg brought in an official cleaning crew, providing retroactively the setting for Occupy's representational politics. Similarly, in December, occupiers wearing construction helmets took over a building in East New York. Tools in hand they went into the home, ready to fix it up and make it livable again. They looked like "real" construction workers; they were real doing construction work. The only difference, the difference that matters, is the source of their authorization. Rather than coming from official channels, it was a self-authorization legitimized by its relation to Occupy Wall Street. The active political will of the occupiers represents the gap between a state occupied by capital and one occupied by the people.

The relation to the hole that enables Occupy to represent politically, that is to say, to assert a division that signifies as something beyond what it immediately is, links up the multiple actions the movement undertakes. Endeavors such as Occupy Education and Occupy Colleges and Universities seize and politicize the division between an educational system designed for the public good and one distorted by private interests.

Representation is necessary because the movement isn't a unity or a whole; it's a combination of disparate, sometimes contradictory elements that vary in their relation to the movement's setting. In traditional theories of representation, the combination of disparate interests happens through voting, whether for delegates and legislators or on laws and propositions. In Occupy, combining happens through active willing in relation to the hole opened up in Wall Street. The duration of combination—as in any model of representation—is temporary and variable.

That combining occurs in the course of active willing in relation to the hole in Wall Street, to the politics that is the specificity of this gap, is overlooked by those who see the movement as a swarm or meme. These interpretations are one-sided. They highlight aggregation and circulation but omit the very relation that makes Occupy political, that enables its practices not just to present but to re-present. To say that anything can be occupied, that the originality of Occupy is in the creation of an open source political brand that anyone can access, misses the actual politics of the movement, the fact that it happens in the space of a relation to hole in Wall Street. The more distant and dispersed an action is from that relation, the less representative it is. It's just an activity like any other. Similarly, enthusiasm for Occupy's political opening fetishizes openness itself, disavowing the active will to occupy and repeating, in a way, the very displacement of political will for which traditional accounts of representation are rightly criticized. For all their much celebrated inclusivity, the movement's General Assemblies, like parliamentary bodies more broadly, distance themselves from active political willing. Whereas parliamentary bodies do so by transferring will from author to authorized, from the represented to the representative, in a process that progressively concentrates the will in some will diminishing it in most, GAs either progressively dilute the will to what can be shared by many or deflect it—with the result that it will be concentrated in some and rejected by most (any group can undertake an action in the name of Occupy).

Rapacious capitalism has eaten us up and spit us out. It has ravaged communities, the environment, the food supply, the very lives and futures of the majority of the people on the planet. It has made the people not a part of their own lives. Occupy Wall Street is a politics that represents the "not-a-part-ness" of the people through the practice of occupation in relation to the hole in Wall Street. It thus offers a new form of political representation. In the place of a relation between the people and those who would take their place, willing in their stead, the practices and actions of Occupy Wall assert division in relation to the fundamental antagonism between rich and power, few and many. This new mode of representation doesn't attempt to reconcile. It doesn't aggregate interest, extract division, and assert a forced false unity in a different place. Rather, it is the repetition of division, the creation of new practices, institutions, and will that remain divisive as they are held open and together via their relation to the fundamental antagonism between rich and poor, few and many, ninety-nine and one percent. Occupy makes this antagonism appear. Asserting division, it represents possibility.

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The post-communist revolution in Russia and the genesis of representative democracy

1. INTRODUCTION

While many notions of contemporary politics stem from the early modern period or even from Middle Ages and Antiquity, the composite title of "representative democracy" was born in the end of 18th century, in the course of the American Revolution. The system of representative democracy was then theorized and instituted during the French Revolution. Interestingly, in the North America, it was A. Hamilton who first advanced the notion in 1777, same Hamilton who was later, in the "Federalist Papers," calling to limit the democratic element of the republic. In France, E. Sieyès contributed to modifying Rousseau's teaching and to transferring the "general will" to the level of nation's representatives, thus making it workable and tangible. Here, the representative institution had existed within the old regime - the General Estates were convoked by the king himself, and Sieyès' main task was to supply them with a democratic, unitary, "national" interpretation.

"Representative democracy" is, at the moment of its emergence, an oxymoron. Representation, and in any case the electoral representation, has always been considered an aristocratic institution. Rousseau saw it as a "modern", that is medieval, feudal, form of government, linked to the institution of estates. Representation referred to the estates (even in Locke), or – in Hobbes or Bossuet – to the incorporation of both God and society in the figure of the monarch. The model of Sieyès, where the representatives of the estates were to become constituent power, representing the sovereign nation, merged the two (contradictory) senses of representation together. The oxymoronic formula sends from its both terms away to something else – namely, to the contradiction itself which, far from being since then "sublated", is perpetuated and may at any time turn its restorative-conservative or radical utopian side. Furthermore, this formulaic tension is in fact a sign of the event which goes beyond the concept but which opens up its internal contradiction and determines the tendency that would prevail for a time.

In general, one may argue that the representative democracy as such is a creation of revolution. Revolution is a point where a society turns against itself, a moment of its internal conflict. But it is also the internal fold where the society aspires to constitute itself from within. The "re-" of representation is of the same nature that the "re-" of revolution: both refer to the internal fold of the modern society which, in its political structure, turns toward and against itself . In this context, the "representative" democracy implies an ambivalent attitude to (direct) democracy: here, the democratic politics becomes wary of democracy. Representative democracy may mean a restraint of democracy -- as for Hamilton -- or democratization of the (hitherto estate-based) representation -- as for Sieyès.
It has long been noticed that the task of the revolution – the self-constitution of a state – was a self-contradictory one. Revolution by definition is ambivalent, allowing opposite interpretations. Who is entitled to constitute a new state, if any legitimacy would only be born with this constitution? Who is the "self" – the people, the nation – who has to constitute itself before even existing at all? Will the old people constitute the new one, or the new people will retrospectively recreate its own origins? E. Sieyès, writing his Qu'est-ce que le tiers État just before the French revolution, during the election of the General Estates, suggests solving this problem by distinguishing between the constituent power and the constituted power. The former does not have a legal status or form, but depends on a fact. The fact is, however, that of representation. If the deputies of the third Estate come to Paris from all over France, it is not that important by which rule they were elected or which legitimate status they have. Therefore:
Whatever is the manner in which they are delegated, in which they assemble, and in which they deliberate – if one cannot ignore (and how could the nation that commissions them, ignore them?) that they act in virtue of an extraordinary commission of people, their common will shall mean (vaudra) the will of the nation itself.

Albeit imperfectly, the deputies do represent the nation, and there is no formal criteria to apply in this case. The nation is by definition constituent and sovereign. It can give a constitution to a new republic, even through the few people who claim to represent it. The representation does not mean here substitution, or identity – it means the fact of the mere presence of the deputies, and the event, in which these delegates to the king become sovereign legislators. Any emphasis on fact means a desire to suppress history, forget the past and to deal with the datum. There is then, paradoxically, something deeply revolutionary in the appeal to the fact – such appeal should be distinguished from any "positivism", since here "fact" means an eventful change of perspective, a possibility of what had been previously deemed impossible (hence, also, the oxymora and the paradoxes in the revolutionary language, which thus conveys surprise). Indeed, it was shown that the very term "revolution" in reference to a political turmoil was censored, in the 18th century, for its connotation of a fait accompli (Rachum 1999). The moment that Louis XVIth, in his well known exchange with the Duke de Liancourt, admitted that the events of the 14th July were a revolution – he actually admitted that they had happened.

2. A BRIEF HISTORY OF SOVIETS IN RUSSIA

The Soviet Union, as it is widely known, had maintained the institution of the revolutionary councils, Soviets – which, however, had lost all real power to the Communist

Party since the early 1920s. [1] The Soviets of workers' deputies first emerged in 1905, during the first Russian revolution, on the basis of strike committees, and often took in their hands the task of the local self-government. Although soviets certainly had some roots in the communal culture of the Russian peasantry [2], at least no less important was the revolutionary reversal of a form that was created purposefully by Moscow police. Richard Wortman, in his book Scenarios of Power, tells how the Russian tsarist state purposefully created the workers councils, as a part of their project to unite the tzar with the people and to solve the social question from above. As Wortman writes:

Finally, the police began to organize unions in the industries of Moscow. They arranged for elective district assemblies, and a workers council (soviet) for the entire city of Moscow. In the first years of the twentieth century the experiment of police spread to other cities. Thus the tsarist administration, in resisting the appeal of revolutionary groups among proletariat, sanctioned workers' grievances and gave them their first lessons in political participation.

Obviously, this policy was based upon the corporate understanding of society, as ultimately embodied in the Tzar – a model similar to the one that stimulated the medieval concept of representation. In February 1917, when the new revolution started in Russia, its leaders decided to reproduce these councils or Soviets. The newly founded Soviets of the workers' and soldiers' deputies became a center of power that was alternative to that formed by the former Duma (the "Provisional Government"). After a period of double-rule, the Bol'shevik party effected a coup against the government, in order to give "All power to the Soviets", according to their slogan. For a while, it seemed to many, including the Bol'sheviks, that Soviets were a viable form of democracy that could become a basis for a new state of the working people. Soviets were in many ways different from the regular "parliamentary" type of representation. The Soviets, unlike the parliaments, were thought as bearers of "all" power – which, in technical terms (that were not used), meant that they were sovereign. At the same time, only the deputies to local Soviets were directly elected. These Soviets sent their delegates to the Congresses of Soviets at a higher level, etc. The system was built as contiguous chain-like delegation, based, in its foundation, on direct democracy. The Congresses of Soviets did not work permanently but gathered several times a year, and the rest of the time a permanent organ formed from their midst (the executive committee, ispolkom) assumed the supreme (not just executive) power. All vote was open. The deputies (except the members of ispolkom) worked in the Soviets on a non-

3. THE QUESTION OF "SPONTANEITY"

Hannah Arendt, in her book On Revolution, criticized the classic concept of political representation for alienating and demobilizing the subject. Instead, she pointed to the phenomenon of revolutionary councils, which "spontaneously" emerged in all large European revolutions, particularly during the French revolution of 1789-1799 (the Parisian "sections"), the Parisian Commune of 1871, the Russian revolutions of 1905 and 1917, and in Hungary of 1956. The councils, according to Arendt, provide a chance of self-government that would not be direct democracy but which would preserve the continuity among the levels of representation, or delegation, and would stimulate active political participation.

In the Russian post-communist revolution, the democratic institutions emerged out of the frozen, relict representative forms of the communist Soviet regime, in the same way that the soviets themselves emerged in 1905 out of the artificial police-created organs of social work, and in the same way as the actors of the French revolution originally used the General Estates, with their medieval form of representation. This paradoxical development allowed a diffuse, network-like, mobilizational form of representation. The effect of this representation was largely negative and at times even paralyzing rather than constructive – but this means that its primary function was to represent the society's internal rupture. The temporal knot formed by this revolution of representatives indicates that we deal with a fold where the society turns towards and against itself. In the further development, this form of representation was suppressed and substituted by the parliamentary representation, which sharply divided the representative from the represented. Political democracy in Russia has, since then, been limited and even minimal, since the balance between too much and too little democracy has, at least by now, been not attained. But – one could claim -- the revolutionary representation, as a potential for diffuse resistance, remains (as it may be shown) a hidden ground of legitimacy for the regime.

For Arendt, the councils, or Soviets, was the truly revolutionary mode of government, alternative to representation or a better species of it. [3] Arendt's councils are an analogue of what Sieyès called "constituent power" – the formless, pre-legal sovereign democratic authority which precedes and operates the creation of constitution and of the government. Arendt chooses the Soviets because they provide a way of signification based on contiguity – metonymy – rather than on metaphoric substitution. Similarly, Sieyès insists that the constituent

representatives of the nation represent it simply by making its part, a part that just happened to be in the right place in the right time – neither because of the superior qualities of the representatives nor because of the procedure of the nation's "reproduction". In French, one could speak of this kind of representation using a partitive form: "il y a de la nation". Clearly, it is more democratic, and more linked to the specific situation (event) that requires representation, than the procedural election that aspires to the correct reproduction of the society.

Arendt has the Soviets emerging "spontaneously" [4] (she repeats this word many times), through the "organizational impulses of people themselves", in the climate of the "swift disintegration of the old power". For her, this means that in spite of an existing tradition of such councils, which goes back to the Middle Ages, their emergence has never been planned in advance. But "spontaneity" has also the meaning of unconditional freedom, creation ex nihilo – and this meaning seems to be also important for Arendt, since she speaks of Soviets' "miraculous" emergence. However, this accent on the "spontaneity" seems to me problematic in view of the critique of political subjectivity that Arendt powerfully develops in The Human Condition and in On Revolution. In The Human Condition, she argues against the view of the subject as the author and owner of his actions, proposing instead the concept of action as irruption into the preexisting chain of events. In On Revolution, she shows that the revolutionaries face the double, paradoxical task of (negative) destruction and of (positive) foundation, which allows them to create a fleeting moment and space of freedom, being very hard to permanently preserve. To derive the revolutionary power from "spontaneity" means, in many ways, begging the question and holding the task of auto-constitution for a simple positive fact.

Arendt's apology of Soviets found its more recent follower in Antonio Negri, particularly in his book Potere Constituente. For Negri, Soviets are the only truly immanent political institutions, they synthesize the political creativity with the economic one (productive work) and destroy the juridical divide between state and civil society. Soviets are the "constituent power" in Sieyès's sense, but the one that lasts continuously, and does not disappear with the act of constitution. They are part of an alternative history of modernity, which is divided between the emancipatory (immanent) and repressive (transcendent) trend and does not allow for any mediation between the two. For Negri, like for Arendt, Soviets are sites of true "spontaneity," "invention," and "activity". The working class, according to him, "invents" the Soviets in the course of class struggle. Thus, both Arendt and Negri transpose the fiction of absolute beginning from the formal constituted power, to the formless constituent one. However, history shows that the organs of constituent power do not emerge out of the void. They usually build, in this or that fashion, upon the already existing institutions of the old regime. It is simply that the meaning and function of those institutions are radically reversed.

The constituent power often emerges not out of nothing but out of a representative institution of an autocratic regime subsequently overthrown by it. So it was with the General Estates in France, with the Russian Soviets of 1905 and with the degraded Soviets in USSR. The turn to these institutions often seems a restorative, archaic gesture, since they are clearly dated, no longer corresponding to the absolutist state or to the bureaucratic communist regime, respectively.

There is much in common between the revolutionary workers' councils and the estate representation of Ancien Régime (semi-imperative mandate, the non-professional character, the indirect chain-like structure of delegation, the right of recall). While the French Constituante emerged directly from the General Estates, the "municipal revolution" which gave birth, among others, to the Parisian commune also relied, to a large extent, on the electors to the General Estates, a chain in the indirect mechanism of the medieval representation. The Soviets of 1905 had their roots partly in the attempt of police at incorporation and regularization of workers. Even in 1917-1918, the Soviets were conceived as the vehicles of the estate, or class, representation. The city Soviet was conceived as the one of the "soldiers and workers", being elected proportionally only from these groups, in factories and in the troops. The all-Russia Congress of Soviets was also one of the soldiers and workers, and the peasants' Soviets had their own Congress. Only after the Bol'sheviks' victory, and not without a struggle against the Socialist Revolutionary party that prevailed in most peasants' Soviets, the Soviet Congresses began to reunite "workers', soldiers', peasants', and Cossacks' deputies". Some ideologues of Yeltsin's constitution of 1993 even call the Soviets an "estates institution," ignoring the constituent democratic function of these organs. The institution of Soviets in the

communist Soviet Union played, partly, the role of a king's court, being a regular reunion of the country's elite – but it also served as a chance to speak of some local, regional or professional, problems that the leaders of the country could resolve. In this latter sense it was not that different from estates institutions, or other representative institutions of the autocratic countries.

History shows that the "estates" and the councils can turn one into another. Both of them are alternatives to parliamentary representation with its mask-like substitution. Instead of this logic of substitution, estates and councils are based on the loose contiguity of delegation. However, the medieval estates are representative of complaints and protests, while the councils are organs of rule. The transformation of estates (or even ritualized communist Soviets) into the revolutionary councils is the conversion of the negative and passive stand into the positive and active one. This conversion is, however, easily reversible. What is important here is the very link of representation to the revolutionary event which changes (converts) its meaning to the opposite (descendant model of power into the ascendant one, the analytic representation of social groups into the "synthetic" representation of unity; passive representation of complaint and interest into the active representation of constitution and foundation).

The prefix "re-" in "representation" designates opposition, repetition, and reversal of time. Where there used to be an absolute, transcendent authority, now there is a fold or a knot, a site of a paradox and aporia of self-government (or of subjectivity), which takes a temporal form. The revolution – and this is well shown by Arendt – essentially implies a turn to the past, a will to "restoration", which aspires to self-constitution but which cannot help but stopping and subverting the present by this very turn. Moreover, the revolutionary representation creates a topsy-turvy world, world standing on its head, thus symbolizing the resistance to representation or symbolization.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Thus, we need a historical concept of representative democracy, instead of its formalist, legalist concept. The democratic legitimacy is derived from revolution; it is therefore finite and historically concrete. [5] The formalist concept of representative democracy doesn't work because it is a logical contradiction, a site of an aporia (as many other Modern political concepts, such as natural law, sovereignty of the people, etc.). The democratic legitimacy is based on the event of liberation, negation and even inversion of the past (not imitate the West but draw on our own liberating experience which repeats it).

One cannot fully separate the positive, constructive side of representation from its negative and passive one. On the contrary, political power is acquired only through protest and resistance, which may (or may not) gradually crystallize into the structures of rule. The negative side of revolution precedes its positive side, and the former therefore should not be disavowed or rejected. <…> It is important that democratic representation follows the temporal logic of referring to a past (but not entirely past) event, and not only the spatial logic of gathering provincial deputies in the center. Time is a sphere of loose, indeterminate, internal borders, which corresponds better to the representative model of councils than to the hierarchical representation of the parliamentary type. The reference to the past, which is inscribed in the revolutionary constitution of the representative democracy, introduces into the representation a creative indeterminate asynchrony. <…>

The form of representation is never self-sufficient. The most wonderful institutions can entirely reverse their meaning (become an instrument of hierarchical rule out of an organ of democratic mobilization – and vice versa). Soviets, and other semi-spontaneous forms of constituent power, strangely resemble the pre-Modern forms of political representation (the estates), even though the latter were not at all disposed to be a democratic organ of self-ruling people, they were rather a consultative body for a prince. Both exist at the limit, at the place of negative foundation, of the Modern self-sufficient subjectivity.

One has therefore always to keep an eye not only on the political form but also on the fact. When one institution ceases to be democratic or representative, there may be another that is representative but not democratic, or yet another, which is democratic but not politicized – not representing the unity of the country. One has to democratize representation and to represent the democracy. Thus, today's media are an organ of representation and therefore of political power, much stronger than most parliaments. Why not democratize them? Before our eyes, Internet, being a form of media, becomes itself a new peculiar form of democratic communication (and thus, representation) even if, like other semi-spontaneous forms of constituent power, it is easy to manipulate it and, potentially, subsume to the non-democratic ends. A technology, an event, or a simple social fact can thus be constituent of representative democracy without being sufficient for it, since it has yet to be reoriented through a revolutionary event.

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Endnotes:

1. On the history of the Soviets during the (homonymous) Soviet period, see Korzhikhina 1995.
2. As argues Alexander Skirda (Skirda 2003) in his book Vol'naia Rus': ot veche do sovetov. This book, an anarchist apology of Soviets, is yet another attempt to build an eventless continuity of political institutions throughout the Russian history.
3. Arendt hesitates as whether to call the councils a form of representation or not: thus, she actually speaks of the structure of councils as ultimately "representing the whole country" (Arendt 1965, 267).
4. Arendt derives her emphasis on "spontaneity" from Oscar Anweiler, her main source on the history of soviets (Anweiler, 1972).
5. This Jacques Derrida (Derrida 1987) rightly notes that the question of representation is essentially tied to a constitution of a historical epoch, with its "mission" and "destiny". It is not by chance that for Sieyès, in his Qu'est-ce-que le tiers état, representation is also a matter of a particular epoch (Sieyès 1970, 178-179).

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David Riff

"A representation which is divorced from the consciousness of those whom it represents is no representation. What I do not know, I do not worry about."

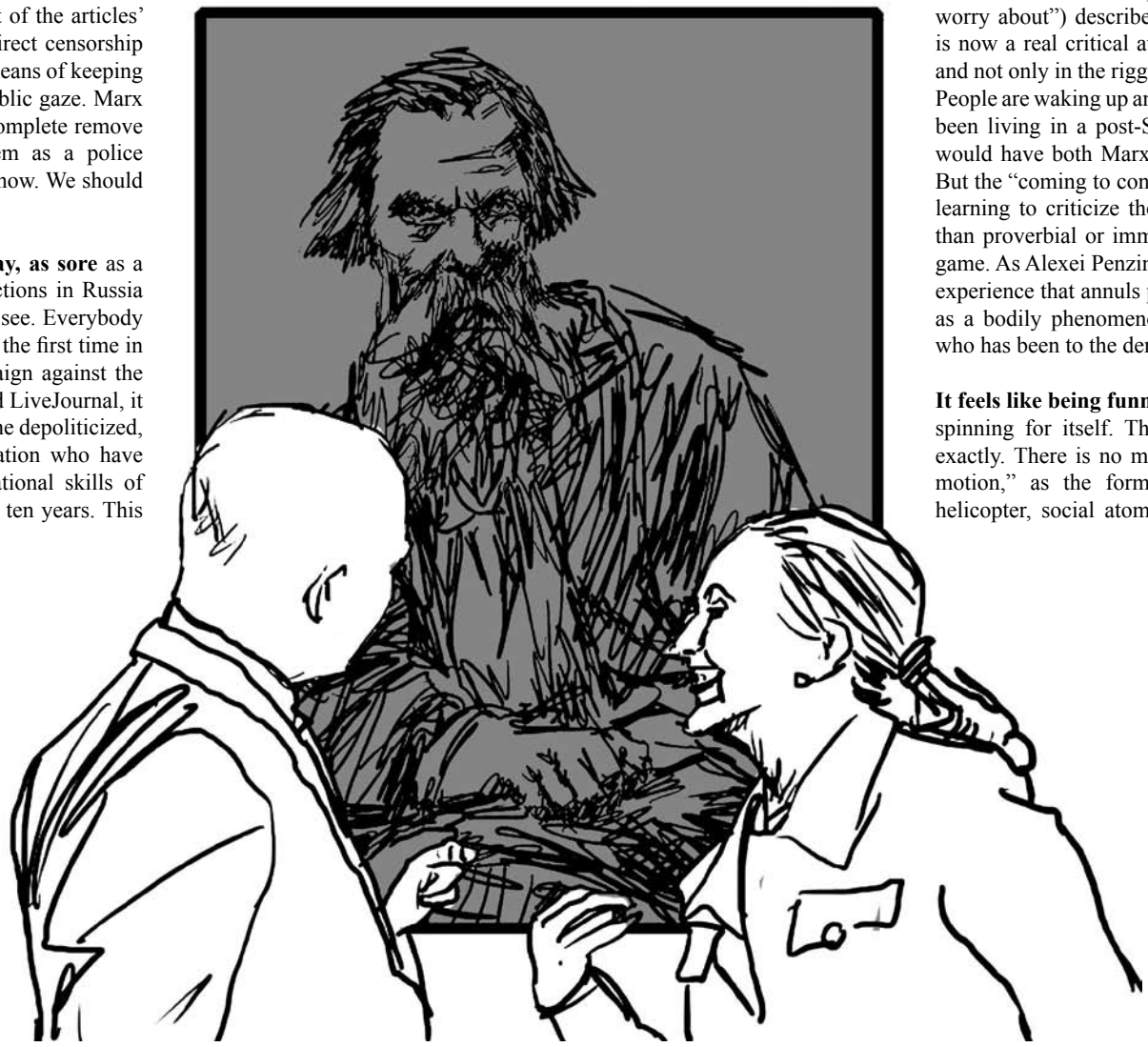
There is something uncanny in this quote from Marx, torn out of context and pasted into a fresh document 150 years after it was written. [1] It's like looking into a mirror where there should be a window. It describes the status quo of our own spectacular world: a massive accumulation of non-representations, all divorced from consciousness. But at the same time, this is a world where self-representation, implying self-consciousness, claims to be everywhere, on mobile devices, in cars, airplanes, and even on remote desert islands. Representative machines previously only available in big clunky institutions are now open for everyone's use. Consciousness is everywhere as a potentiality. But the pressure is too great. You have to represent. You have to hand in this text. Don't think. Write. Self-expression before self-knowledge; find the right quick phrase for a certain state of subjectivity, shot out ultra-rapid in a network of friends, where it quickly loses connection to the consciousness that supposedly created it, becoming a micro-commodity, or a firing neuron in some collective mind we do not yet fully understand. Stop complaining. Represent.

Of course, Marx wasn't talking about representation in the artistic, cultural, or linguistic senses. In these particular sentences, he meant political representation. The quote above comes from an impassioned plea for the freedom of the press in covering the deliberations of the Rhine Province Assembly 150 years ago, one in a series of articles for the Rheinische Zeitung where Marx works through all the linguistic mis-representations and purely unconscious lapses in the available documentation of the closed Assembly's proceedings. Part of the articles' polemic program is the battle against direct censorship and other more intricately hypocritical means of keeping the work of government far from the public gaze. Marx is attacking a state that sees itself at a complete remove from its subjects, hovering above them as a police helicopter. We should see. We should know. We should worry. Marx is demanding transparency.

Transparency is still a sore topic today, as sore as a face full of botox. The presidential elections in Russia are the perfect example. Everybody can see. Everybody knows. The election was rigged. But for the first time in more than a decade, there was a campaign against the main candidate. Started on Facebook and LiveJournal, it spread in all political directions among the depoliticized, largely docile post-Soviet urban population who have kept busy acquiring the self-representational skills of so-called creative capitalism for the last ten years. This process bears all the marks of a civic "coming to consciousness," in which all the contradictory subjectifications of the last 12 years become visible, devirtualized in unprecedented mass meetings. These have effectively have cleaved and even broken the back of the state's self-proclaimed monopoly on political representation. Then again, many if not most of the new representations corresponded to the three-second gaze I mentioned before: soundbites, slogans, and phallic pointers, a little like Voina's penis painted on the drawbridge across from the FSB last summer, that macho potency symbol as a gesture of impotence against the obvious yet total opacity of power. John McCain was jubilant: the Arab Spring had arrived on "dear Vlad's" doorstep.

Meanwhile, the regime led its own campaign. Its sitting-duck president-soon-to-be-premier Medvedev introduced a reform package, while the president-elect Putin worked his way through the demands of the leftists, nationalist, and liberals, playing the state socialist clientelist apparatchik, the law-and-order patriot, and the privatization-legitimator all at once. For the most, it was clear that these eclectic messages rehashed older speeches, and that their writers were poorly masking the seams of their ideological Frankenstein. Reality is more radical that ideology. It was clear he'd had implants or injections in his cheeks, it was clear that the mass meetings on Poklonnaya Hill and Luzhniki Stadium were staged and paid. And the demand for transparent elections? Nothing easier than that. The sovereign, famously out of touch with the internet, gives a command to Medvedev's "nanotechnologists" to put webcams in every polling station, just like he ordered the installation of webcams to observe the building of houses in provincial Russia after the firestorms of 2010. Putin 2.0 provides total electoral transparency via the site Webvybory2012.ru, requiring authenticated login (and contact access) to use its Facebook app. Driven by Google Maps, it provided live feeds from almost every place in Russia. You could observe the polling for hours and use your PC to log any irregularities, probably the FSB servers logs all your friends.

A small price to pay to watch the triumph of non-representation: beautiful views of empty polling stations, then crowds of people, all exercising their abstract votes. A feast for an eye trained in critical realism, a total panorama of society, so used to security cameras that they were unconscious of being watched. Well, mostly. On the margins, some were having fun, misrepresenting in one way or another. One girl dropped her pants and showed her ass to the camera in a village polling station, an unconscious version of the topless Ukrainain feminist protest performers of Femen, maybe, or maybe a fake, like the regime's camera teams filming fictitious riots in Moscow on the days before the campaign. Somewhere out in Tyumen, the electoral commission decided to party once the vote was done. Oops, the camera was still on, but so were the disco lights. There was other funny stuff, but mostly it was just the prose of life, friends and relatives waving at one another. My father-in-law waved at my son, only to be eclipsed by Russia's Paris Hilton turned Jane Fonda Ksenia Sobchak and nationalist liberal anti-corruption blogger Alexei Navalny, at least that's what I thought, as I frantically made star-struck screenshots to catch these two preeminent election observers. A new form of unconscious vision for non-representative sovereign democracy, perfect for capitalism at the stage of its ultimate decline. That is really something to brag about for the former KGB officer, his face still shiny with crocodile tears.



It would be convenient to end at this point. But I really don't want to say that consciousness has been preempted by representation and destroyed by security camera transparency. Actually, if you agree with the things Marx wrote in The German Ideology, it is only misrepresentation - as articulated in a fundamentally unjust, divided process of production and reproduction - that creates consciousness, and not the other way around. [2] The election prompted a wave of real-life activist election observation, which has so far uncovered massive abuses, giving the opposition a sense of what "a long march through the institutions" would mean. If the last sentence of the Marx-quote ("What I do not know, I do not worry about") describes the mood in the year before, there is now a real critical awareness of the extent of corruption, and not only in the rigged elections, but also in everyday life. People are waking up and basically recognizing that they have been living in a post-Soviet neo-capitalist wonderland that would have both Marx and Kafka giggling with confusion. But the "coming to consciousness" is not just that people are learning to criticize the regime in all its guises. It is more than proverbial or immaterial, more than a representational game. As Alexei Penzin noted in a recent text, it is a physical experience that annuls previous representations. It is enacted as a bodily phenomenon, as biopolitical presence. Anyone who has been to the demonstrations knows that.

It feels like being funneled into a vortex, each social atom spinning for itself. Though spinning isn't the right word, exactly. There is no mass hysteria, only a calm "Brownian motion," as the former KGB officer can see from his helicopter, social atoms, pushed from brand to brand in a

highly regulated security cordon. There were flags at the center, in front of the stage, that's where the cheers came from, the divided and conquered opposition of the last years, joined by new movements both from the left and the right: neo-nazis and anti-fa. The majority remained silent, save the odd skeptical comment or joke. As the meetings progressed (with turnouts of up to 100.000 people, unheard of since perestroika), the Mayday-type columns at the center became more pronounced, as did individual attempts at Facebook-like self-expression. Even the ancient materialist philosophers that Marx studied in his dissertation knew: atoms inevitably take on an conscious identity when they swerve, collide, and bond with other atoms. Especially when the police cordon tightens, and the outside pressure grows.

So far, under pressure, the opposition represents only those few definite things upon which there is a consensus among the liberals, leftists, and nationalists, as well as the previously apolitical majority of protesters. The demand for Putin and his party of crooks and thieves to go away, and the call for fair elections. Most other agendas are subject to conscious underrepresentation, swept under the table or into the unifying subtext of a national awakening. This neo-romantic civic self-consciousness is clearly and stridently Russian: it conflates the confidence of the bourgeoisie, the aspirations of the urban service class, the demands for better conditions from workers and pensioners, the disappointments of the disenfranchised petit bourgeois proletariat, the theologizing philosophies of the true believers, and the varying resentiments of all these groups. Migrants and other victims of Russia's neo-colonialism are excluded. Foreign opinions are suspect. The most consensual figure for now is moderate nationalist liberal and anti-corruption crusader Alexei Navalny, another macho super-slav. At the meetings he gets more air-time than the others. His speeches are short loops of circular reasoning ("we won't leave, they should leave"), curiously divorced from the consciousness of those who they are supposed to represent, more prayers than speeches.

Prayers are what Marx once called the heartbeat of a heartless world. They misrepresent real aspirations and desires, twisting them out into a long line of false expectations that become a physical presence and a material force. Here, I have to think of the half a million pilgrims who stood in line to touch a relic of the Virgin Mary's pregnancy belt at Christ the Savior Cathedral in late November 2011, right before the opposition's constituents underwent their political epiphanies. Unconsciously, this grotesque procession looked like an update of 19th century Russian realism in the age of immaterial labor: pensioners, off-duty security guards, clerks, office workers, waitresses all devoutly crawling through the cordon as the mirror image of our own pilgrimages to Opposition meetings. "Black robes and golden epaulettes," "an Easter procession of black limousines," while "gay-pride is sent off to Siberia in shackles," as Pussy Riot sang in their recent punk-prayer at the same church, in which they ascended onto the dais of the altar to perform a song with the brutally clear chorus "Mother of God, chase Putin away."

What makes this quick-and-dirty hyperbole, lip-synched to go viral as a bad (or bad-ass) reproduction on YouTube so spicy as an image is that it consciously misrepresents the protests, reducing them to calls for insurrection and open violence through ultra-leftist radicals wearing Commandte Marcos baklavas. This is exactly the kind of iconic image the protest movement has been trying to avoid, with its emphatically anti-revolutionary rhetoric, its consolidation around patriotic if not national-democratic values, and its respectful avoidance of any critique aimed at the Russian Orthodox Church as one of the state-ideological apparatuses that has filled the void left behind by the Communist Party. By resorting to such conscious hyperbole, Pussy Riot's incantation channels an apolitical indignation that otherwise cannot rise above the horizon of civic concern and fear at the most forcible possible repression.

Pussy Riot really seems to have hit the mark, in terms of creating a (mis)representation that sparks a far broader "coming to consciousness" than the consciously flat, restrained slogans offered by the Opposition so far, but the fears that have stunted and confined those articulations are not unfounded. The repressive apparatus is immense. A intra-agency task-force was created to find and apprehend two of Pussy Riot's key activists on shaky if not non-existent legal grounds, stripping Maria Alyokhina and Nadezhda Tolokonnikova of their masks, and turning them into two beautiful young mothers who now may face up to seven years in jail. [3]

This overly harsh response has drawn the broadest criticism, and not only from the usual suspects: even leading clerics in the Russian Orthodox Church have come out in defense of the activists by asking for the mildest possible punishment, some even amplifying Pussy Riot's critique, and attacking the hypocrisy of their own institution. But even more importantly, Pussy Riot has raised an unexpected and under-represented feminist voice in the current opposition, putting the "miss back in representation" [4] in the most decisively gendered way. This is not just about the president-elect and his machismo, presently undergoing a midlife crisis like that of many fellow president-philanderers, like global neoliberalism on the whole. Nor is just about about what contemporary Russian capitalism has done to women over the last 20-30 years, how it has subjected them to a forcible regendering, replacing that contradictory thing called Soviet emancipation (though implictly heterosexist and homophobic) with a consumerism rife with 1950s-style chauvinism, underpinned by the reinstated simulacra of traditionalist patriarchy in the age of the internet.

This re-gendering mirrors other similar processes of expropriation and re-subjectification that have taken place over the last 20-30 years. Former Soviet citizens from the Central Asian Republics - once subjects of all the contradictory and doubtful (inter)nationalism the Soviet Union offered - have become subaltern migrant workers from distant friendly dictatorships, (re)productive slave labor, for now completely absent from the Opposition meetings, unrepresented, though probably fully conscious of the benefits of the present paternalism over more stridently xenophobic systems of exclusion. Another would be the expropriative privatization (mislabeled as corruption) of the entire bulk of the Soviet Union as such, which at the same time still unconsciously exists, reproduced daily in almost every institutional behavior and every representation, rearticulating its faltering health care system, its educational system (once mighty, now in ruins), its housing developments, and its transportation networks, all turned into sites of a continual reproductive, expropriative, unrecognized labor that continues on Facebook in an endless loop. The only chance combat this spectacle is to let it tell the truth unconsciously, heightening its contradictions with its own instruments to create a gap where all the mis-representations of production and reproduction could truly bring forth something like genuine collective consciousness.

Footnotes:

[1] Karl Marx. Debates on Freedom of the Press and Publication of the Proceedings of the Assembly of the Estates. Rheinische Zeitung, No. 130, Supplement, May 10 1842. Online at: http://marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1842/free-press/ch03.htm.
[2] Cf. Karl Marx/Friedrich Engels. The German Ideology. 1845. Online at: http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/german-ideology/ch01a.htm
[3] For more information on Pussy Riot's incarceration, visit http://freepussyriot.org/ and join the Facebook Group "Free Pussy Riot."
[4] Many thanks to Hito Steyerl for this brilliant formulation.

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Gene Ray

Radical Learning and Dialectical Realism: Brecht and Adorno on Representing Capitalism

What follows belongs to an ongoing project aiming to clarify some problems involved in representing capitalism by artistic means. The problems taken up are above all practical and political. How do we grasp the global social process – the total nexus of social forces, relations, processes and tendencies – in order to change it? Any attempt to find a pathway out of this global order is conditioned on getting the representation problems sorted. Assuming we understand the valorization and accumulation processes as the master logic of this system – assuming, and I do, that a critical Marxism gives us this much – then how do we find adequate cultural and artistic forms for our understanding, and how do we orient those forms toward practical struggle against a systemic enemy? How do images and fictions educate, persuade and activate others? The challenges of radical pedagogy and of reaching consensus-in-movement today are inseparable from the problems of organizing agency and counter-power from below. For if we agree that the mere existence of social misery and class struggle will not lead automatically to an emancipating system change, and that conscious agency always has to be prepared and organized strategically, then we have to grant culture – learning and the arts, and the arts of learning – an important part in any future renewal of radical leftist politics. [1] In short, without radical learning, no revolutionary process; and at the core of radical learning is the de-reifying critical representation of social reality.

This set of problems has a history, and Brecht is a key figure in it. If I like others am drawn to Brecht at this moment, it presumably is because the problems themselves point us back to his works and positions. Rereading Brecht, I have kept Adorno open on the table. I have tried to maintain the pressure that each puts on the other, and to think from that tension about the challenges of representing capitalism in art. Brecht's works were aimed at producing pedagogical effects, at stimulating processes of radical learning. He took art's relative autonomy for granted but refused to fetishize that autonomy or let it become reified into an impassable separation from life. He based his practice on the possibility of re-functioning and radicalizing institutions and reception situations. Adorno, in contrast, made the categorical separation from life the basis of art's political truth content. In its structural position in society, art is contradictory: artworks are relatively autonomous but at the same time are "social facts" bearing the marks of the dominant social outside. [2] Paradoxically, only by insisting on their formal non-identity from this outside can artworks "stand firm" against the misery of the given. Adorno's position is first of all a categorical or structural one; it generally is not oriented toward effects or specific contexts of reception. Except, as will be shown, when it comes to the works of Beckett and a few others. The radically sublime effects that these works ostensibly produce led Adorno to advance them as counter-models to Brecht.

Brecht's Dialectical Realism

There are many roads to Athens.
B. Brecht

Brecht's representations of capitalism are often rough sketches or snapshots of the background processes against which radical learning takes place. Arguably, the learning process itself is almost always the main object represented. Capitalism – including fascism, one of its exceptional state and regime forms – appears as "the immense pressure of misery forcing the exploited to think." [3] In discovering the social causes of their misery, they discover themselves, as changed, changing and changeable humanity. Seeing the world opened up to time and history in this way, Brecht was sure, inspires the exploited to think for themselves and fight back.

As Fredric Jameson rightly points out, critical approaches to Brecht need to periodize his production carefully and situate each theater piece and other forms of writing within the context of struggles and social convulsions in which he worked. [4] Minimally, we can distinguish between Germany before the Nazi takeover, the stations of exile through the period of fascism and war, and the years at the Berliner Ensemble after his return to a divided Germany. Within this rough division, moreover, every work and collaboration takes form as a specific intervention into a specific social force field.

<.....>

But having registered the differences in these moments, I now work back in the other direction, and go from the particular back to the general. For beyond the shifts in emphasis and focus, some abiding and properly Brechtian artistic principles are derivable. These can be brought together under the sign of "realism," in the precise and flexible sense in which Brecht developed this category. For reasons I now make clear, "dialectical" is the best term with which to qualify Brecht's notion.

In the polemics over realism, Brecht had to defend his earlier innovations against charges of formalism and against a rigid and restricted conception of realism based on models from the bourgeois tradition. His strategy then was to broaden the category by demolishing simplistic separations of form and content and by exposing the narrowness and rigidity of criteria derived exclusively from particular historical forms – in this case, from the bourgeois novels favored by Lukács. Brecht writes:

Keeping before our eyes the people who are struggling and transforming reality, we must not cling to "tried" rules for story-telling, venerable precedents from literature, eternal aesthetic laws. We must not abstract the one and only realism from certain existing works, but shall use all means, old and new, tried and untried, deriving from art and deriving from other sources, in order to put reality into peoples' hands as something to be mastered.

Since there are many ways to represent reality as material to be mastered, as a nexus to be grasped and changed, it is important, Brecht goes on, to encourage artists to explore all means available in seeking effective combinations of form and content:

For time flows on, and if it did not it would be ill for those who do not sit at golden tables. Methods exhaust themselves, stimuli fail. New problems surface and call for new means. Reality changes; to represent it, the mode of representation must change as well. Nothing comes from nothing; the new comes out of the old, but that is just what makes it new. [5]

In contrast to official versions of Socialist Realism, then, the realism Brecht calls for is precise in aim but flexible, even experimental, in means and method. It aims at representations of reality that are workable, operable, practicable – helpfully applicable to transformative practice.

What makes them workable is that they are de-reifying: they show society not as a static and naturalized fate or second nature, but as a field of forces and processes in motion, unfolding in time, subject to development. The individual appears in such representations not just as a psychological subject but also as a "causal nexus", an ensemble of social relations that are historical and therefore changeable. The name for this mode of radical thinking, this critical stance or Haltung oriented toward transformative practice, is, of course, dialectics. Brecht's flexible realism is dialectical, in this radical, Marxist sense. The first test of dialectical realism is whether or not, in context, it produces this effect of de-reification or estrangement. Verfremdung is then the general category for all the diverse artistic techniques for producing this effect, which in turn becomes a moment in a larger process of radical learning. These artistic principles – what I now call dialectical realism – can be actualized today, provided artists mark the distance between Brecht's time and our own and aim their interventions at contemporary conditions.

Adorno's Critique of Brecht: Conclusions

All this points to a problem in the critical method Adorno develops from his structural analysis of art's double character. Any artwork that takes a critical stance against capitalism necessarily does so from a position of at least relative autonomy vis-à-vis the dominant social totality: otherwise, such a stance would not be possible at all. But because Adorno does not admit that radically committed art under capitalism entails an operative relative autonomy rather than an utter renunciation of all autonomy, he relieves himself of the need to investigate context in a more than abstract and passing way. If the social outside always shows up within artistic form, as its "polemical a priori," [6] then this structural constant cannot by itself be the basis for differentiation and assessment. This alone should point us back to the outside, to specific effects in actual reception situations, but Adorno declines to make this move. His formalist tendency to discount context leads him to treat representations as if each one was definitive – meant to stand for all time, rather than to intervene in specific situations. If there is a "use by such-and-such a date" marking, Adorno does not notice. In the case of his critique of Brecht, this tendency becomes a destructive avoidance. To conclude: dialectical immersion in particular works entails a simultaneous immersion in the social contexts for which they were produced. Evaluations of the quality of Brecht's representations and the net balance of their truth content cannot simply be carried out categorically. Nor do specific criticisms alone suffice to render a summary judgment, without seriously taking into account the real context of struggle. If this is right, then Adorno has failed to back up his judgment of Brecht in anything like an adequate way.

Conclusion

If a problem can be clarified, the solutions are emerging.

– anonymous paraphrase of the Marxist classics

Adorno's case against Brecht, then, comes down to this: art must not try to do what theory already does better, and in any case preaching to the converted does not win anyone for the revolution. For the reasons given, Adorno's preference for the sublime anxieties of uncommitted art should not scare us away from Brecht or contemporary forms of dialectical realism. Until everyone has the time and access to culture to work through Das Kapital and has actually appropriated Marx's critique of capitalism, we will be happy to have artistic representations that bring social processes and power into view, however incomplete or flawed such renderings ultimately may be. Flaws and omissions can, after all, be pointed out and discussed. If it is "the immense pressure of misery" itself that forces us to think, what we think still needs to pass through our reflections and representations. Any artistic representation of social reality that provokes or fosters radical learning is a contribution to emancipation. In certain contexts and given an adequate critical reception, sublime works and images may have this effect. Committed works of dialectical realism are likely to be more helpful. We cannot expect that any single representation, however ambitious and monumental, will give us the essence of social appearance with exhaustive perfection, as Alexander Kluge's nine and a half hour gloss on Eisenstein's unmade film of Capital should remind us. [7] But if the pressures of crisis and war, mega-slums and absolute poverty, climate change and ecological degradation lead us to try again to organize a passage beyond the master logic of capital accumulation, then we will need artistic as well as theoretical representations of social reality. The more representations the better, then, so long as they are dialectical – so long as they dissolve social facts into processes and the logics driving them. This kind of radical realism will always contribute to that Great Learning by which alone we can make our collective leap.

Footnotes:

1. My recent concerns focused on the possibilities for radical cultural practices sited outside the system of established art institutions. The question posed there was: if not art, then what? The problems of representation taken up here return me to the old question, what kind of art? – to the search, that is, for the critico-political potentials of institutionalized art itself; my hope is that these reflections may be of some use to those trying to work with and radicalize those potentials. My previous research came, for good reasons, to focus on the Situationist International, still the model of radical cultural intransigence. That work culminated in "Toward a Critical Art Theory," in Gerald Raunig and Gene Ray (eds), Art and Contemporary Critical Practice: Reinventing Institutional Critique (London: Mayfly, 2009). Behind that text as behind this one, the confrontation with Adorno was a powerful stimulus.
2. "Der Doppelcharakter der Kunst als autonom und als fait social teilt ohne Unterlaß der Zone ihrer Autonomie sich mit." (Art's double character as both autonomous and fait social announces itself unfailingly from the zone of its autonomy.) Theodor W. Adorno, Ästhetische Theorie [1970], eds. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1998), p. 16; Aesthetic Theory, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1997), p. 5. In this and subsequent citations from Adorno, Brecht and Max Horkheimer, I have modified the published English translation.
3. Bertolt Brecht, Gesammelte Werke, vol. 17, ed. Werner Hecht et al. (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1967), p. 1051; Brecht On Theater: The Development of an Aesthetic, ed. and trans. John Willet (New York: Hill and Wang, 1992), p. 83. Hereafter, the first is cited as GW; the second, as "Willet."
4. Fredric Jameson, Brecht and Method (London: Verso, 1998).
5. Brecht, GW 16, p. 327; Willet, p. 110.
6. Adorno, GS 11, p. 410; "Commitment," p. 77. Or again, GS, p. 428; "Commitment," p. 92: "The effect-complex [Wirkungszusammenhang] is not the principle that governs autonomous art; this principle is in their very structure [ihr Gefüge bei sich selbst]."
7. Alexander Kluge, Nachrichten aus der ideologischen Antike [News from Ideological Antiquity]: Marx-Eisenstein-Das Kapital, Suhrkamp DVD, 2008.

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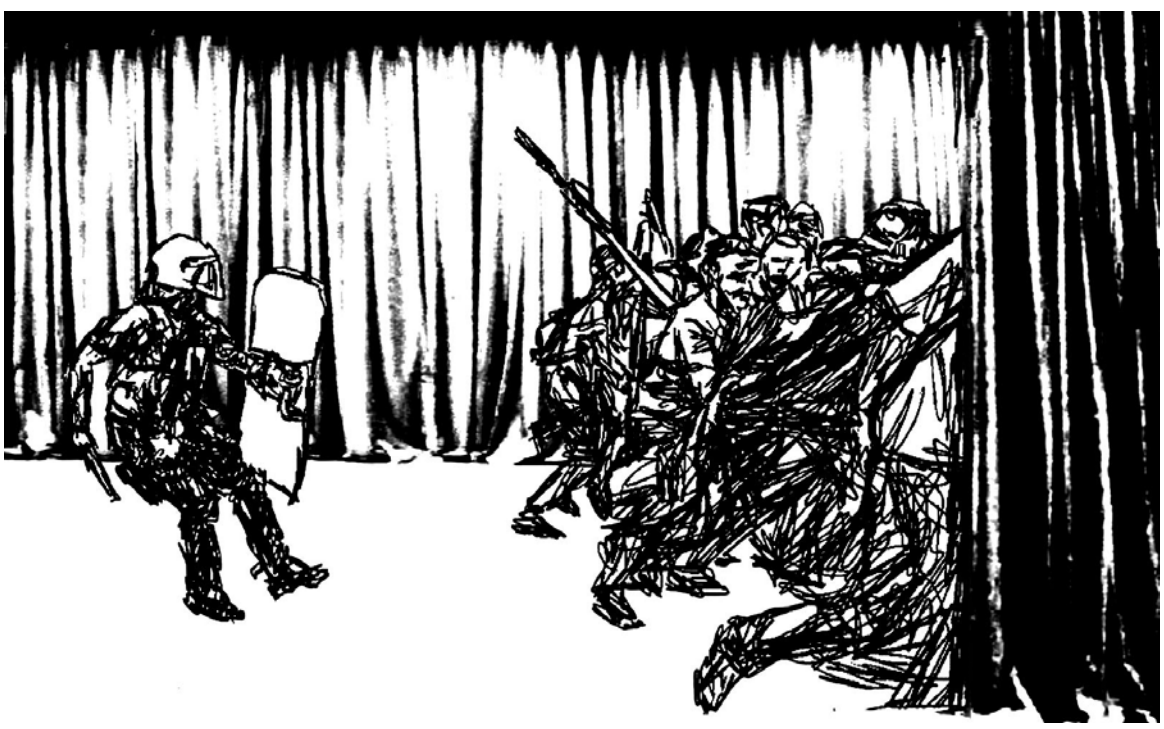

Alice Creischer

Every Day #4
decoded

The drug industry says
that
due to the availability of a great many
people
who never take drugs,
it has its testing done in places
Where no drugs are taken.

It allows
a great many contracts
to be signed by thumb.

The signatories' death rate
rises in proportion
to the number of tests.
The number of tests
in places where no medicine is taken
has grown since 1990
by 2000 percent.

In the year 2010
668 people
died in India
during these tests

Until 2009
the families of the dead received
no compensation.
2010
the Bayer corporation paid
off 5 of 138,
Sanofi Aventis corporation
paid 3 of 152 families
50,000 rupees,
which is 3,125 dollars
and which is what a taxi driver there
earns in a year

Meanwhile in Germany
in 2008
60,000 Euro
were paid per corpse.

Which is something that shouldn't enter the equation,
since everyone is equal in death,
though it does, involuntarily,
as the drug industry proceeds to calculate,
and where this calculation is tied
to the impossibility of transplanting the rule of law,
which seems nailed to places
where drugs are taken.

Source: [e-drug] Poor compensation to MNCs
clinical trials victims, From: "Chandra Gulhati"
<seemgee@ythoo.co.uk>

...a social totality that lacks the mirror of its own representation is an incomplete social totality and, consequently, not a social totality at all. Only full reconciliation between substance and subject, between being and knowledge, can cancel the distance between the rational and the real. But, in that case, representation is a necessary moment in the self-constitution of the totality, and the latter is only achieved so long as the distinction between action and representation is abolished.

From Ernesto Laclau
Emancipation(s) Power and Representation.

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